



# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

JUNE 2022 | VOLUME 3 | NUMBER 1

# CONTENTS

---

- 3**    **MEDITATION**  
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 8**    **FROM THE EDITOR**  
Rev. Andrew W. Lanning
- 9**    THE RP CHURCH: FAILING TO  
HOLD THE TRADITIONS  
David J. Engelsma
- 13**   THE RP CHURCH: (ADDENDUM)  
SITTING LOOSE TO THE CREEDS  
David J. Engelsma
- 14**   **EDITORIAL**  
ENTRENCHED IN PREREQUISITES  
Rev. Andrew W. Lanning
- 25**   **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**  
HUMPTY DUMPTY (2):  
WHICH IS MASTER  
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 33**   THIRTY-FOUR THESES ON  
JUSTIFICATION IN RELATION TO  
FAITH, REPENTANCE, AND GOOD WORKS
- 36**   **SOUND DOCTRINE**  
TRUE REPENTANCE  
Rev. Martin VanderWal
- 39**   **CONTRIBUTION**  
CERC'S CONDITIONAL SALVATION  
Aaron Lim
- 44**   **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!**  
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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

Editor-in-chief

Rev. Andrew W. Lanning

Contributing editors

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

Rev. Martin VanderWal

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

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

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

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

1950 Perry St SW  
Byron Center, MI 49315

*Sword and Shield* does not accept advertising.

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

Reformed Believers Publishing  
325 84th St SW, Suite 102  
Byron Center, MI 49315  
Website: [reformedbelieverspub.org](http://reformedbelieverspub.org)  
Email: [office@reformedbelieverspub.org](mailto:office@reformedbelieverspub.org)

Reformed Believers Publishing maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Sword and Shield* subscribers.

*But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. — Acts 2:16–18*

**P**entecost. The promise of a new day! The name *Pentecost* means *fifty* and refers to the fifty days between Passover and the day of Pentecost.

In the law to Moses, God required every Israelite male to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost—to remember God’s promise of a new day and to confess his faith in the coming Messiah and the realization of that new day. On Pentecost every year God gave Israel a type of the day when the Spirit would come and with the coming of the Spirit the dawning of the new day.

On Sunday morning in Jerusalem, Pentecost was fulfilled, and the new day came. Christ, who had ascended into heaven, returned to his church to take up his abode with his people by pouring out the promise of the Spirit.

And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy! They will all become prophets. The whole church would be a church of prophets.

The Old Testament prophets prophesied that this day would come. Moses did. That happened, as recorded in Numbers 11:26–30, when two unknown men, Eldad and Medad, prophesied in the camp, and Moses expressed his wish that all the people of God would prophesy. Thus the greatest Old Testament prophet taught Israel to look for the coming of that day. All the patriarchs and prophets who saw in visions to the new day that was coming, to the restoration of the temple and the house of David, to the coming of a glorious kingdom of peace and prosperity, and to the coming of the kingdom of priests and prophets consecrated to God were seeing the coming of the new day, the day of the Spirit.

Among those prophets was Joel, who spoke of the coming of the day of the Spirit and increased Israel’s anticipation for the day when all the people of God would prophesy. Then on that day in the upper room, Pentecost came when God made all of his people prophets and fulfilled the desire of Moses, and God realized his own promise by means of the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ. And they all prophesied and spoke the wonderful things of God, so that the temple was resplendent after a long, dark night of ignorance with the light of the glory of God shining through the testimony of his church; and the temple that had long lain silent, cold, and sterile with

the faithless perversity of that generation and its doctrine of man was again alive and reverberated with the sound of the wonderful things of God.

The risen Christ.

The Spirit.

Pentecost.

Your sons and daughters shall prophesy.

A wonderful thing! The promise realized! The age of fulfillment arrived to shine ever more unto the perfect day and the consummation of the covenant promise of God in the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be joy in body and soul and pleasures before God forevermore.

Lovely day!

Jesus had told his disciples to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Spirit. For ten days they waited. During that time they elected an apostle to take Judas’ place. The risen Christ showed that he is the living Lord, and Matthias was chosen. Yet the new day had not yet come because he was chosen by lot.

Suddenly at nine o’clock Sunday morning, there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where the hundred and twenty were sitting; there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire that sat upon each of them; and they all began to speak in other languages.

Especially this belonged to the event of Pentecost: they all began to speak. And the multitude heard them speak, each in his own language: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylans, Egyptians, Libyans, Cyrenians, Romans, Cretians, and Arabians. All in their native tongues heard the hundred and twenty believers speaking.

They were all proclaiming *Magnalia Dei*, the wonderful things of God.

What did they sing?

Lord, thou hast ascended on high in might to reign; captivity thou leadest a captive in thy train!

Let God be praised with reverence deep; he daily comes our lives to steep in bounties freely given.

God cares for us, our God is he. Our God upholds us in the strife; to us he grants eternal life.

They heard, all of them, the wonderful things of God!



For of him and through him and to him are all things.  
Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.

Or, thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

Some were amazed and wondered what this meant.

And others mocked! "These men are full of new wine," they scoffed.

That was a very convenient explanation of Pentecost. Then the scoffers could stay untouched and unchanged in their lives, in their false religion, and in their sins. That "these men" were drunk meant for the Jews of that day that nothing had changed. Then the temple stayed. The veil, which had no doubt been repaired, remained hung before the holy of holies because the way was not yet made plain. It meant that the altar, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the laver likewise stood. It meant that the graves that had opened could be closed, and the sightings of many dead who then lived could be dismissed as the figments of troubled consciences. Then the priesthood and the people with all their lambs and their blood continued. Annas and Caiaphas stayed high priests who represented God. Worship as it had been continued. Life continued as it was.

That those men were full of new wine meant most importantly that the condemnation of Jesus Christ of Nazareth by majority vote had been good and right church discipline and that his premeditated murder at the hands of the leaders of the Jews had been entirely just. It was expedient that one should die for the people. Then the Christ of so many miracles and so many wonderful works and so many powerful words; the Christ of the farcical trial, of the crown of thorns, of Golgotha, of the terrible darkness, of the earthquake, of the rent veil, and of the opened graves stayed comfortably condemned, comfortably crucified, comfortably dead, and thoroughly buried. Then he was a dead Christ.

If those men were full of new wine, then salvation remained the work of man, as the Pharisees taught, or a vain illusion, according to the Sadducees' doctrine. Then the ax that God had laid to the root of the tree of Israel would be withdrawn, and all would be well with their souls. The nagging consciences testifying to the deeds of their wicked hands could be ignored, then silenced, and finally seared with a hot iron. Then the calls to repent, to be baptized, and to believe were all nothing. Then the warnings that the day of the Lord was at hand were all lies.

Yes! These men are full of new wine. Nothing has changed!

Unbelief!

Unbelief always latches on to a convenient excuse not to repent and believe and to continue in its unbelief and other sins. And other unbelief is ready always to provide the excuse.

Unbelief did that with the prophets: "They are madmen or pessimists; they hate Israel, and they love Israel's enemies. They are impostors. They are in the minority. Look how many other prophets contradict them." And the multitude nodded in approval. Thus the prophets were conveniently dismissed.

Unbelief likewise slandered John when he came preaching and brought the revelation of the kingdom of God uncomfortably close to the Jews and spoke uncomfortable things to them and who in his very appearance was a testimony against their worldliness. John did not drink wine, as they well knew, so they said that he had a devil. But the effect was the same. John was easily dismissed.

They did the same to our Lord in his earthly ministry. When the bridegroom came, they said, "Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. He is from Nazareth, where nothing good happens and out of which nothing good comes. He casts out devils by the prince of devils, Beelzebub. He is a Sabbath-breaker, a rebel from the duly-appointed authority of the priests and scribes. He is a teacher of sedition. He is not worthy to be heard!"

They condemned him by majority vote! And the multitude screamed for his crucifixion and blasphemed at his cross.

And as unbelief did to the Lord in his earthly ministry, so unbelief did with the Lord's ministry from heaven. Unbelief explained the divine speech of Pentecost as only the babble of drunken men. Quickly summarized and conveniently dismissed.

Man still does the same today. He has a word about Pentecost. Oh yes, because Pentecost is not merely an event that happened in Jesus' day, but Pentecost is the entire New Testament age of the gospel of Jesus Christ preached in the whole world in the last day and hour. Wherever the wonderful things of God are heard, wherever Christ crucified is preached, wherever the truth comes, there Pentecost comes; and there unbelieving man has a word about Pentecost. A convenient excuse for his impenitence, stubbornness, and unbelief so that the truth that he hates can be quickly and slanderously summarized and easily and comfortably dismissed: "They are radicals; they are schismatics; they are rebellious; they are self-appointed leaders; they sit loose to the creeds; they have their own agenda. Let us pass on. Our house is safe from destruction."

But Peter stood up with the eleven! “These are not drunken,” exclaimed Peter, “as ye suppose.”

Inconveniently for their dismissal of the truth, Peter pointed to the fact that it was only the third hour of the day, a mere nine o’clock in the morning. A stray drunk from the night before you might meet, but a whole company of a hundred and twenty men?

This is not that!

This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel.

Hundreds of years before, during another terrible time of carnality and unbelief in the nation of Judah, God had raised up Joel. His name means *Jehovah is God*. An obscure man. People call him a minor prophet. Nothing that he spoke was minor. For he was a prophet, and as a prophet he spoke the word of God to drunkards and winebibbers, whether spiritual or otherwise.

Joel spoke of Pentecost. It was the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord when he came and visited his people. A day of salvation for the righteous, a day of rejoicing, a day of deliverance and freedom. A day that is terrible for the impenitent and ungodly. If that was not what Joel spoke, then Peter and the rest were drunk. But if that was what Joel spoke, then the day of the Lord had come, and Jehovah had come to his people for their salvation and for judgment. It was the last days. After these days will come the everlasting and endless day of rejoicing in heaven and of weeping and wailing in hell. Then there is reason for fear and consternation and trouble for the carnal seed who sit secure in their folly that their houses will stand forever.

Joel spoke of the day of the Lord as the day of Jehovah’s coming in the Spirit.

Most importantly, Jehovah came when the Spirit came because of who the Spirit is. The Spirit is God. He is the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit is true God, coeternal and coequal with the Father and the Son. The Spirit is revealed as God in all his works. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them by the Spirit of his mouth. He was present in the beginning, brooding over the creation to cause life to abound. By him prophets spoke. He led all God’s people in the land of uprightness and in a broad place of liberty. All the works of God are of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. He is the Spirit in whom the Father loves his Son and who is the in-ness of Father and Son with one another in the eternal and triune life of God. The Spirit searches eternally all things, even the deep things of God. The Spirit is the consecration of the people of God to God in love.

The Spirit is a person. He is not merely the power of God. He is not merely an instrument of God’s will. The Spirit is a divine person. He is the willing, decreeing, creating, sovereign God. The Spirit knows, acts, searches,

instructs, teaches, wars, witnesses, softens and hardens, blesses and curses. He gives life and works death. He assures and convicts. He soothes and troubles.

In the glorification of Christ, the third person became the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the man.

Deepest mystery...

The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ are one and the same Spirit. They are the same person. The Spirit was given to Christ to be Christ’s Spirit, who is so closely one with Christ that the Lord is that Spirit, and through him Christ comes to us in order that our God might dwell among us.

Profoundest grace!

That the Lord God might dwell among us! His beloved, his blood-bought people, consecrated to him. Christ came and died and obtained righteousness and eternal life by his perfect obedience. And what is that life that he obtained for us but life with him in the Spirit and thus life with God?

At Pentecost Christ poured out of his Spirit, and with him Christ gives life and all his heavenly graces.

He poured out because in comparison to the saints of the Old Testament we have much, while they had little of the Spirit. They certainly had the Spirit, enough to know God and to know their salvation and to know the forgiveness of sins. But little. We have the fullness! The new day is come. The night is past.

Especially the Old Testament saints had the Spirit confined among the special officebearers, the prophets, as those men to whom God gave dreams and visions in order to reveal to them his secret counsel and will for the salvation of his people. In the power of that Spirit, they were carried along to speak God’s word for the people and to the people, whether they believed or did not believe, whether they mocked or were humbled, whether they went on in their sins to their destruction or turned for their salvation.

At Pentecost Christ poured out in abundance and upon all flesh. *All flesh* does not mean every human being but every kind of people: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, servants and handmaidens. Thus this means that the whole church was filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit was poured out on a hundred and twenty believers, not merely on the apostles. They all received of the Spirit.

And all from Christ, who by his incarnation, death, and resurrection satisfied the justice of God and earned perfect righteousness and the gift of the Spirit. Christ has the fullness, for God gave not the Spirit by measure to Christ. Only he who was God in the flesh can bear that honor and that glory. Only his death in the flesh was so precious to God that Christ merited that honor and that glory. He

poured out of his Spirit, a measure distributed to each, and with the Spirit came many gifts and graces upon the church. The church always receives *of* the Spirit, some measure to each man and woman and child and to the whole church, of the Spirit that is Christ's without measure.

And with the Spirit came the new day of the new covenant. With his coming the last days have come that shine ever more to the perfect day. A day of the assurance of Christ's perfect righteousness accomplished; a day of liberty from the bondage of the law, from sin, and from death and hell; a day of joy and peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord; a day of standing in grace; a day of the experience of salvation given with the gift of the Spirit. With the Spirit comes the covenant, fellowship with God, grace, peace, assurance, and the experience of salvation and of every blessing of salvation. What do we lack of salvation or of the experience of salvation when we have the Spirit? With him we have heaven now.

For Christ's sake...

And what then of those who by means of their formula "faith and in the way of obedience" give to man's obedience the power to deliver from the sorrow of guilt, to give the experience of salvation, and to give the assurance of salvation? They mock at the death of Christ and the gift of the Spirit as surely as those who said, "These men are full of new wine"! They rob for themselves the Spirit's work to give Christ and with him to give joy, peace, assurance, and the experience of God as our God and salvation as ours. They are also devoid of the Spirit, for he would never permit Christ to be so dishonored, the work and glory of the Spirit to be so thoroughly robbed, and the promise of God to be so evilly annulled. For on the day of Pentecost, with the outpouring of the Spirit, Christ gave salvation and the experience of salvation as gifts and apart from man's works of obedience.

For Christ's sake...

Then they prophesied! That was prophecy! In that prophecy they spoke of the wonderful works of God and not of the works of man. That was Joel's word of promise: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (2:28). The great mark of the Spirit's presence is prophecy.

Joel spoke of prophecy in terms of the Old Testament: "Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (2:28). He did not mean that today with the coming of the Spirit we will see visions and have dreams that have spiritual meanings or that communicate the word of God. Rather, in Old Testament language he taught that the church will become a church of prophets. During the time of the apostles, the Spirit gave to the church the gifts of healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and other miracles. But that ended with the age of the apostles.

Prophecy remains.

The great sign of Pentecost is not that men will heal the sick, raise the dead, or speak in tongues, but that they shall prophesy.

When Joel said that they shall dream dreams and see visions, he taught at the same time what a prophet is. A prophet receives the word of God. That is what it means to receive visions and to dream dreams. The prophet receives the word of God. The prophet receives. He does not invent his message, and neither is he self-willed in his message. He receives the word of God. That word is fully revealed in Christ and set down in the infallible scripture. If we will have the word of God today, we must have it from scripture.

Then the understanding of that word also comes from the Spirit; for in order to speak the word of God, the prophet must understand that word, be illuminated by the Spirit to grasp its meaning, and penetrate by the Spirit's leading to its depths. To know, to believe, to understand, and to love the truth are the work of a prophet. To know, to believe, to understand, and to love the truth are also the work of the Spirit in the prophet and thus are also gifts of grace. Where the truth is received, there is the Spirit. Where the truth is not received but ridiculed and mocked, belittled or rejected, there is a spirit but not the Spirit of Christ.

A prophet must speak the word of God that he receives. That is what the very word *prophet* means. The prophet is always outspoken. That is hated today. *Hated* is not too strong a word to describe the attitude toward the prophet who is outspoken. Too much consideration is given to offending people. But the prophet is not told to care what men think. He is told to speak the truth even to the offense and the cutting off of many. If some do not want the word of God because they are worried about being offended by it or offending others with it, then by that very fact they reveal that they are not moved by the Spirit.

The prophet is a speaker of the truth over against what men say about it. Men say, "These men are drunk" or "There is something wrong with him" or "He has a devil" or "He is a glutton." Over against that the prophet says, "It is not as you say." Men say, "You cannot say that against those people." Men say, "You cannot say that at this time!" And the prophet says, "This is that which was spoken of God." The prophet speaks positively and negatively, or he is no prophet. Over against the words and wisdom of men, the prophet speaks the word of God that always stands antithetically opposed to the word of man.

Man always has his word about every situation and event. He has his word about Pentecost, creation, sin, the

cross, heaven, hell, his neighbor, God, and things in the church. And the prophet is called to speak the word of God over against that word of man. The prophet is to be outspoken. When he is outspoken, it is not drunkenness or madness, schism or rebellion. It is the Spirit. The Spirit is the only explanation of prophecy, for such prophecy that makes man nothing and makes God everything is natural to no man. No man can prophesy or speak the word of God except by the Holy Ghost.

By prophecy then the prophet speaks for God. Prophecy is to be sharply distinguished from merely religious speech. Prophecy is to be sharply distinguished from merely speaking about God, about Jesus, or about sin and salvation. The prophet does not speak about God. He speaks for God. The prophet is an instrument in the hands of the almighty God and the Lord Jesus Christ. God lays hold on the prophet and speaks in and through him, so that he becomes the visible representative of the invisible God, whose voice is heard through the prophet and who speaks his word by means of the prophet's heart, brain, vocal cords, emotions, lips, and tongue. When prophecy comes, God comes.

When God comes, the day of the Lord is at hand, and it is the last days. God judges in that day by the gospel of Jesus Christ so that all who repent, who believe on Christ, and who call on him shall be saved. And all who do not repent and who do not believe will be damned. When God comes and the day of the Lord comes, then God speaks for the salvation of his people and for judgment on his haters, haughty though they be.

That is the word of God to all about the coming of prophecy. Where it takes place, there is the Spirit, and there the day of the Lord has come. So also everywhere the word of God comes, there God has come, and there God speaks, and his word is never idle or vain and never returns to him void. God's word is not idle or vain because working with and by that word is the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit who made the word of God effective to bring forth light and all manner of creatures in creation is the same Spirit who makes the word of God in prophecy effective to accomplish the eternal will and good pleasure of God—for salvation and damnation, for softening and hardening, for justification and condemnation, for sanctifying and creating enmity.

All flesh shall prophesy! Every child of God is a prophet who receives God's word and speaks it, confessing it unto his salvation. Even infant lips God ordained to strength in order to silence the enemy and the avenger. And that word by those faithful lips proclaimed is the mark of the Spirit—the sure indication of his presence, as surely as mockery of the word and rejection of the truth are sure indications of the presence of another spirit.

The Spirit and prophecy cannot be separated. Whoever receives prophecy does so by the power of the Spirit. Whoever rejects prophecy does so because the Spirit hardens his heart. Wherever the truth is preached, the Spirit is the explanation. Whoever rejects the truth rejects the Spirit, and whoever mocks the truth mocks the Spirit. For Pentecost has come, and the Spirit is poured out, and with him comes the preaching of the truth of Jesus Christ crucified.

And the coming of prophecy is the fulfillment of the promise! God promised salvation for his people, the salvation that consists in their deliverance from sin and into his eternal fellowship in his covenant of grace. God promised the Spirit as the fulfillment of the promise by God. And at Pentecost God fulfilled his promise. He did not forsake his church or his word or his covenant, but he fulfilled his promise. When the Spirit came, he brought prophecy. By that power God saves his people. Where you see and hear prophecy, then you are experiencing the very fulfillment of God's promise—both for salvation and damnation.

The promise of God and the fulfillment of that promise always depend solely on God and his Spirit. Salvation and the experience of salvation; salvation and the assurance of salvation; salvation and the enjoyment of salvation are the work of the Spirit, the fulfillment of the promise. That truth is at the heart of the message of the true prophet. He proclaims the unconditional promise of God fulfilled in Christ through his Spirit in the hearts and lives of his people in their generations, whether they are afar off or near, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. He declares in the name of God that all who repent and believe and call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved and their children. The prophet warns in the name of God that all who do not come to Christ in true faith shall certainly perish. For salvation is found in Christ alone and in no other; salvation is found in his suffering and obedience alone and in no other work or obedience.

When the Spirit comes, Christ comes, and God comes to take his abode with us and all his own who repent and believe and are comforted by the Spirit with Christ over against their sins. The promise fulfilled.

And they prophesy! Proclaiming the wonderful works of God.

That is disconcerting for the ungodly. So they dismiss Pentecost—then as now—as drunkenness, radicalism, departure, schism, folly, and wickedness. Woe unto all who mock.

The day of the Lord is at hand. That is salvation and joy for the people of God. That is a day of terror for the ungodly scoffers.

—NJL



With this issue of *Sword and Shield*, the magazine enters its third year. Two years ago, on June 1, 2022, the first issue of *Sword and Shield* made its appearance. Apparently it made something of a splash. Since that first issue—was it really only a scant two years ago!—much has transpired. Not the least of these events has been God’s reformation of the church in the establishment of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Every member of the denomination has his own story of how God brought him to the denomination. For many and perhaps most of those members, that story includes reading *Sword and Shield*, to one degree or another.

The history of the last two years of the magazine is a testimony to the weakness of men and the power of God. The men and women who are involved in the publication of the magazine are nothing. I know that they would give the same testimony about themselves, but let me speak only for myself. There has probably never been a more unsuitable editor for a magazine, and yet God permits the magazine not only to exist but also to be on the front lines of the battle for the truth of sovereign grace, the unconditional covenant, and the gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ alone. The magazine is thus a testimony to the unconditional mercy and grace of our God, whose truth endures forever.

As for the reading public’s reception of the magazine, most seem either to love it or to hate it. As far as I can tell, *Sword and Shield* is not one of those things in life that people are generally indifferent about. Some still burn the magazine, quite literally. Others still wait by the mailbox, quite literally, so that they can get it and read it before the other members of the household. This is as it should be. The magazine deals with the truth of the gospel on the battlefield of faith. When it comes to the truth, you must either love it or hate it. You must either believe it or damn it. There is no middle ground.

Looking back at the first issue, I can’t believe how tame it was. People’s reactions to the magazine made it seem as if the magazine razed the land like a marauding horde. They were aghast at its polemical tone, which polemical tone had not been heard with any volume in the Protestant Reformed Churches for many years. But that first issue was as gentle as a lamb! Did so many really get so bent out of shape by it? We must be a soft and doughy people indeed if we took to the fainting couch over that.

Since that time God has only honed the magazine’s edge and strengthened its fighting mettle. As we begin volume 3, let us remember that the magazine is polemical. It is not merely a magazine that says true things, though it

strives to speak the truth of the Reformed faith. But the hallmark of *Sword and Shield* is that it  *fights* . It fights for the truth. It contends against the lie. The polemical character of the magazine is what makes it hated by so many. The hatred of so many will put pressure on the association, the board, the writers, and the editors to tone it down. Let that never happen. If the magazine ever tones it down to please men, then someone please kill the magazine quickly and start another fighting magazine in its place.

If I may be permitted to quote from the editorial in the first issue,

This means that the content of *Sword and Shield* must be polemical. *Sword and Shield* does not exist to prevent controversies or to smooth them over when they appear. *Sword and Shield* does not exist to bemoan the fact that spiritual warfare exists and that fighting must be done. Rather, *Sword and Shield* exists to fight. It exists to expose the lie in the service of the truth. It exists to oppose the lie as the enemy of God, the enemy of God’s truth, and the deadly enemy of God’s people. *Sword and Shield* exists to draw blood in battle so that the enemy is killed or routed from the field. If *Sword and Shield* ever becomes timid and cowardly in battle so that the enemy finds an opening and a comfortable place from which to deceive God’s people, then cursed be the editor, the writers, and the readers of *Sword and Shield*. This is God’s own sobering judgment regarding those who bear a sword. “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood” (Jer. 48:10).

Finally, the magazine costs something to publish. Each issue runs several thousand dollars, most of which goes for printing and mailing. Many generous donations have come in, ranging from thousands of dollars to a few dollars, so that the magazine can be sent free to our readers each month. We marvel at how God has provided through this means. We would like to continue to publish the magazine free of charge to our readers as long as possible. If you consider *Sword and Shield* a worthy cause, consider making a donation through the contact info found on the masthead. Please, and thank you.

As we thanked God in the first issue for giving our little nothing of a magazine its place, so we thank God now for giving us the beginning of another volume. May God speed the truths written herein to your hearts and the next issue into your hands.

—AL



---

# *The RP Church: Failing to Hold the Traditions*

by David J. Engelsma

(March 31, 2022)

Dear Family,

This is a response to you concerning the attack on my person and on the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in the latest issue of the magazine, “Sword and Shield” (March 15, 2022).

I do not respond to the angry personal attacks. Always, in the long history of doctrinal controversy in which I have been compelled to engage, I have left attacks on the persons of the adversaries to my combatants. This is because, first, it is a well-known rule of controversy that resorting to attacks on the person of one’s adversary is evidence that one has no substantial argument in his arsenal. Second, all authorities agree that the very weakest argument in debate is the argument *ad hominem*, that is, the attack on the person of one’s foe. And, third, I have substantial arguments against those writing in “Sword and Shield” against the PRC.

What alone is important to me is the doctrinal issue. The latest writings of the editors of the magazine promote and defend a doctrine that is unchristian, to say nothing of un-reformed. I refer specifically to their denial of the necessity of repentance in order to receive from God the forgiveness of sins. That this is their doctrine is not a matter of implication. They themselves state that this is their doctrine. I quote:

Repentance has no bearing whatsoever on that man’s remission of sins or his justification (“Sword and Shield,” March 15, 2022, p. 27).

This is the gospel message of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The sinner has forgiveness without repenting (“Sword and Shield,” March 15, 2022, p. 43).

My insistence on the necessity of repenting of sin is what brands me as an Arminian, according to the editors of the “Sword and Shield” (“S&S”). In truth, this insistence shows me to be an orthodox Christian.

“Forgiveness without repenting”—how does this affect the disciplinary work of elders? “Forgiveness without repenting”—how do godly parents implement this “fundamental rule of the gospel” in their calling with regard to a wayward child? “Forgiveness without repenting”—how does the missionary proclaim this as the message of the gospel on the mission field to the heathen idolaters?

“God forgives you continuing impenitently in your idolatry and heathen practices of life, so that you may then repent”?

The necessity of repentance for the reception of pardon is not an unbiblical teaching (being compelled to state this is indicative of how far the theologians of the Reformed Protestant Churches [RPC] have already strayed from orthodox, biblical Christianity). The truth of the necessity of repentance for forgiveness is not a dark and difficult implication of Scriptural teaching, but explicit biblical doctrine. I quote a few such clear passages.

II Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

I make only two observations. First, if a PR theologian or church assembly had said this, the men of the RPC would pounce with the charge of “conditional heresy,” fiercely charge him or it with the Arminian heresy, and devote a full issue of their magazine to a denunciation of him. Any statement that dares to use “if” is suspect, or condemnable out of hand, to the theologians of the RPC, which of course condemns many passages of Scripture. Second, the text denies that “the sinner has forgiveness without repenting.” “If His people repent, then God “will forgive their sin” (“if/then,” and if not/then not). The Bible says so. Granted, not the theologians of the RPC. But a statement by God should carry some weight in the dispute.

Isaiah 55:6, 7: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

The men of the RPC will preach this passage, if they preach it at all, under the theme, “The Sinner has Forgiveness Without Repenting,” regardless of the exact wording of their theme. If they do not repent of this blatant twisting of the Word of God, they had better hope that their false doctrine were true.

Luke 13:3: "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Now Jesus Himself falls under the hyper-orthodox hammer of the RPC: repenting is necessary for not perishing. How dare Jesus contradict the theology of the RPC! Lest His warning be overlooked, or set aside by critics of His theology as an unfortunate misstatement, Jesus repeats it in verse 5.

Acts 2:38: "Repent...for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Forcing the text to mean, "Have the remission of sins for [a following] repentance, and ye have received the gift of the Holy Ghost," seems not to be what the text is saying. One can emerge from this forcing of the text with a sound theology. But he does not do justice to, and honor, the text itself, which is, "repent *first*, and receive the remission of sins as that which *follows*. The order of this saving work of God is repentance/remission. This is the way God works.

I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," etc.

Confession of sin is an essential element of repentance. In the inspired text, the sinner's confession precedes God's forgiveness. It will not do for the theologians of the RPC to rave against this doctrine as obvious evidence that the PRC are now "accursed" heretics, whose heresy is that they put the sinner before God in the work of salvation. For the order, our confessing our sins preceding God's forgiveness of our sins, is not the order of a PR theologian but the order of the inspired apostle John. *Read the text!* To the response that there is an orthodox explanation of this order, an order that maintains not only that God is first, but also that God is the only Savior in this order, of course, there is.

And the PRC give this explanation as they always have. But their explanation does not abolish the order of the text, much less place it under the suspicion that John here was a Pelagian heretic. The orthodox explanation lets the inspired order of the text stand—and teach us something.

These texts are not isolated passages of Scripture, although even if they were, they would have their authority. But they are the current doctrine of Scripture on repentance and forgiveness.

One fundamental error of the editors of "S&S" in this debate over repentance, against which shoddy work in exegesis I and the other professors in seminary warned them, is their confusion of "concepts." Election and redemption are not the same as the forgiveness of sins. Election is the eternal decree appointing some to salvation (which salvation according to *the decree* will be by way of repenting of sins). Redemption was the saving work of Jesus especially on the cross, of purchasing the elect from their guilt unto

God by the offering of Himself as the sacrifice that atoned for their sins and obtained for them the right to be the children of God (which redemption God would apply to them in the forgiveness of their sins in the way of their repenting). Forgiveness, in distinction from election and redemption, is the living Word of the gospel to the elect, redeemed, and now by grace penitent sinner absolving him of all his guilt. It pleases God to forgive by way of bringing His child to repentance. The fact is that apart from repentance, forgiveness has no meaning to the believer. My response to an act of God forgiving me, apart from my repenting of my sins, would be, "No doubt, I am to be thankful to Thee, but for what?"

The editors of "S&S" must not themselves confuse election, redemption, and forgiveness, nor must they leave this confusion in the minds of their audience. When orthodox Christianity confesses, with Scripture, that repentance precedes forgiveness, it is not saying that repentance precedes election or redemption. And even if the men of the "S&S" insist that Christ forgave the sins of His people by His act of redemption on the cross, so that forgiveness there does precede repentance now, they are compelled to acknowledge that the Bible teaches, *and emphasizes*, a forgiveness by the gospel in the consciousness of the elect sinner, so that repentance in this important respect precedes forgiveness. "Repent for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). This acknowledgment nullifies all their rash, unbrotherly criticism of the PRC as being guilty of making repentance a prerequisite, a la Arminianism. Even when dealing with those who are "accursed" of God, a Christian theologian is called to be truthful.

The editors of "S&S" also show serious church historical weakness, which contributes to their blindness to the divine order of forgiving by way of bringing elect sinners to repentance. The weakness is that they suppose that the Reformed churches objected to Arminianism on the ground that Arminianism called humans to repent as a requirement unto forgiveness of sins. How these editors are ready to charge "Arminianism" against the teaching that God requires repentance of the sinner for forgiveness!

But the Synod of Dordt did not object to the doctrine that God requires repentance of sinners, or to the doctrine that repenting is the way to forgiveness. Not a chapter or a line in a chapter in the Canons can be adduced to prove such an understanding of the Reformed polemic at Dordt. Rather, the synod objected to the teaching that a saving work of God, here forgiveness, *depended upon* a work of the sinner, here repentance, that was an act of his free will. Not the necessity of repentance, but whether repentance was a condition to be performed by the free will of the sinner was the issue at Dordt. To misrepresent this issue, as do the theologians of the RPC, is serious church historical error. And the result is schism in the church of Jesus Christ!



Here, I note a curious act on the part of the RPC. They have rejected, or are in the process of rejecting, the PR “Declaration of Principles,” although, as is characteristic of their ecclesiastical conduct, they do so in a deceptive manner. They decide “not to adopt the ‘Declaration.’” The wording of this decision, or proposed decision, is strange. Claiming as they do to be the legitimate succession of the PRC, they were bound by the “Declaration,” one would have thought. Disavowal of the “Declaration,” then, would not take place by a decision not to adopt, but by a decision to reject it. In any case, the decision *was*, or *would be*, a rejection of the “Declaration.”

But the question, and in light of the importance of the “Declaration” in the PRC tradition an urgent, unavoidable, significant question, is, why this rejection, or proposed rejection, of the “Declaration” by the RPC? Why do they at an early stage in their history put distance between themselves and the “Declaration of Principles”? Especially in view of all their bombast that they, and they only, maintain the unconditional theology of the “Declaration,” their rejection of the “Declaration” is curious in the extreme.

Although one who is not privy to the discussion of the motion “not to adopt” the “Declaration” cannot judge with certainty what it is in the “Declaration” that displeases the RPC, it is likely that the reason for the rejection of that secondary creed in the PRC is explained in the RPC’s repudiation of the doctrine that God commands all humans to repent and that repentance precedes forgiveness. For the “Declaration” not only condemns the doctrine of a conditional covenant. It also confesses that “God seriously commands to faith and repentance, and that to all those who come and believe He promises life and peace” (“Declaration,” III,B, in *Confessions and the Church Order*, 426). According to the confession of the PRC, there is a command of God in the preaching of the gospel to all humans. It is also the official doctrine of the PRC that life and peace are the promised benefit of coming and believing. Coming and believing are the way of having life and peace. Coming and believing include repenting. This, the RPC reject. Therefore, they reject the “Declaration of Principles” if not now, then later.

Whatever the reason of the RPC for doing so, these churches are either seriously considering the rejection of the “Declaration” as their binding creed, or have already rejected it. Thus, they reject one of the most important of all the “traditions” of the PRC and weaken their confession of an unconditional covenant.

For all the vain confidence that the members of the RPC have that they are the true continuation of the PRC and their traditions, these members have already abandoned, or are abandoning, a grand element of these traditions: the “Declaration of Principles.”

This my word to the members of the RPC is not an angry, if not hateful, outburst of personal attack.

But it is a virtually sorrowful admonition: “Hold the (PR) traditions!”

Yet another important departure of the RPC from the historic Reformed faith, if not from a significant aspect of the gospel, is its denial that repentance is an aspect of true and living faith. The reason for this denial is evident to all: the RPC denies the necessity of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. If repentance is, indeed, an essential aspect of faith, denial that repentance is an essential element of faith would mean that faith itself is not necessary for forgiveness.

But this denial that repentance is an aspect of faith is mistaken. First, the Bible repeatedly relates closely, indeed inseparably, repentance and faith. One instance is Mark 1:15: “repent ye, and believe the gospel.” “Repentance” is specifically mentioned with faith because it is an important element of faith. The same intimate relation of repentance and faith is the teaching of the creeds. Canons, 5.7 is representative:

By His Word and Spirit, [God] certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies...

In this article of the Canons, the way to seek and obtain remission of sins is a “sincere and godly sorrow for...sins,” that is, repentance. And at least one theologian in the RPC will be surprised to learn that the creed states that this sorrow over sin, which is repentance, brings about that the repentant sinner “*may*”—*may! may! may!*—experience the favor of God, that is, be forgiven.

I make something here of the Canons use of the word “may,” because one of the editors of “S&S,” criticizes my use of the word, “may,” as though I were suggesting that our activities *permit* God to act (“S&S,” March 15, 2022, 38, 39). My critic forgot, apparently, that I was quoting the Canons, which uses the word “may” in the context of forgiveness following repentance, and ignored the use of “may” as expressing the mood of a verb. Or, in his frenzy to throw stones at me, he aimed hastily to hit me and struck the Canons of Dordt instead. The Canons state, “*may* again experience the favor of a reconciled God.” According to the judgment of the editor, on the basis of the Canons’ use of the (harmless) word, “may,” it is the theology of the Canons of Dordt “that man’s activities are the *may* of God’s activities.” That is, in the thinking of this editor, the Canons “put the creature first before God” in the matter of repentance. At least, if I taught such a doctrine, which I do not, as the editors of “S&S” know well, I would be in good company. Both the Canons and I use the

verb form, “may.” One should restrain the frenzy to throw stones. Both the Canons and I will survive the pitiful stone.

Such is the intimate relation of repentance and faith in Scripture, particularly with regard to the forgiveness of sins, that justifying faith is always accompanied by repentance. Therefore, even if repentance is not an element of faith, but “only” an inseparably related spiritual perfection, there is never the forgiveness of sins without repentance. And this refutes the contention of the RPC that there is “forgiveness without repenting.”

Conclusive in the creeds is Question 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. It defines faith, in part, as the assurance that to the believer is freely given “remission of sin.” Implied is that the faith, that is this assurance, is sorrow over the sins that need and receive this assurance. What sense is there to an assurance that one’s sins are remitted if one does not grieve over these sins with the sorrow of repentance. Apart from the sorrow of repentance there is no need in the sinner’s mind for assurance that sins are forgiven. To put it differently, faith neither knows Jesus as one’s Savior nor trusts in Him for salvation unless one is burdened by the guilt of sin, which burden is that of repentance.

To illustrate by an earthly example, I will not go to the doctor if I have no knowledge of my illness. My spiritual illness is my sin, and my knowledge of my illness is repentance. The question to those who reject the doctrine that repentance is an aspect of faith and, in fact, dismiss the doctrine out-of-hand as Arminian heresy is, “Why do you believe on Jesus Christ?” Or, “why does the Holy Spirit direct you to Jesus Christ in a true faith?” If you answer, “because I am sorry for my sins and desire forgiveness in Jesus Christ,” you have acknowledged that repentance is an aspect of the faith that knows and trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior. If you do not give this answer, I like to know why you believe in Jesus whatsoever. Or, “why does the Holy Ghost lead you to Jesus at all?” “Apart from your knowledge of and sorrow over your sins, you have no need of Jesus the Savior.” Going to Jesus for forgiveness of sins without repentance over these sins is like going to the doctor without any knowledge of or concern over an illness.

Should I meet a member of the RPC at the feet of Jesus, I would readily explain my presence there as repentance over my sins, including sorrow over my sins against God and longing for the healing of forgiveness from the Great Physician. I would then ask him or her, “Why are you here? What brings you here?” He or she would be speechless. But, in fact, none of them, believing the theology of the RPC, would ever be at the feet of Jesus. For they have “forgiveness without repenting.” And it is repenting by which the Spirit of the Great Physician brings sinners to Jesus for the healing of forgiveness. “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick...I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:12, 13).

In addition, if more evidence regarding the relation of faith and repentance is called for, Calvin scholars, in addition to myself, agree that for the Reformer repentance is an aspect of true faith.

The conclusion is that the doctrine that “the sinner has forgiveness without repenting” contradicts the Reformed tradition, the Reformed creeds, and the Bible. To continue to affirm this is sin. That the theologians of the RPC may be forgiven this sin, I call them to repent.

P.S. I call attention to one important, serious misrepresentation of an event involving myself in the article by Editor Andy Lanning in the issue of “S&S” of March 15, 2022. Correctly he recalls that I called him to my office upon having heard that he had preached a sermon that was forbidden by the Reformed Church Order, that was injurious to some of his colleagues in the ministry, that promised to be divisive in the PRC, and that was certain to jeopardize his ministry. That was an act of mine of which he ought to have been appreciative, as demonstrating love for him and regard for his ministry, instead of dismissing it, as he does. In fact, on my initiative, we met twice. But he errs in his article in his magazine when he describes the nature of our meeting and the content of my admonition of him (p. 16). I did not tell him “that [he] may never criticize [his] own denomination from the pulpit.” I never suggested such a thing! His description of my admonition at our meeting is false. What I did tell him, with some vigor, was that he may not accuse his colleagues in the PR ministry of grievous sins on account of which they are judged by Andy Lanning as whores of Babylon and other vile, damning epithets. Charges of sin against one’s colleagues in the ministry must be brought to the churches for judgment by the churches—judgment by the *churches*, not by Andy Lanning—at the church assemblies. When he appealed to Jeremiah and other OT prophets, I gently reminded him that he was not an inspired prophet. And when he objected that he would “get nowhere” by this course of action, the PRC being so far gone, I responded that God did not call him to be successful, but to be faithful in following the church orderly way. Needless to say, he disregarded everything I told him. And this is why all his play on the emotions of his readers and followers by decrying the discipline of himself by the PRC does not move me: he never followed the way of the church order, the way of protest and appeal, although upon entering the ministry, he promised to do so. His behavior, whether substantively right or wrong, was revolutionary.

Also, it is my firm intention that these are the last *written* comments I will make to you, my family, on the present schism in the PRC. From now on I will restrict my help of you to spoken comment. I feel no compulsion to assist the editors of “S&S” in filling the pages of their magazine, especially not with misleading, false, and violent attacks on the PRC.

—DJE



---

# *The RPC: (Addendum)*

## *Sitting Loose to the Creeds*

by David J. Engelsma

April 4, 2022

Dear Family,

Contrary to what some of you sceptics will be quick to charge, I am not so soon violating my resolution no longer to respond to the errors and challenges of the new churches and their theologians.

What I write in this missive should have been included in my previous letter of March 31, 2022. I intended to include it. I omitted the content of this missive by oversight. It belongs on pages 8 and 9 of the previous letter as part of the creedal condemnation of the doctrinal decision of the RPC, that repentance has no bearing on remission of sins so that the sinner has forgiveness without repenting.

I showed that the Canons of Dort and the Heidelberg Catechism condemn this doctrine. I intended to add the statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). I add the official declaration of the WCF here. About “Repentance unto Life,” the WCF says this:

Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God’s free grace in Christ; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it (WCF, 15.3).

As though the Assembly foresaw the effort of the theologians of the RPC to justify their attack on repentance by presenting it as a human “work,” the WCF begins its confession concerning repentance by identifying it as “an evangelical grace” (WCF, 15.1). Doing justice to repentance is not the magnifying of a human “work,” as the theologians of the RPC foolishly, or deliberately, charge, but the magnifying of the “evangelical grace” of God.

Further exposing the complete error of the theology of the RPC concerning repentance, the WCF describes repentance, not as love for God, but as sincere sorrow over sin:

By it [repentance] a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such

as are penitent, so grieves for and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments (WCF, 15.2).

And then, as though warding off the attempt to undercut the biblical requirement of repentance by raising the challenge, “*how much* repentance is required?” the WCF instructs believers that the demand is not for a certain amount of repentance, but for *genuine* repentance: “those who *truly* repent” (WCF, 15.4).

Rather than that its necessity is denied, for instance, by the RPC, “the doctrine [of repentance] is to be preached by every minister of the gospel” (WCF, 15.1).

The same doctrine of repentance and its importance is the teaching of the Second Helvetic Confession, in its day (1566) one of the most significant of all the Reformed confessions (Chapter 14). Repentance is grief over one’s sins; “a sheer gift of God and not a work of our strength”; and necessary [with regard to its] confessing our sins to God our Father.”

Now compare with this official, Reformed doctrine of repentance, the doctrine of the RPC: “Repentance has no bearing whatsoever on that man’s remission of sins” and “the sinner has forgiveness without repenting.” Apart from all else, this is not the preaching of repentance that the Reformed creeds (following Scripture) demand, but a deliberate setting of repentance aside as insignificant. The theologians of the RPC deceive themselves if they suppose that this minimizing, if not abolishing, of repentance will not bear evil fruit in their fellowship, especially among their youth.

Everything about the RPC grieves me. Many things about the RPC surprise me. Their cavalier attitude towards the Reformed confessions, and then on such a fundamental issue as repentance, astounds me. They have set themselves a church course of their own making, if not of their own impulse. The end must be spiritual and ecclesiastical disaster.

“*Tot zo ver.*”

P.S. Since this is an addendum to the previous letter, you may distribute it as widely as you did the previous letter. I hope that it reaches all who read the previous letter.

## ENTRENCHED IN PREREQUISITES

Professor Engelsma continues to publish articles in the form of letters to his family. In these articles the professor continues his teaching that man's repentance (by the power of God) is a prerequisite for God to forgive man (in man's conscious experience).

1967

The professor's articles are full of confusion and outright lies. But one thing has become abundantly clear through these articles: Professor Engelsma and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) with him are firmly entrenched in their doctrine that some activity of man (in this case repentance) must precede some activity of God in salvation (in this case forgiveness). They are entrenched in the doctrine that repentance is a prerequisite for justification.

I did not realize how firmly Professor Engelsma was entrenched in his teaching that man precedes God in salvation. I thought that Professor Engelsma had slipped last year when he started writing about man's preceding God and that he had inadvertently backed himself into a corner that, because of age or infirmity or pride, he could not get out of. But a member of Second Reformed Protestant Church recently discovered a *Beacon Lights* article from 1967 in which Professor Engelsma (Reverend Engelsma at that time) was explaining James 4:8—"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." In the discussion questions that he provided following the article, Reverend Engelsma asked the Protestant Reformed young people this: "In what way does our drawing near to God precede His drawing near to us?"<sup>1</sup> Remember that this was in 1967. This was long before his sermon on James 4:8 in what was then South Holland Protestant Reformed Church. This was long before he began his attack on the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) over Malachi 3:7. Professor Engelsma's theology in 1967 was already that, in some vital sense in salvation, man precedes God.

In his *Beacon Lights* article, Reverend Engelsma included a parenthetical explanation that James 4:8 could not be used to support the doctrine of free will. No doubt that parenthetical explanation assured everyone that Reverend Engelsma was not promoting Arminianism. In

fact, that parenthetical explanation likely assured everyone that the PRC were vigorously battling Arminianism. After all, free will was being condemned! But what about the question? "In what way does our drawing near to God precede His drawing near to us?" The question does not ask whether our drawing near to God precedes his drawing near to us, so that the young people of the PRC could answer with a resounding, "NO!" The question does not ask why it is essentially Arminian to say that our drawing near to God precedes his drawing near to us, so that the young people of the PRC could reflect on the evil of Arminian contingency. No, the question asserts for the young people that there actually is a way in which man's drawing near to God precedes God's drawing near to man.

Did you know that this was Protestant Reformed theology? Did you know that this was Protestant Reformed theology for more than fifty years? Did you know that this was such an important part of Protestant Reformed theology that if some of the Protestant Reformed Churches' spiritual children would ever reject it, the PRC would curse them as antinomians? Did you know that it was vital to the Protestant Reformed gospel that man in some sense must precede God? I did not know any of that. I thought that the defining doctrines of the PRC were sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant. But *sovereign* and *unconditional* cannot be harmonized with this: "In what way does our drawing near to God precede His drawing near to us?" The fact that those cannot be harmonized is now being revealed in the Protestant Reformed Churches. What is the Protestant Reformed denomination fighting for tooth and nail these days? Not this: sovereign grace. Not this: the unconditional covenant. But this: man's repenting necessarily precedes God's forgiving. What is the legacy that the PRC will bequeath to the coming generations as a result of this controversy? Not Herman Hoeksema's sovereign grace and unconditional covenant. But David J. Engelsma's "our drawing near to God precede[s] His drawing near to us." Since 1967 there has been a deadly cancer in the PRC, and we didn't know it. But God did, and he is now bringing it to light.

1 David Engelsma, "Helps for Bible Study on the Epistle of James," *Beacon Lights for Protestant Reformed Youth* 27, no. 3 (May 1967): 11; <https://beaconlights.org/sermons/james-4-2/>.



## *The Issue: Prerequisites*

Once again, because of Professor Engelsma's distractions to the contrary, it is necessary to state the issue between Professor Engelsma and *Sword and Shield*. The issue is prerequisites for man's salvation. Professor Engelsma teaches that there are prerequisites for man to fulfill first (by the power of God), after which God will bestow certain blessings of salvation (in man's experience). Professor Engelsma began this battle between himself and *Sword and Shield* by teaching that prerequisites apply to all of man's conscious experience of salvation—to God's drawing near to man in man's own conscious experience and to God's returning to man in the fellowship of the covenant. Over the last year Professor Engelsma has done everyone the favor of striking to the heart of the issue by applying his doctrine to the blessing of justification. Professor Engelsma teaches about justification, which is the heart of the gospel, that man's activity of repentance is a prerequisite to God's activity of forgiving that man's sins. For Professor Engelsma justification is not by faith alone in Christ alone but is by man's repenting.

Professor Engelsma does not use the word *prerequisite* or *condition* to describe his theology. He uses the words *precede* and *follow*, *first* and *then*, *in the way of*, and, significantly, *in order to* and *so that* and *for*. By all these terms Professor Engelsma teaches prerequisites and conditions. Professor Engelsma will not use the words *prerequisite* and *condition* because those words are supposedly still a red flag in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Actually, those words are hardly even a yellow flag in the PRC anymore today. I assure Professor Engelsma that he could use those words and be perfectly safe in his churches. Some few feathers would ruffle, but Professor Engelsma would hardly be challenged on his use of those words. If there would even be a protest against him, which itself is doubtful, that protest would be kicked around the assemblies for years while at least some of those assemblies vigorously defended Professor Engelsma's person and reputation, regardless of his doctrine. If an assembly finally would render judgment on his use of the words *prerequisite* and *condition*, it would do so in the most meaningless, convoluted language. But even while passing such judgment, the assemblies would do everything in their power to protect Professor Engelsma's office and reputation. I can assure Professor Engelsma of this because that exact scenario already played out in the case of Professor Engelsma's former colleague, Ronald Van Overloop.

I can also assure Professor Engelsma that he may freely use the terms *prerequisite* and *condition* to describe his theology without fear of any consequence from his denomination because his sister church in Singapore is currently

doing so boldly. Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church does not have a problem with conditions for salvation, as long as God is the one who enables man to fulfill the conditions. See the article from the saints in Singapore later in this issue.

But I can especially assure Professor Engelsma that he would not get in trouble for using the words *prerequisite* and *condition* because the people in the PRC are hungry for the theology that those terms represent. They savor prerequisites and conditions. When they finish one dish of prerequisites and conditions, they order up another. I know this because the Protestant Reformed theologians, with Professor Engelsma in the lead, along with Rev. Kenneth Koole, Prof. Ronald Cammenga, and others, have been serving conditional theology to the PRC as fast as they can make it, and the people in the PRC have devoured it. As soon as they finish wolfing down Reverend Koole's plate of *If a Man Would Be Saved, There Is That Which He Must Do*, they gobble up Professor Engelsma's platter of *There Is a Sense in the Sphere of Salvation in Which Our Forgiving Each Other Is First and in Which God's Forgiving Us Follows*. The people in the PRC have already swallowed their meals of *conditions* and *prerequisites*, bones and all; they would not now choke over the terms themselves. And if anyone did happen to get that bone stuck in his craw, I am sure the Protestant Reformed theologians would take to pulpit and pen to assure everyone that *prerequisite* and *condition* only mean "A comes before B" and "B comes before C," and all of A, B, and C are gifts of God anyway, so that *prerequisite* is orthodox and Reformed.

Nevertheless, Professor Engelsma has not used and probably never will use the terms *prerequisite* and *condition* to explain his theology. Whether or not it is a red flag for his denomination, it is apparently still a red flag for him. This is too bad, because *condition* and *prerequisite* are the precise and exact terms that he needs for his theology. His theology is that man's act of repentance precedes God's act of forgiving a man's sins in such a way that God's act of forgiveness waits upon man's act of repentance. Thus: "The necessity of repentance in order to receive from God the forgiveness of sins." And thus: "The necessity of repentance for the reception of pardon." And thus: "The truth of the necessity of repentance for forgiveness." And thus: "The order of this saving work of God is repentance/remission." And thus: "The sinner's confession precedes God's forgiveness." And thus: "Repentance in this important respect precedes forgiveness." And thus: "God requires repentance of the sinner for forgiveness." And thus: "The necessity of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." And thus: "Faith neither knows Jesus as one's Savior nor trusts in

Him for salvation unless one is burdened by the guilt of sin, which burden is that of repentance.”<sup>2</sup>

All of that is simply the doctrine of prerequisites: man’s (Spirit-wrought) repentance as a prerequisite unto God’s forgiving man’s sin (in man’s experience). That is simple. That is precise. And that is damning. The forgiveness of sins is justification. Justification (the forgiveness of sins in a man’s conscious experience) upon a prerequisite (repenting) is no justification at all.

This is the issue. Are there prerequisites for justification? Is repentance a prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins? Are there (Spirit-wrought) activities of man that must precede God’s remitting that man’s sin (in that man’s conscious experience) and upon which God’s remitting waits?

Professor Engelsma says, yes. “The necessity of repentance in order to receive from God the forgiveness of sins.”

I say, no. As Professor Engelsma quotes me: “Repentance has no bearing whatsoever on that man’s remission of sins or his justification.” Or, if I may be permitted to quote myself:

Repentance is not a means of salvation. Faith alone—worked by the Holy Ghost in the elect sinner’s heart by the preaching of the gospel and confirmed by the use of the sacraments—is the means of salvation. Repentance is not a means unto the remission of sins. Only faith is. God does not grant justification through repentance but only through faith. God does not forgive our sins through repentance but only through faith. So also for all of the blessings of salvation: justification and sanctification are all through faith, not repentance. Though repentance springs from faith as its fruit from the very instant that a man believes, that repentance has no bearing whatsoever on that man’s remission of sins or his justification. The reason that God saves his people only through faith is because of faith’s object: Jesus Christ. The reason that God does not save his people through their work, including their work of love and their work of repenting, is so that no man may boast (Eph. 2:8–9). Faith in Jesus Christ is the means of salvation, and repentance is its inevitable, spontaneous, and instantaneous fruit.<sup>3</sup>

### *More Distractions*

It is necessary to state the issue again because Professor Engelsma continues to throw up distractions, as he has

done since last year, when he first accused me of developing an un-Christian religion. I must say that in his March 31, 2022, email article, the professor does stick closer to the heart of the matter.

What alone is important to me is the doctrinal issue. The latest writings of the editors of the magazine promote and defend a doctrine that is unchristian, to say nothing of un-reformed. I refer specifically to their denial of the necessity of repentance in order to receive from God the forgiveness of sins.

Yes! There is the heart of the issue: prerequisites for justification. The necessity of repentance *in order to* receive from God the forgiveness of sins. That is the theology that *Sword and Shield* has been condemning. Nevertheless, the professor’s paper is still full of smokescreens and distractions. He continues to try to make the issue something other than the issue of prerequisites.

This time the distraction is the professor’s wounded fixation on what he calls “the attack on my person” and “angry personal attacks” against him. He brings this up in almost every, if not every, new article that he writes. The more he declaims to his audience that he is above the fray and that he will not respond to personal attacks, the more he enters into the fray and laments all the supposed personal attacks. I for one would like to know where all these angry personal attacks against him can be found in *Sword and Shield*. Does the professor mean that we have analyzed his theology and found it to be essentially Arminian? Does the professor mean that we have warned men that they are not justified if they truly believe the professor’s theology that their work precedes God’s work in their justification? Does the professor mean that we have called men to let him be accursed for teaching a doctrine contrary to the apostle? If these are what he thinks are angry personal attacks, my response is that this is simply polemics. It is simply warfare on behalf of the truth and against the lie, just as Jesus waged it against the scribes (Matt. 23), as Paul waged it against the Judaizers (Galatians), as Professor Engelsma has waged it in years past against the federal vision, and as the professor has taught us by precept and example to do ourselves. If our engaging in polemics against him is what the professor means by “angry personal attacks,” then he certainly has given as good as he’s gotten, both in his controversy with *Sword and Shield* and throughout his ministry.

Or does the professor mean by “angry personal attacks” that I called him and his colleagues “turkeys” for

2 David J. Engelsma, “The RP Church: Failing to Hold the Traditions.” All quotations of Professor Engelsma in this article are from this document unless otherwise noted.

3 Andrew Lanning, “Reply,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 11.



not being as honest as Hubert De Wolf about the conditions in their theology? Admittedly, “turkeys” is not found in scripture. I could have used “dogs” or “sows,” which are. Or I could have used “ignorant pettifogger” and “unclean beasts” who “blattered in folly,” as John Calvin does.<sup>4</sup> But I will stick with “turkeys,” which fit the fowl motif of the paragraph. Here also the professor must not take umbrage, for he has given as good as he’s gotten through the years. Was it not he who announced on the pages of the *Standard Bearer* to the entire Reformed church world that Dr. Jelle Faber of the Canadian Reformed Churches was in Alice’s Wonderland: *Jelle In Wonderland*? Was that to be considered an angry personal attack on Dr. Faber? I didn’t think so. I thought it was a perfect title and that those were excellent articles. Jelle was in Alice’s Wonderland! But let Professor Engelsma not now posture as if he were above all this fray, or as if *Sword and Shield* were just an angry attack on him, or as if *Sword and Shield* were doing something outside the pale of theological polemics.

The heart of the gospel is at stake: justification by faith alone. The souls of men are at stake, for no man is justified who truly believes that he is justified by his repenting. With the heart of the gospel at stake, “turkeys” is probably not nearly strong enough. Better this: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt. 23:15).

Professor Engelsma’s wounded feelings are not the issue. The issue is prerequisites for justification, prerequisites for the remission of sins. After the smoke is cleared away, Professor Engelsma continues to be crystal clear that in order for a man to be forgiven his sins, he must first perform the activity of repenting. God’s forgiveness waits upon that man’s repenting. Professor Engelsma demands “the necessity of repentance in order to receive from God the forgiveness of sins.”

### *Professor Engelsma’s Texts*

Professor Engelsma has his texts: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 55:6–7; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; and 1 John 1:9. The professor interprets all of these texts as teaching “the necessity of repentance for the reception of pardon” and “the necessity of repentance for forgiveness.”

Professor Engelsma’s texts certainly establish the necessity of repentance for the child of God. Indeed, the texts establish the necessity of repentance for everyone who hears the call of these texts. God commands his people and all men everywhere to repent, to turn, to seek him.

God commands all the wicked to forsake their wicked ways. God commands all the unrighteous to forsake their unrighteous thoughts. The necessity of repentance is that God commands it.

6. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:
7. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isa. 55:6–7)

However, Professor Engelsma’s texts do not establish the necessity of repentance *in order to receive the forgiveness of sins from God*. This is the question at issue. The question is not merely whether repentance is necessary. There is no controversy over this, any more than there is a controversy over whether obedience is necessary. Repentance and obedience are necessary as the commands of God, and they are necessary as the preordained fruits of our salvation. The question is not whether repentance is necessary. Rather, the question is whether man’s repentance is necessary *in order to receive forgiveness*. Is repentance necessary *in order to be justified*? The question is the *relationship* between man’s repentance and God’s forgiveness. Does man’s activity of repenting bring about God’s activity of forgiving? Does God’s activity of forgiving wait upon man’s activity of repenting? Is the necessity of man’s repenting that it obtains God’s activity of forgiving?

The professor thinks that his texts do teach that repentance is necessary in order to be justified. The professor offers these texts as proof that man’s activity of repenting precedes God’s activity of justifying in such a way that man must repent in order to be justified and in such a way that God’s justification of man waits upon that man’s repenting. The professor explains his texts as though they establish a prerequisite for forgiveness. Remember, the professor is teaching that repentance is *necessary* for forgiveness. “The necessity of repentance for the reception of pardon.” And: “The truth of the necessity of repentance for forgiveness.” Another word for *necessary* is *requisite* or *required*. The professor teaches that man’s activity of repenting is requisite/necessary/required *before* God’s activity of forgiveness. “The order of this saving work of God is repentance/remission.” And: “In the inspired text, the sinner’s confession precedes God’s forgiveness.” And: “Our confessing our sins preceding God’s forgiveness of our sins.” Another word for *before* is the prefix *pre-*. When the professor teaches that man’s repentance is necessary

<sup>4</sup> Henry J. Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 303.

(requisite) before (pre-) God forgives, he is teaching that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. He insists that his texts teach this prerequisite. “The orthodox explanation lets the inspired order of the text stand—and teach us something.”

Professor Engelsma is entirely mistaken in his exegesis of these texts. His exegesis is sloppy. That itself is a shock to me because, before this controversy, I always considered him to be a sound exegete. I learned to exegete under his instruction. (I wonder again, where has my professor gone?) The fact remains, though, that Professor Engelsma has exegeted his texts in the most superficial way and thus has wrenched them into something grotesque. When the professor is finished with his exegesis, he emerges from his texts with a doctrine of prerequisites. “The truth of the necessity of repentance for forgiveness is...explicit biblical doctrine.” “In the inspired text, the sinner’s confession precedes God’s forgiveness.” When we object to his doctrine of prerequisites as false doctrine, he holds up his wretched exegesis and stamps his foot while telling us, “*Read the text!*”

It will not do for the theologians of the RPC to rave against this doctrine as obvious evidence that the PRC are now “accursed” heretics, whose heresy is that they put the sinner before God in the work of salvation. For the order, our confessing our sins preceding God’s forgiveness of our sins, is not the order of a PR theologian but the order of the inspired apostle John. *Read the text!*

All right then. I have read the texts. And I have read many more like them. Those texts do not teach what Professor Engelsma insists that they teach. There is nothing of prerequisites in those texts. There is nothing of man’s preceding God in those texts. There is certainly nothing that man must do as a prerequisite for his justification in those texts.

So what do those texts mean? Here are the texts (quoted without Professor Engelsma’s strange and ominous omission of baptism in Acts 2:38), followed by the proper exegesis of the texts.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chr. 7:14)

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will

have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isa. 55:6–7)

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:3)

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

First, all of these texts are the call of the gospel. That is, these texts address men with God’s call to them to repent of their sins and to believe in God, with the promise that God will save all those who come to him in Christ. This call of the gospel, including its promise and command, is described in the Canons of Dort.

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel. (Canons of Dort 2.5, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 163)

Second, the order in these texts is the call to man to repent, followed by God’s promise that he will forgive. In the texts the call precedes the promise, and the promise follows the call. For example: “Let him return unto the LORD [call preceding], and he will have mercy upon him [promise following]” (Isa. 55:7). This order is characteristic of the call of the gospel throughout scripture, not only in these texts but in many others as well. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Often in the call of the gospel, the call for man’s activity comes first, and the promise of God’s activity comes last.

It is this order of call preceding promise and promise following call that the professor makes so much of. When he demands that we “*Read the text!*” he means that we should see this order in the text. When he insists that we let “the inspired order of the text stand,” he means that we must acknowledge and abide by this order. Well then, let Professor Engelsma, the Protestant Reformed Churches, and all men know that we have now read the texts. And let all men know that we see the order in the texts. And let all men know that we acknowledge the order to be this: call first, promise second; call preceding,

promise following. We have always known this, but now you know that we know this. So let that be the end of your hollering at us to read the texts.

In their preaching of the gospel, the Reformed Protestant Churches issue this call of the gospel, and they issue it in the order of the texts. The RPC call men to repent and believe, and the RPC declare God's promise that all who believe shall be saved. The RPC preach, "Repent of your sins, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Anyone who has listened to even a smattering of Reformed Protestant preaching will have heard this. There is no need for Professor Engelsma to engage in his foolish speculations about what Reformed Protestant preaching must sound like, or how the RPC can do discipline, or how Reformed Protestant parents rear their children, or how Reformed Protestant missionaries would address the heathen. In all of these settings, we issue the call. I invite Professor Engelsma to listen to Reformed Protestant preaching. I daresay that he will hear the call of the gospel—and in the order in which he likes it—issued more often than he hears it in any church of his own denomination.

Third, the order of the call in these texts is not the order of God's operation in salvation. In the texts the order is call first, then promise. But that does not mean that God accomplishes the salvation of his elect people in the order of man's repentance first, followed by God's forgiveness later. The reality is that God gives his people all of the promised blessings first. He gives them his mercy and his forgiveness and his pardon first. In fact, God gives these blessings *in the very promise of the gospel itself*. God's promise in the gospel to pardon my sins is not the announcement of something that he will do later. God's promise that he will pardon my sins *is* the pardon of my sins. The moment that God proclaims his promise, "I will abundantly pardon," in that very moment I am pardoned of all of my sins in my conscious experience. I am pardoned in that very moment, before I ever repent or love God or do any other thing. I am pardoned before I can even assent to the fact that God's promise is true. The declaration of the gospel is my salvation and the bestowal of my salvation in that moment. It is the bestowal of my salvation to me personally in that moment, so that I know it to be mine.

I will certainly repent. Inevitably, I will repent. The Holy Spirit gives the gift of repentance by the same gospel that forgives my sins. But God's forgiveness does not wait upon my repentance. The forgiveness of sins in my consciousness is accomplished by God in the declaration of the gospel itself.

The explanation of this order of salvation (which is different from the order of the call) is that the gospel is Jesus Christ. The gospel is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. The call of the gospel proclaims Jesus Christ to me. The call of the gospel proclaims the merciful God of salvation to me. The call of the gospel, then, is not a prerequisite. It is not about what I must do in order to obtain what God will later do. The meaning of the call of the gospel is not essentially this: *Thou shalt!* Thou shalt repent, thou shalt believe, thou shalt turn, thou shalt draw near, thou shalt seek. Rather, the call of the gospel is essentially the declaration of what God has done. The call of the gospel is essentially this: Jesus Christ and his righteousness! His love, his grace, his incarnation, his suffering, his curse, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his baptism, his supper, his pardon. The gospel—and the call of the gospel—is not what I must do but what he has done. The gospel—and the call of the gospel—is not Me but He.

God's salvation of the Philippian jailor powerfully demonstrates the fact that the order of the call is one thing, and the order of God's operation in salvation is another thing. In Acts 16:31 Paul and Silas issued the call of the gospel to the Philippian jailor, and they issued that call in the order of the jailor's calling first and God's promise second. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." That was the call, and that was its order. But God's operation upon the jailor was to save the jailor at that very moment. God's salvation of the jailor was not some future event, whether a few days in the future or a few seconds in the future. God saved the jailor in that moment. God saved the jailor by the very declaration of the gospel, "Thou shalt be saved." There was no activity for the jailor to perform first, after which God would proceed to the promised salvation. The call was the jailor's salvation. The rest of the text bears this out. We don't read of the jailor's believing until the very end of that passage (v. 34). But before we read of the jailor's believing, we read of his being baptized with all his house (v. 33). The call has its own order, and we call in that order; but salvation has its own order, which we also preach.

This is what makes Herman Hoeksema's sermon on the Philippian jailor in 1953 so valuable.<sup>5</sup> To the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Herman Hoeksema answered, "You must do nothing. Believe. Believe. Nothing. Do nothing but believe, believe, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Hoeksema's sermon shows that there is an order to the call: Believe and

5 Herman Hoeksema, "The Calling of the Philippian Jailor," sermon preached in Hull, Iowa, on July 5, 1953; [https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2020/09/04-The-Calling-of-the-Philippian-Jailer-7\\_5\\_53.mp3](https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2020/09/04-The-Calling-of-the-Philippian-Jailer-7_5_53.mp3).



be saved. Hoeksema's sermon also shows what that order means: there is nothing for you to do to be saved, for it is already finished.

It is exactly here that Professor Engelsma's exegesis of his texts is sloppy. The professor confuses the order of the call of the gospel with the order of God's operation in salvation. The professor does not recognize that the order in the call of the gospel is one thing, and the order in God's bestowal of salvation is another thing. All of his texts are the call of the gospel. They consist of the call to repent and believe first and the promise of salvation second. If Professor Engelsma had explained the texts this way—call first; promise second—we would agree. But Professor Engelsma explains the texts this way—man's repentance first; God's forgiving second. He takes the form of the call and makes it the order of God's working. "The order of this saving work of God is repentance/remission. This is the way God works." No, this is not the way God works. This is the way God *calls*, but the way God *works* is that he saves man first, and man's activity follows as the fruit of that salvation. Listen to the Lord explain how God works salvation:

44. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.
45. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. (John 6:44–45)

Or again, Professor Engelsma argues, "In the inspired text [1 John 1:9], the sinner's confession precedes God's forgiveness." No, in the inspired text God's *call* to the sinner ("If we confess our sins") precedes God's *promise* to the sinner ("He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"), but this does not mean that the sinner's *confession* precedes God's *forgiveness* as a prerequisite.

One might ask, if the order of salvation is God first, then why does God issue the call of the gospel in the order that he does? Why does he first call man to repent and believe and then follow with his promise to save man? I have answered this question elsewhere, so I refer interested readers to an earlier email that I wrote to Professor Engelsma.<sup>6</sup> Actually, it is not that long, so I suppose it doesn't hurt to quote it here.

What of the fact that the wording of the call of the gospel has man's activity preceding God's activity? "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). Simply this: The order in the call is not the order of God's operation. Just because man's

activity is spoken first and God's activity is spoken second, that does not mean that in the bestowal of salvation, man's activity must precede God's activity. The order of God's operation in salvation is established throughout the scriptures to be this: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). In that order of operation, man's activity can never precede God's.

The order in the call is given the way it is to establish that it is indeed God's serious call to man to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. The order also warns the departing hearer that there is no salvation in his departing. The order also assures the child of God that God is merciful and that he does indeed receive sinners who have gone away from him by their sin and rebellion. But the order in the call does not establish the order of God's operation.

It has been a hallmark of Reformed exegesis to interpret the order of the call as establishing man's duty, sounding a warning, and establishing God's mercy, but not as establishing the order of God's operation. In the order of God's operation, God is first. For example, John Calvin on James 4:8:

Draw nigh to God. He again reminds us that the aid of God will not be wanting to us, provided we give place to him. For when he bids us to draw nigh to God, that we may know him to be near to us, he intimates that we are destitute of his grace, because we withdraw from him. But as God stands on our side, there is no reason to fear succumbing. But if any one concludes from this passage, that the first part of the work belongs to us, and that afterwards the grace of God follows, the Apostle meant no such thing; for though we ought to do this, yet it does not immediately follow that we can. And the Spirit of God, in exhorting us to our duty, derogates nothing from himself, or from his own power; but the very thing he bids us to do, he himself fulfils in us.<sup>7</sup>

In order to be faithful to the text, including the order of the call, there is no need to find a way for man's activity to precede God's activity in any sense, whether experience or otherwise.

6 Andy Lanning, "Reverend Lanning to Professor Engelsma, June 19, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 30.

7 John Calvin & John Owen, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 334.

## *Election and Atonement—Finally!*

In his March 31, 2022, article, Professor Engelsma finally gets around to dealing with the doctrine of God's eternal election and the doctrine of Christ's atonement for his people's sins on the cross. I say that he finally gets around to it because his recent writings on justification took no notice of God's election or of Christ's atonement, except for perhaps a scanty mention or two. Professor Engelsma's doctrine of the forgiveness of sins did not proceed from God. It did not proceed from election. It did not proceed from Christ. It did not proceed from the cross. Instead, Professor Engelsma's doctrine proceeded from man. It proceeded from man's activity of returning to God (in order that after man returned to God, God would return to man). It proceeded from man's activity of drawing nigh to God (in order that after man drew nigh to God, God would draw nigh to man). It proceeded from man's activity of repenting (in order that after man repented, God would forgive man's sins). All we heard about was man and man's activity, which activity of man would then draw some response from God. As the professor's articles began to pile up, the absence of election and the atonement became striking and stark.

The fact is that Professor Engelsma could not develop his doctrine of man's repenting preceding God's forgiving in the light of election, because it is exactly the doctrine of election that exposes his doctrine as un-Reformed. When a Reformed man hears that there is a certain vital sense in which man's activity in salvation precedes God's activity, the Reformed man instinctively knows that something is wrong because of the doctrine of election. God chose his elect in eternity unto salvation. There is nothing of the activity of man in eternity but only the activity of God. There is nothing of man first and God following but only God first and man following.

Professor Engelsma also could not develop his doctrine of man's repenting preceding God's forgiving in light of the cross because the cross also exposes his doctrine as un-Reformed. When a Reformed man hears that God's forgiveness of sins waits upon that man's activity of true repentance and that remission of sins comes by means of man's activity of sincere repentance, the Reformed man instinctively knows that something is wrong because of the doctrine of the atonement. Christ died for the sins of his people and entirely accomplished their forgiveness at the cross. There is nothing of their repenting at the cross but only the finished work of Jesus Christ. There is nothing of man first and God following but only God first and man following.

Any reader who would like to know how the doctrines of election and the atonement relate to the truth of our forgiveness of sins can read this in Rev. Nathan Langerak's article in the March 15, 2022, *Sword and Shield*.<sup>8</sup> It was this article that drew Professor Engelsma finally to glance in the direction of election and the cross.

But when Professor Engelsma now finally does get around to noticing election and the atonement, he shows a remarkable disdain for them. Professor Engelsma does not bring up election and the atonement in order to work with them but in order to dismiss them. Election and the atonement are fatal to his doctrine of man's preceding God. Election and the atonement are fatal to his doctrine of prerequisite repentance for forgiveness. Therefore, election and the atonement must be dismissed.

Professor Engelsma dismisses election and the cross in three ways.

First, he accuses the editors of confusing the concepts of election, redemption (or the atonement or the cross), and the forgiveness of sins.

One fundamental error of the editors of "S&S" in this debate over repentance, against which shoddy work in exegesis I and the other professors in seminary warned them, is their confusion of "concepts." Election and redemption are not the same as the forgiveness of sins.

When Professor Engelsma says that we have confused the concepts of election, redemption, and forgiveness, he means that we have equated *election* with *forgiveness* and equated *redemption* with *forgiveness*. He means that we have taught that election *is* forgiveness and that redemption *is* forgiveness. Over against our supposed confusion of concepts, Professor Engelsma admonishes us to distinguish the concepts: Election is not forgiveness of sins, and redemption is not forgiveness of sins. Election is election. Redemption is redemption. And forgiveness is forgiveness.

When Professor Engelsma accuses *Sword and Shield* of confusing election with forgiveness, he is using an age-old tactic to discredit and dismiss election from the equation of salvation. The doctrine of election establishes that salvation is of the Lord and not of man. The doctrine of election will not allow for any conditions or contingencies in salvation. Therefore, those who teach a condition or a contingency must dismiss election. They cannot allow election to govern salvation. One way that they have done this is by accusing orthodox Reformed Christianity of confusing election and salvation. In years past this was the charge of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands

<sup>8</sup> Nathan J. Langerak, "Engelsma's Order," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 32–43.

(Liberated) against the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) held to a conditional covenant, which covenant is promised to every baptized child alike, whether elect or reprobate. When the Protestant Reformed Churches insisted that the covenant is established only with the elect, the Liberated accused the PRC of confusing election and the covenant. When the Liberated admonished the PRC not to confuse election with the covenant, the Liberated really meant that election must be divorced from the covenant. Election must not be brought to bear on the covenant. Election must not govern the covenant. By this the Liberated were dismissing the doctrine of election from the doctrine of the covenant.

Now Professor Engelsma takes up the very same tactic of the Liberated and uses it against the Reformed Protestant Churches. Professor Engelsma admonishes us not to confuse election and the atonement with the forgiveness of sins. The fact is that the RPC are not confusing concepts. One only has to read the articles again to see that. What Professor Engelsma really means is that election and the cross must not govern God's order of operation in the forgiveness of sins. Whatever order of operation happens in election, that must not be the order of operation in the forgiveness of sins. And whatever order of operation happens at the cross, that must not be the order of operation in the forgiveness of sins. In election man does not precede God, but God precedes man, and that is fine for election. In the cross man does not precede God, but God precedes man, and that is fine for the cross. But in the forgiveness of sins, according to Professor Engelsma, man does precede God. "Repentance in this important respect precedes forgiveness." *Sword and Shield* brought the doctrine of election to bear on Professor Engelsma's doctrine of forgiveness to expose the professor's doctrine as false. *Sword and Shield* brought the doctrine of the cross to bear on Professor Engelsma's doctrine of forgiveness to expose the professor's doctrine as false. Professor Engelsma's response is to admonish the editors not to confuse election and redemption with forgiveness. By this admonition Professor Engelsma sets election and the cross aside.

Second, Professor Engelsma dismisses election and the atonement by mocking God's gracious forgiveness of the sinner. Professor Engelsma will not allow God to forgive the sinner unless the sinner has first repented of his sins. And if God would dare to forgive Professor Engelsma without Professor Engelsma's first repenting, Professor Engelsma would mock God's forgiveness of him.

My response to an act of God forgiving me, apart from my repenting of my sins, would be, "No doubt, I am to be thankful to Thee, but for what?"

Not this: "I thank thee for thy gracious forgiveness of me!"

Not this: "I thank thee for Jesus Christ and his blessed cross!"

Not this: "I thank thee for thy eternal love and good purpose to deliver me from all my iniquity in spite of my unworthiness and rebellion!"

But this: "Thankful for what?"

Should this have been the response of the man sick of the palsy, whom Jesus forgave without the sinner's repenting (Mark 2:1-12)? "Thankful for what?"

Should this have been the response of the woman taken in adultery, whom Jesus forgave without the adulteress' repenting (John 8:1-11)? "Thankful for what?"

Should this be the response of the Reformed believer who hears the declaration of God in Lord's Day 23 that he is righteous in Christ before God with all of his sins remitted, which declaration does not include a single word about his repentance? "Thankful for what?"

What blasphemy.

Inasmuch as God's gracious forgiveness of the sinner is grounded in Christ's cross and has its source in election, the professor's mockery of forgiveness is a mockery of the cross and a mockery of election. For Professor Engelsma election, the cross, and forgiveness can wait their turn. God can wait his turn. Professor Engelsma will first repent. And Professor Engelsma will not allow any of God's election, Christ's cross, or the forgiveness of sins to mean anything to him until he first does his activity of repenting. Until Professor Engelsma repents, his word to the forgiving God is, "Thankful for what?"

What utter blasphemy.

Third, Professor Engelsma dismisses election and the cross by including repentance as a prerequisite in both of them. The professor cannot leave his prerequisite repentance out of it even for a moment. When he defines the doctrine of election, he must define it with prerequisite repentance firmly in place.

Election is the eternal decree appointing some to salvation (which salvation according to *the decree* will be by way of repenting of sins).

Why the parenthesis? The parenthesis does not belong there. Election is not defined in terms of man's repenting whatsoever. In the professor's definition he has God decreeing salvation, and he has God at the very same time decreeing a prerequisite for that salvation. This is essentially conditional election.

When the professor defines redemption, he must define it with prerequisite repentance firmly in place.

Redemption was the saving work of Jesus especially on the cross, of purchasing the elect from



their guilt unto God by the offering of Himself as the sacrifice that atoned for their sins and obtained for them the right to be the children of God (which redemption God would apply to them in the forgiveness of their sins in the way of their repenting).

Again, why the parenthesis? The cross is not defined in terms of man's repenting whatsoever. In the professor's definition he has Jesus' atonement waiting to become effectual until man repents. This is essentially conditional atonement.

Having cast election and redemption aside under the guise of distinguishing them from forgiveness, the professor then defines forgiveness. And when he does so, he must define it with prerequisite repentance firmly in place.

Forgiveness, in distinction from election and redemption, is the living Word of the gospel to the elect, redeemed, and now by grace penitent sinner absolving him of all his guilt.

The essence of Professor Engelsma's teaching in his definitions is not salvation by grace but salvation by penitence. God elects the penitent. Christ died for the penitent. And God forgives the penitent. The truth of salvation by grace is that God elects the ungodly (Rom. 11:5), Christ died for the ungodly (5:8), and God forgives the ungodly (4:5). Their repenting and all of their other obedience are the fruits of their election, the fruits of Christ's cross, and the fruits of God's forgiveness of them. But in election, at the cross, and in justification, they are the ungodly, not the penitent.

### *Sundries*

The remainder of Professor Engelsma's article and his addendum are more quickly dealt with. First, Professor Engelsma misrepresents the Synod of Dordt, as he misrepresents our objection to his theology. The professor maintains that "the Synod of Dordt did not object to the doctrine that God requires repentance of sinners..." Neither do we object to this. God requires repentance of sinners. The question is whether God requires that repentance as a prerequisite for their forgiveness. We say, no. The professor says, yes.

The professor also maintains that "the Synod of Dordt did not object...to the doctrine that repenting is the way to forgiveness." But what the professor has meant by "repenting is the way to forgiveness" is that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. The Synod of Dordt certainly never taught repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness.

The professor also maintains that the only issue at the Synod of Dordt that is relevant for this controversy

was man's free will. "Not the necessity of repentance, but whether repentance was a condition to be performed by the free will of the sinner was the issue at Dordt." The professor is mistaken. Dordt certainly denied the free will of the sinner, which was a vital element in Arminian theology. But Dordt denied free will as a sub-point in the service of Dordt's main point, which was that salvation is of God alone. Salvation is by grace alone without the cooperation of the sinner. Salvation is not contingent upon man. Salvation is not conditioned on man. Arminian theology did not merely teach the free will of man, as horrendous as that doctrine is. Rather, Arminian theology taught, and teaches, that salvation is *contingent* upon man. Arminian theology does not allow salvation to be of the Lord but makes salvation in its appropriation to be of man. Therefore, Dordt did not merely deny "a condition to be performed by the free will of the sinner." Dordt denied a condition, period. Dordt denied contingency, period. A quick glance through the Canons will reveal Dordt's hatred of conditions, period, regardless of whether or not those supposed conditions are fulfilled by the free will of man. For example, see Canons 1, rejection of errors 2-5, 7, 9 (*Confessions and Church Order*, 160-62).

Second, Professor Engelsma tells an outright lie about the Declaration of Principles and the Reformed Protestant Churches. The RPC have not rejected the Declaration. The RPC have not virtually or secretly or deceitfully rejected the Declaration. The RPC have not put distance between themselves and the Declaration. The RPC love the Declaration of Principles. The RPC embrace the theology of the Declaration of Principles.

The Reformed Protestant Churches likely will not be adopting the Declaration of Principles, just as the Protestant Reformed Churches did not go back and adopt all of the previous synodical decisions and synodical documents of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. There is nothing sinister or devious about this. There is certainly nothing of a rejection of the Declaration in this.

Professor Engelsma's wicked charge will likely be the last word on this for the Protestant Reformed Churches. From now until those churches are cast into the abyss, they will repeat the lie that the RPC have rejected the Declaration of Principles. The Lord knows, and that is enough for me. If any reader would like to investigate the documents of the Reformed Protestant classis where these things are laid out, I would be happy to provide you with them.

Third, Professor Engelsma continues his dogged insistence that repentance is faith. This time he imagines that he finds this fiction in Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 21. Lord's Day 7! Lord's Day 7

does not breathe a word about repentance. Not a word! Lord's Day 7 defines true faith, and it teaches justification by faith alone. For the professor to introduce repentance into Lord's Day 7 is shameful. It is a shameful betrayal of the Reformed doctrine of faith, and it is a shameful attack on the gospel of justification by faith alone.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are no friends of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, which is the heart of the gospel. Protestant Reformed theologians have been perfectly comfortable with justification by sanctifying faith (Revs. James Slopsema, Carl Haak, Ron Van Overloop, and Garry Eriks).<sup>9</sup> Now they are perfectly comfortable with justification by repentant faith (Prof. David J. Engelsma).

Such is the intimate relation of repentance and faith in Scripture, particularly with regard to the forgiveness of sins, that justifying faith is always accompanied by repentance. Therefore, even if repentance is not an element of faith, but "only" an inseparably related spiritual perfection, there is never the forgiveness of sins without repentance.

But why does the professor stop there? Are not obedience and good works also "inseparably related spiritual perfection[s]" with faith? Is not justifying faith always accompanied by good works? Why does he not then make good works to be a prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins as well? Why not have justification by obedient faith and justification by working faith to go along with justification by sanctifying faith and justification by repentant faith? And then the PRC may as well give Norman Shepherd and the federal vision a call to see if they have any more exciting kinds of faith to suggest for justification.

I don't think that there is much more to say on the professor's monstrous confusion of repentance with faith. See past issues of *Sword and Shield* for our rebuttal. All I can say is, "Run from the professor's doctrine. It will take you to hell."

Fourth, Professor Engelsma did take my previous advice to climb into heaven and say something to God's face about Professor Engelsma's repentance. I thought this would illustrate to the professor how impossible it is for man to precede God. But, astoundingly, when Professor Engelsma got before the feet of Jesus, he boasted. He turned to another miserable sinner, which sinner had been drawn there by the gospel of his savior, and Professor Engelsma boasted to that other sinner of the professor's repenting and sorrow and longing.

After which Professor Engelsma chased the other sinner away.

Should I meet a member of the RPC at the feet of Jesus, I would readily explain my presence there as repentance over my sins, including sorrow over my sins against God and longing for the healing of forgiveness from the Great Physician. I would then ask him or her, "Why are you here? What brings you here?" He or she would be speechless.

This fits remarkably well with the professor's other blasphemy, "Thankful for what?"

And I hurriedly advise Professor Engelsma to stop climbing into heaven and to stop appearing before God if he can. That would be better for him.

Fifth, the Westminster Standards and the Second Helvetic Confession are not my confessions. If Professor Engelsma is going to continue with them, he will have to take another look at them. They do not teach what he thinks they teach. Beyond that, I am not interested in exegeting or debating these confessions with him.

Sixth, Professor Engelsma is wrong in his recollections of our private meeting. This could be demonstrated objectively from certain details that the professor has confused in his recounting. But Professor Engelsma makes the point now publicly that he made privately in the meeting. This is the point: The only way for me as a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches to pursue controversy was through protest, not through the pulpit. To call one's own denomination to repent is to judge the churches, which judgment belongs only to the assemblies.

As for following the Church Order, here is the Church Order article regarding doctrinal controversy in a denomination, as that controversy applies to a minister's calling.

To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting. (Church Order 55, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 397)

At this point I feel like I am repeating everything from the last two years. So let me finish. Here is the one thing to remember about Professor Engelsma's doctrine of prerequisite repentance. It is not the apostolic faith but another gospel. Salvation is of the Lord.

—AL

<sup>9</sup> *Acts of Synod 2018*, 194–99.

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

## HUMPTY DUMPTY (2): WHICH IS MASTER

### *Making Theology Impossible*

“There’s glory for you!”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of dogmatics at the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, recently wrote in the *Standard Bearer* a series of eight articles regarding the phrase *in the way of*.<sup>2</sup> In this series he attempts to talk straight recent Protestant Reformed synodical decisions which stated that there are activities of man that precede blessings of God.

I began an evaluation of that series in the May issue.<sup>3</sup> I finish my analysis in this article. I do not intend to be long at examining his series. The articles are not worth it. The series is such transparent nonsense and egregious falsehood that one must have been smitten by a very strong delusion indeed to believe it. At the least serious level, the series is nothing more than a whimsical theological jabberwocky. Furthermore, the series is barren. There is false theology that can be compellingly expressed, for instance Karl Barth on election. False. Absolutely false but compelling. The series is not that. It is bad theology poorly and blandly argued. At a more serious level, the series is a concoction of theological ideas mixed together into an unpleasing porridge that reeks of Arminius and

that is sprinkled with some overripe Reformed cheese for flavor and a little creedal parsley for a pleasing presentation. But when the series is set on the ecclesiastical table, the overwhelming impression is still the sulfurous smell of Pelagianism. At the most serious level of all, the theology of the articles is a theology of man; and so it is dishonoring to God, stokes the fires of man’s pride, and harms souls.

Professor Huizinga works with recent synodical decisions of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). These decisions were the fruit of a nearly five-year doctrinal controversy in the denomination. In these decisions the PRC officially adopted the doctrine that man precedes God in a certain and vital sense in man’s salvation. There are acts of man—God-given and God-wrought and by grace, of course—that are prior to and unto blessings from God. Many, many things depend on what man does. Especially is this true in the realm of experience. Really, to experience anything in the PRC you must trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus. This is the doctrine of the PRC. This is what ministers must preach and do preach. This is what is taught in the Protestant Reformed seminary as the gospel that ministerial candidates are to learn and then as ministers to develop and preach in the pulpits of the churches. This is the doctrine for which Professor Huizinga contends in his series of articles. Of course, he mentions grace, election, Christ, and the cross. But they receive only mention. They are some overripe cheese and parsley sprinkled on for flavor and color. His doctrine—the doctrine of the series as represented by the majority of the words—is that there are activities of man that precede and are unto blessings of God.

All of this bad theology is carted in on the phrase *in the way of*. The professor is busy now and will apparently spend the rest of his ministry developing a theology of *in the way of* to explain how this idea is orthodox and necessary. And he will teach the churches and all his

1 Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*; <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/throughthelookingglass-54.html>.

2 Brian Huizinga, “Synods 2020/2021 and ‘In the Way of Repentance,’” *Standard Bearer* 98, nos. 4–11 (November 15, 2021–March 1, 2022). Page numbers for quotations from these articles are given in text.

3 Nathan J. Langerak, “Humpty Dumpty (1): Jabberwocky,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 18 (May 2022): 21–28.



students that many, if not all, of the “if” passages, all the calls and demands spoken in scripture, are not first to be referred to Christ but to be explained as *in the way of* man’s doing this and man’s doing that. It is a hermeneutic of *in the way of*. The professor cannot develop the truth of election, faith, and the cross of Christ. He cannot because they only serve as enabling powers; they are not the thing but only gateways to the thing, which thing is man’s activities and man’s obedience as the way unto God’s blessings. What a barren wasteland. It reminds me of the Latin phrase that translates as “they create a desert and call it peace.”<sup>4</sup> So in the PRC they create a theological desert and call it development.

Professor Huizinga has gone a long way in his development in this series of articles. The phrase *in the way of* means at least five different things in two different contexts. However, how many more senses of the phrase *in the way of* he might develop is anyone’s guess. The sky is the limit, and the only hindrance is the fertility of the imagination of the Protestant Reformed theologian who is working in the soil of the phrase *in the way of*. Perhaps he will have salvation in the way of obedience or the assurance of one’s justification in the way of obedience or sanctification in the way of obedience or blessings from God in the way of obedience. Oops. He already has that!

Professor Huizinga chastises his readers that they must be precise in theology and carefully define terms and maintain scriptural distinctions. Would that he had taken his own advice. In these articles he makes words, history, examples, illustrations, creeds, and scripture mean whatever he needs them to mean or wants them to mean for his purposes. His purpose is to explain the phrase *in the way of*. He contends for this phrase as though it were the essence of orthodoxy and the hinge upon which all true religion turns. The problem is that in the series we find out that for the professor *in the way of* rarely means *in the way of*. The phrase means *precedes, prior to, way unto, or simultaneous with*, depending on the context. The specific purpose of the articles is to explain that repentance is unto remission of sins and to distinguish this from obedience unto fellowship with God. Yet also here words change meaning, and the meaning of *repentance* changes with the context. Sometimes repentance is a work; sometimes repentance is not a work; sometimes we may talk loosely, broadly, and inaccurately about repentance. Then it can be a work. Sometimes we talk precisely, accurately, and narrowly about repentance. Then it is most definitely not a work. It is impossible and even ridiculous

and dangerous and very naughty to make repentance a work when one is speaking precisely, especially when one is saying that man’s act of repentance is unto the remission of sins.

The question is, indeed, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

The result of such theological jabberwocky is to make theology impossible. Doing theology when words mean so many different things is like trying to do mathematics when 1 plus 1 sometimes equals 2 and sometimes equals 3, depending on the context. Mathematics at that point becomes impossible. So theology also descends into the ridiculous and the nonsensical when *in the way of* and *repentance* mean many different things in many different contexts.

### *God-worked?*

Professor Huizinga sets himself this task because he needs to explain the decision of Synod 2020 of the Protestant Reformed Churches that determined that “there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God.”<sup>5</sup> It must be remembered that synod’s decision explained what Proverbs 28:13 means and what Rev. D. Overway meant when he preached on that passage and said, “It is in the way of confession, in the way of repentance, that we have the mercy of God.”<sup>6</sup> The synod also made official what the PRC means when ministers preach that we have this and that blessing *in the way of* this and that activity. The synod made it official dogma that *in the way of* means that prior to the blessing of God there must be an activity of man, so that man’s activity is that without which the blessing of God does not come.

In his series the professor needs to talk straight the naked Pelagianism of Synod 2020’s formulations. He writes, “When the Synod taught that there is a God-worked activity of the believer that precedes a certain blessing of God...” (79). But there was no “God-worked” in Synod 2020’s decision. Synod 2020 made a statement or two about the believer’s activity being the fruit of God’s work in such a way as to make the addition of those statements meaningless. The synod emphasized all that man has to do before he receives God’s blessing and then added, “The previous point does not contradict that the believer’s activity...is still the fruit of God’s work.”<sup>7</sup> Those were just meaningless words at that point. Synod 2021 did similarly. The professor, following both synods, does the same. But this is the main point of Synod

4 <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095542724>.

5 *Acts of Synod 2020*, 78.

6 David Overway, “Dealing Rightly with Our Sins,” sermon preached November 11, 2018, as quoted in *Acts of Synod 2020*, 75.

7 *Acts of Synod 2020*, 79.

2020: “There is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God.”<sup>8</sup> Synod 2020 hid behind a meaningless addition about man’s activity being the fruit of God’s work; and Synod 2021 and Professor Huizinga, like Professor Engelsma, hide their Pelagianism behind the words “God-worked.”

But Professor Huizinga must understand two things.

First, adding “God-worked” does not save synod’s decision. It simply profanes the name of God by using his holy name as window-dressing on the professor’s man-centered doctrine. It would have been better to leave “God-worked” out instead of besmirching the name of God by association with false doctrine. Whether the activity that is prior to the blessing of God is God-worked is not the issue. The issue is that God’s blessing depends for its realization on man’s activity. Man’s activity is the decisive thing in this theology. God will always bless. God will always do his part. No one suggests otherwise. But man must do his part to have God do his part. There is an act of man that is prior to the blessing of God. It is man-centered, man-first, man-pleasing theology that displaces Christ.

Second, the issue with the decision is that the Protestant Reformed synod supposed that because it added the words “believer” and “experience” to its denial of the truth, the decision was saved from Pelagianism. Obviously, if one teaches that there is an activity of man that is prior to the blessing of God, that is Pelagianism. But because synod’s decision was about a “believer” and “experience,” then according to synod, it is legitimate, right, good, and necessary to say that there are activities of man that are prior to blessings of God. But simply because one is talking about a believer who is regenerated and because one is talking about the experience of salvation for that believer does not make it legitimate to make man first before God any more than it is proper for man to be first before God prior to regeneration. Man’s activities prior to God’s blessings is the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and it is that theology that we charge as being conditional. The faith of man as his activity, the repentance of man as his activity, and in the end the obedience of man as his activity are all unto the obtaining of remission, assurance, and salvation now and in the final judgment.

Assuring everyone that the formulations of the Protestant Reformed Churches are no departure from the truth, Professor Huizinga writes, “The synod was not turning the focus from God to man, or making man first and God second, or teaching ministers to emphasize man and his activity in their preaching” (79). This sounds a lot

like the Christian Reformed Church’s defense of common grace. The Christian Reformed ministers talked like this too: the decision about common grace by which we tore three massive holes in the wall of the antithesis does not mean that we are encouraging worldliness. But that was the effect under God’s judgment. So also in the PRC the effect of synod’s doctrinal decision is that ministers emphasize man and man’s activity in the preaching. Pick a random sermon from a random minister, and you will see. The ministers preach all about man’s active faith, man’s active repentance, man’s confession, and man’s doing this and doing that. This is the result because, contrary to what Professor Huizinga writes, the PRC did in plain English words decide that man is first and that God is second. Take the synodical decision that “there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God” and put it in front of one hundred random people and ask them, “Who is first here?” You would have to be an idiot or, worse, a deceiver to say that man is not first in that statement. Man is first if English words have meaning.

But then again, for Professor Huizinga: “When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

The professor continues to give us his whole series of things that the synod was not doing by its decision that there are activities of man that are prior to blessings of God. He writes,

The synod was not flirting with conditional theology and introducing repentance as a new condition the believer must fulfill in order to receive mercy, as if God’s will to bestow mercy hinges upon the believer’s will to repent of his sins. The synod was not introducing some profane species of covenantal bargaining in which the ‘party’ man meets the ‘party’ God and they both agree that, if man does his part and repents, then God will do His part and forgive. (79)

Where does one even start with this kind of manipulative writing? The synod was not flirting with conditions. The synod taught them. There are activities of man that are prior to blessings from God. Who in their right mind would deny that that is a condition? It is true that the synod was not introducing parties. That would have been much too obvious. But besides, for the PRC parties that have to bargain do not go far enough. Man does not even have to bargain anymore in Protestant Reformed theology. He does, and he gets.

<sup>8</sup> *Acts of Synod 2020*, 78.

## *Just like Norman*

Professor Huizinga's defense of this man-centered and soul-destroying theology is to insist on the phrase *in the way of* as though it were the very essence of orthodoxy and as though orthodoxy could not be maintained without it. I want everyone to know that this was also Norman Shepherd's way out of his dilemma in which he made works instrumental. He began to talk about ways!

There is some discussion about the liability of the term "instrument" for both faith and works in relation to justification and the expression "the way" is suggested instead, and we find "the way of faith and the way of obedience" used instead of "instrument."<sup>9</sup>

What Shepherd was hiding behind those phrases, "the way of faith" and "the way of obedience," was the total overthrow of the Reformed doctrine of justification and thus also of the covenant. Instead of saying "instrument," he simply said "the way of." And in this way he joined repentance and obedience so closely with faith that faith cannot save, justify, or assure without repentance and obedience.

Shepherd said what he meant by the words "the way of." He meant "faith coupled with obedience" and "faith and new obedience" and "faith and repentance" as being unto or necessary for justification.<sup>10</sup>

In his *Thirty-four Theses*, he wrote,

In a right use of the law, the people of God neither merit nor seek to merit anything by their obedience to God, but out of love and gratitude serve the Lord of the Covenant as sons in the household of the Father and in this way are the beneficiaries of his fatherly goodness (Mal. 3:16-18).<sup>11</sup>

Notice the language that out of love and gratitude they serve the Lord...*and in this way are the beneficiaries of his fatherly goodness.* That is not a stitch different from the synodical decision that there are activities of the believer that are prior to the experience of the blessing of God, which the PRC made official dogma.

Shepherd also wrote,

Faith, repentance, and new obedience are not the cause or ground of salvation or justification, but are, as covenantal response to the revelation

of God in Jesus Christ, the way (Acts 24:14; II Peter 2:2, 21) in which the Lord of the Covenant brings his people into the full possession of eternal life. (*Theses*, number 18)

And Shepherd wrote, "The forgiveness of sin for which repentance is an indispensable necessity is the forgiveness of sin included in justification, and therefore there is no justification without repentance" (*Theses*, number 15).

I could cite more examples and multiply them endlessly because what Shepherd taught, his language and his phrases, are what is being taught in the PRC, in the seminary, and in the dogmatics classroom of the PRC; and it is the overthrow of the Reformed faith. For Shepherd himself tells us what he meant by his phrase "the way of":

The righteousness of Jesus Christ ever remains the exclusive ground of the believer's justification, but the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Heb. 12:14). (*Theses*, number 22)

Following this article I publish Norman Shepherd's *Thirty-four Theses*. Read them, and tell me if that is not what you are hearing and have heard preached in the Protestant Reformed Churches for years and years.

Professor Engelsma complained endlessly that Norman Shepherd was never disciplined. To that I say that the PRC does not discipline false teachers either. But I will also say this: if Norman Shepherd could have refrained himself from using the word *condition*, he would have found a comfortable place in the ministry of the PRC. What he taught is just what the PRC is teaching in almost exactly the same words. I am only trying to figure out yet if the PRC was following Norman Shepherd's playbook or if the PRC actually wrote the playbook before Shepherd came along, and he followed and developed from the PRC.

But that there is a striking and chilling similarity between the expressions of the relationship between repentance and remission by Norman Shepherd and by the professors and ministers of the PRC is obvious. In that light the PRC owe David Overway a huge apology. What the PRC did to him was iniquitous at many levels and grotesque hypocrisy. The ministers and professors believe what he taught, and that is coming out now, and the PRC is advancing far beyond him.

9 Ian Alastair Hewitson, "Trust and Obey: Norman Shepherd and the Justification Controversy at Westminster Seminary The Years 1974-1982" (doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2009), 116; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308726102\\_Trust\\_and\\_Obey\\_Norman\\_Shepherd\\_and\\_the\\_Justification\\_Controversy\\_at\\_Westminster\\_Seminary\\_The\\_Years\\_1974-1982](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308726102_Trust_and_Obey_Norman_Shepherd_and_the_Justification_Controversy_at_Westminster_Seminary_The_Years_1974-1982).

10 Hewitson, "Trust and Obey," 116.

11 Thesis 28, in Norman Shepherd, *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*; <https://pastor.trinity-pres.net/essays/ns13-1978-11-18NSLetterToThePresbyteryOfPhiladelphia34ThesesOnJustification.pdf>.



The important point is that many people far and wide understand that in the Protestant Reformed Churches the obedience of man is decisive. It is *the thing*. It is the thing in every sermon. Even when the ministers preach on Lord's Days 23 and 24, they will not be busy preaching Christ crucified but making sure that their audiences know that faith is active and that the people must be active in faith. The ministers cannot even shut up about man for those Lord's Days on justification. Man's work, activity, and doing—his obedience—are the way to everything: they unlock the storehouse of God's blessings; they turn God's face to shine on you; they open God's arms to embrace you; they throw open the doors of the experience of salvation. Obedience does. It is not the obedience of Christ that is the important and decisive obedience. It is not the gifts and grace of God that are decisive. Those only enable you to do. Those get you only so far! Christ and the grace of God bring you to the point where God can work with you again on the basis of the law and prescribe new ways for you to approach him, to have his favor, and to be blessed by him. There is that which man *must* do to be saved, so the story goes. He must repent; he must believe; he must obey; he must do many, many things, *in the way of* which he will have God's favor and blessings. Man does all of these things by grace, of course; but do them he must, and without doing them he cannot be saved. Man, man's activities, man's doings, man's obedience are the issue. After all, God always does his part. The ministers can breeze over that. And Professor Huizinga does. In an eight-part series, there is one article that is worth the paper it is printed on. Everything else reeks of man—a sweaty, stinking, working man. By all his working that is all a man ever gets: a loathsome stench. And the whole series stinks with the stench of sweaty, smelly, working man.

### *A Telling Definition of Conditions*

The articles make clear that Professor Huizinga's theology is conditional. The articles betray their conditionality

in part by their definition of *conditions*. Conditionality, whether it uses the word or not, betrays itself by its definition of *conditionality*. Definitions are the skeleton of the body that is theology. Definitions are the structure on which one hangs the flesh and around which the body of theology is fashioned. Professor Huizinga gives his definition of *conditions* in the articles. It is cleverly slipped in. He does not dwell on it much. But he gives it, and that definition is the key to understanding the conditionality of the articles. He writes,

Our activity of repentance, however, is to be explained by God's sovereign grace. Apart from divine grace not one person over the length and breadth of the earth would ever repent. There is absolutely no native desire or ability in man to repent. If repentance were a condition for pardon so that the pardoning God had to wait upon us and our repentance, He would forever be waiting and never pardoning. Should there ever be a theology that teaches that repentance is the act of man apart from or even in cooperation with divine grace, and an act upon which God depends, then that theology is not only contrary to Scripture and the confessions but nonsense according to the believer's own experience. (173–74)

Did you catch that? What does Professor Huizinga mean by the word *condition*? He means this: that *man acts in his own strength* or that *man cooperates with the grace of God*. That is how many theologians have covered their conditionality.<sup>12</sup> They restrict conditionality to man's acting in his own strength. The fallacy of the argument is seen by a simple analogy. If I tell my son to put the bikes in the garage before he eats supper, then whether I help him or not makes not a shred of difference regarding the arrangement. The issue is him and what he does. It is the same with conditionality in the PRC. In order to deny that the churches teach conditions, it is said that conditions are what man does in his own strength.

12 For instance, Professor Engelsma in a 1967 *Beacon Lights* article on James 4:8 wrote, "In what way does our drawing near to God precede His drawing near to us? (Some appeal to this text, vs. 8, as proof that man of himself can and must do something—draw near to God—before God can save him—draw near to man. Man's will and work become conditions unto his salvation. This would be a good place to discuss the whole notion. Long ago, Calvin faced this false doctrine, in connection with James 4:8, and refuted it: 'But if any one concludes from this passage, that the first part of the work belongs to us, and that afterwards the grace of God follows, the Apostle meant no such thing; for though we ought to do this, yet it does not immediately follow that we can. And the Spirit of God, in exhorting us to our duty, derogates nothing from himself, or from his own power; but the very thing he bids us to do, he himself fulfills in us.' (Calvin, *Commentary on James*)." (David Engelsma, "Helps for Bible Study on the Epistle of James," *Beacon Lights for Protestant Reformed Youth* 27, no. 3 [May 1967]: 11; <https://beaconlights.org/sermons/james-4-2/>.)

Reverend Engelsma spent a great deal of time telling his readers how bad Arminian conditionality is, and he even quoted from Calvin to refute it, but his own conditionality he did not condemn but presented it to the young people in the form of a question. It is not a question for him. It was not a question then, and it is not a question now. There is a way that our drawing near to God precedes his drawing near to us.

I was stunned when I read this. This theology is old in the Protestant Reformed Churches. How it disguised itself for so long, I do not know. Were we all that deaf, dumb, and blind? The Lord knows. What is more, the demonization of Arminian conditionality in the name of slipping in another form of conditionality is a tactic that has a long pedigree in the PRC.

However, conditionality in the Reformed churches never was about man's doing something in his own strength. This is especially true with regard to conditionality in the covenant. There was always grace to help fulfill the condition. But the fact remained that the activity of man was always the decisive activity. It was not God's activity that was decisive. It was not God's election or God's promise or Christ's work or the grace of the Holy Spirit that was decisive. God helped. God did his part. But man also had to do his part. Also conditionality was never so much about cooperation as about God's giving man all that was necessary for man to do what man must do. That is the nature of conditionality in this controversy too. No one is arguing that anyone is teaching that man must do something in his own strength, and it is pure deception and distraction to present the issue as such.

By so defining *conditionality* as man's doing something in his own strength, Professor Huizinga covers his own conditionality. For him *conditionality* is man's doing something in his own strength upon which God depends. The other alternative is the position of his church and of himself that there are activities of man that are prior to and unto the blessings of God, activities that are God-worked and God-given and graciously provided, but which for all that are activities without which God's blessing does not come. The implication is that since the Protestant Reformed Churches do not teach conditions fulfilled in man's own strength, the denomination does not teach conditions; indeed, it is impossible that the Protestant Reformed Churches would teach conditions. Have you never heard of 1953 and the fact that the PRC defeated conditions once and for all time and eternity!

There are two other instances of this deception in the articles. The professor does the same sort of thing with the word *merit*. The PRC does not teach merit, and so the PRC cannot be teaching justification by faith and by works and cannot be teaching conditions. No one is accusing the PRC of teaching merit explicitly, so the PRC can stop saying that. The other instance of this kind of argumentation is in connection with the call to repentance. The argument runs this way: The PRC make repentance unto remission so that the ministers can issue the call to repentance. The Reformed Protestant Churches deny that repentance is unto remission, so the Reformed Protestant ministers cannot issue a call to repentance; and, indeed, the Reformed Protestant Churches deny that there ever could be a call to repentance. That is a complete lie. And God does not approve of liars, especially not when doing theology. This is the kind of disreputable opponents that we have to deal with. They do not shun the lowest forms of specious argument to attack the truth.

In so defining *conditions* Professor Huizinga gives away that his theology is no different from the theology of

conditions fulfilled by grace. This definition of *conditions* is the old refuge of every teacher of conditions: "We do this all by grace, beloved! But there is that which a man must do to be saved." His articles are simply another restatement of the theology of Rev. David Overway at Hope church; of Rev. Kenneth Koole and his theology that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do; and the theology of Rev. Hubert De Wolf. Reverend De Wolf taught that man's act of conversion is prior to his entrance into the kingdom. Today the PRC teaches that man's act of repentance is prior to receiving forgiveness; man's act of obedience is prior to fellowshiping with God; man's act of forgiving his neighbor is prior to his receiving forgiveness from God; and man's act of abiding in Christ by faith and the obedience of faith is prior to his entrance into eternal bliss.

This theology took over the Protestant Reformed Churches at some point. The theology was sitting at Classis East in May 1953 in the form of the majority report. That report was dismissed, and the theology never left. It worked in the churches. We now can bring the theology back to 1967, when the young people were being taught by Rev. David Engelsma that there is a way that man's drawing near to God precedes God's drawing near to man. The issue came up again after 2015 and really won at that point. The apparent victory of Synod 2018 was nothing but smoke and mirrors. The hierarchy had gained too much ground and was not going to surrender it. The false theology came back with a vengeance and was determined to rid itself of those who objected to it. The PRC cannot conceive of any other theology and never will have any other theology than that there are acts of man that are prior to the blessings of God. What Reverend Overway merely mentioned is the official position of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the official position of the Protestant Reformed seminary, and the official position of the dogmatics classroom at the Protestant Reformed seminary. It is the official position of the Protestant Reformed pulpits, so that there cannot and will not be the gospel preached in those pulpits because when there are acts of man that are prior to blessings of God, that is another gospel that is no gospel, which the apostles, prophets, angels, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church of Christ in every age damn with "Anathema Maranatha!"

### *Going Home Unjustified*

What is thoroughly dreadful is that this theology unabashedly teaches conditions in the matter of justification. Professor Huizinga is not merely teaching that generally somewhere there are activities of man that are *prior to* and *unto* the blessings of God. That is bad. That is God-denying. But he is teaching that man's act of repentance—God-given and God-worked—is *prior to* and *unto* God's

act of forgiving (justifying). Professor Huizinga uses the words *remission* and *forgiveness*. However, whenever one speaks about remission and forgiveness, he is speaking about justification. Let no one fool you. Remission of sins is justification. Man's act of repentance is *prior to* and *unto* God's act of justifying. That is what the professor teaches. Man's act of obedience—God-given and God-worked, of course—is *prior to* and *unto* God's act of fellowshiping with man. That is the same thing. The Protestant Reformed Churches and Professor Huizinga are teaching conditions for justification. They are teaching conditions for fellowship with God, which is the same thing.

He denies that the PRC teach an “act of man...an act upon which God depends” (173). He means that the PRC do not teach rankly Arminian conditionality, and so the PRC do not teach conditions. Is he just deceptive, or is he willfully ignorant? Has he not heard? Professor Engelsma said, “God works in such a way that He moves us to act in order that He may then act in the way He has determined.”<sup>13</sup> Unless man acts, God does not act. Unless man acts, God may not act. You can describe man's acting at that point in whatever way you please—God-worked, God-given, Spirit-wrought. God is dependent on man's acting. And this in the matter of justification!

And this points out another problem with the articles: they are simply yesterday's news. The PRC has run past Professor Huizinga. He is not leading at all. He is following an unruly team of mules. And he is left with the unenviable task of cleaning up all the dung they keep dropping. The PRC is progressing down the road of apostasy so fast that hardly was the ink dried on the professor's articles, and there was new development in the PRC's precipitous departure from the truth: man must act in order that God may act (!); faith and obedience are how a man abides in Christ (!).

The author of this series and all who follow him are to be warned that he and others like him are teaching a theology that sends men home unjustified day by day, Sunday after Sunday, and to hell at the end of their lives. I shudder for his own judgment. He has played a central role in the theological destruction of the Protestant Reformed Churches and in the destruction of the truth in the PRC. He did the work of the Lord lackadaisically. He is one of those men whom God condemns in Ezekiel 13:5: “Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD.” He was on the committee of Synod 2018 that gave the churches the compromised document that he now trumpets throughout the series of articles as the very quintessence of sound theology. That document ensured

that error will never again be condemned in the Protestant Reformed Churches. When things were blowing up in the churches, he took it upon himself to give a speech throughout the churches. I listened to the speech. Afterward I pleaded with him to stop giving it because in the speech he took away with the left hand what he gave with the right. The solution for him was not to teach justification and faith soundly but to teach the churches how to use the phrase *in the way of* properly. He perpetuates that same illusion in his series of articles. He had opportunity after opportunity to address the churches on the issue that was the issue, namely the shameless denial of justification and the promotion of the theology that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. He not only had the opportunities, but he also had the ears of the people. He had the calling: stand in the gap! He squandered the opportunities and disobeyed the calling. Then he attacked the truth. He held the coats of those who stoned us, and I could never figure out why. Was he that naïve? Was he that haughty that he thought he could fix the mess? Put Humpty together again! Was he just misinformed or uninformed? Did he harbor a delusion about the theological state of the PRC? I held some hope for him even at that late hour. I now know why he could not condemn the error that the churches were actually facing—conditional theology in the experience of the covenant and conditional justification. He could not condemn it because he believes it. The sad thing is that I doubt he can see it. As God said in Ezekiel 14:9, “If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.”

He is the egg that grew larger and larger and more and more human and that now pontificates perched precariously on a very high and very thin wall. That is what happens when God gives spiritual blindness and sends a strong delusion. One believes a lie. Not only does Professor Huizinga believe the conditional theology of the PRC; but because of his position and his young age, he will also cement that theology deeply into the consciousness of the next generation of Protestant Reformed ministers. He will teach them to teach their congregations that there are activities of man that are prior to the blessings of God; that there are activities of man that are the way unto the reception of the mercy of God; and that there are activities of man upon which the blessings of God wait. He will teach them this conditionality: repentance is prior to and is unto justification. He will teach them conditions, all the while assuring them and deceiving himself that he is teaching the old paths.

13 David J. Engelsma, “Ignorant, Lying, or Merely Mistaken,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 12.



## All the King's Horses...

It is like Humpty Dumpty then: “When *I* use a word... it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

And with Alice we ask Professor Huizinga, “The question is... whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

The series could have been much shorter and far clearer. Professor Engelsma has made perfectly clear what the Protestant Reformed Churches mean by *in the way of*. The churches mean that God causes man to act so that God may act. They mean conditions. They will not use the word *condition*, but they should. They are teaching conditions. Refusing to use the word *condition* is just dishonest and adds duplicity to the charge of false doctrine. They teach that there is an activity of man that precedes a blessing of God. It does not matter where that activity comes from or what the explanation of that activity is. There is an activity of man that precedes a blessing of God. This activity of man is that on which God's blessing depends and without which God's blessing does not come. That is a condition. Saying that the activity of man that is necessary for salvation is God-worked is not a bit different from saying that the conditions that God requires are fulfilled by grace. The fact is that there is some activity of man—God-worked, by grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit—that man must do to be saved.

“You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir,” said Alice. “Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called ‘Jabberwocky?’”

“Let's hear it,” said Humpty Dumpty. “I can explain all the poems that were ever invented—and a good many that haven't been invented just yet.”

This sounded very hopeful, so Alice repeated the first verse:

*‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

“That's enough to begin with,” Humpty Dumpty interrupted: “there are plenty of hard words there. ‘*Brillig*’ means four o'clock in the afternoon—the time when you begin *broiling* things for dinner.”

“That'll do very well,” said Alice: “and ‘*slithy*?’”

“Well, ‘*slithy*’ means ‘lithe and slimy.’ ‘Lithe’ is the same as ‘active.’ You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word.”

“I see it now,” Alice remarked thoughtfully: “and what are ‘*toves*?’”

“Well, ‘*toves*’ are something like badgers—they're something like lizards—and they're something like corkscrews.”

“They must be very curious looking creatures.”

“They are that,” said Humpty Dumpty: “also they make their nests under sun-dials—also they live on cheese.”

“And what's the ‘*gyre*’ and to ‘*gimble*?’”

“To ‘*gyre*’ is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To ‘*gimble*’ is to make holes like a gimlet.”

“And ‘*the wabe*’ is the grass-plot round a sun-dial, I suppose?” said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.

“Of course it is. It's called ‘*wabe*,’ you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it—”

“And a long way beyond it on each side,” Alice added.

“Exactly so. Well, then, ‘*mimsy*’ is ‘flimsy and miserable’ (there's another portmanteau for you). And a ‘*borogove*’ is a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round—something like a live mop.”

“And then ‘*mome raths*?’” said Alice. “I'm afraid I'm giving you a great deal of trouble.”

“Well, a ‘*rath*’ is a sort of green pig; but ‘*mome*’ I'm not certain about. I think it's short for ‘from home’—meaning that they'd lost their way, you know.”

“And what does ‘*outgrabe*’ mean?”

“Well, ‘*outgrabe*’ is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle; however, you'll hear it done, maybe—down in the wood yonder—and when you've once heard it you'll be *quite* content. Who's been repeating all that hard stuff to you?”<sup>14</sup>

It ought to be clear to anyone who reads Professor Huizinga's series on *in the way of* that the theology of the PRC has become complete nonsense. *In the way of* means *way unto*, *prior to*, *precedes*, or *simultaneous with* and sometimes even means *in the way of*. What the phrase means depends on whether one is talking about remission in the way of repentance or whether one is talking about fellowship in the way of obedience. Repentance, too, can be a work or not be a work depending on whether one is speaking like the creeds (!), imprecisely and broadly, or whether one wants to be hyper-creedal, hyper-learned, and hyper-accurate. If repentance is not work, neither is it faith. What exactly repentance is we are not told.

Which is master, indeed!

And all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put Humpty together again.

And so also have gone the churches of Herman Hoeksema and George Ophoff.

They will not be put together again.

—NJL

<sup>14</sup> Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*; <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/throughthelookingglass-55.html>.

# THIRTY-FOUR THESES ON JUSTIFICATION IN RELATION TO FAITH, REPENTANCE, AND GOOD WORKS

1. All men are sinners by nature and are under the wrath and condemnation of God.\*
2. There is nothing that any man can do to save himself from condemnation or to contribute to his salvation in any sense or at any point, so that any attempt on the part of man to save himself not only fails but even serves to compound his guilt.
3. Justification is an act of God by which He forgives sinners acquitting them of their guilt, accounts and accepts them as righteous, and bestows upon them the title to eternal life.
4. The term “justification” may be used with reference to the acquittal and acceptance of a believer at his effectual calling into union with Christ, or with reference to the state of forgiveness and acceptance with God into which the believer is ushered by his effectual calling, or with reference to God’s open acquittal and acceptance of the believer at the final judgment (Matt. 12:36, 37; Rom. 3:22, 24; 5:1; 8:1; Gal. 5:5).
5. The ground of justification or the reason or cause why sinners are justified is in no sense to be found in themselves or in what they do, but is to be found wholly and exclusively in Jesus Christ and in his mediatorial accomplishment on their behalf.
6. By faith the sinner receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness as held forth in the gospel, and in this way is justified.
7. In the order of the application of redemption in the case of an adult, justification is by faith, and the sinner must believe in order to be justified; however, to use the categories of antecedence or priority to describe the relation of faith to justification obscures the truth that the justifying verdict and the gift of faith are received *together* at the moment the sinner is united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. (Later revised to: In the application of redemption in the case of adults, justification is by faith and the sinner must believe in order to be justified; however, the justifying verdict and the gift of faith are received *together* at the moment the sinner is united to Christ by the Holy Spirit.)
8. The order of the application of redemption which places faith before justification, in so far as it takes no account of the experience of redeemed infants, is Baptist. (Later revised to: Elect infants who are saved in infancy and other elect persons, incapable of, or prevented from exercising faith or repentance or yielding obedience to Christ, are justified when they are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit.)
9. Redeemed infants and others incapable of, or prevented from exercising faith or repentance or yielding obedience to Christ, are justified when they are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. (Later revised to: In the case of redeemed infants, justification precedes faith in time, but the regeneration given together with justification in union with Christ inevitably manifests itself in the exercises of faith, repentance, and obedience to Christ as the child matures.)
10. Although believers are justified by faith alone, they are never justified by a faith that is alone, because faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit is given together with all the other gifts and graces flowing from the cross and resurrection of Christ, and the exercise of faith is co-terminous with the exercise of the other gifts and graces so that when a man begins to believe he also begins to love God and to bring that love to expression through obedience to God (West. Conf. of Faith XI, 2).

\* As an expression of his views on justification, Rev. Norman Shepherd, associate professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, presented these *Thirty-four Theses* to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on November 18, 1978.

11. Justifying faith is obedient faith, that is, “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6), and therefore faith that yields obedience to the commands of Scripture.
12. Faith which is not obedient faith is dead faith and neither saves nor justifies; living and active faith justifies (James 2:14-26).
13. Faith and repentance are so inextricably intertwined with each other that there cannot exist a true and saving apprehension of the mercy of Christ without a grief for and hatred of sin, a turning unto God, and a purposing and endeavoring to walk with God in all the ways of his commandments (West. Conf. of Faith, XV, 2).
14. Repentance, inclusive not only of grief for and hatred of sin but also of turning from sin and endeavoring to walk with God in all the ways of his commandments, although not the ground of forgiveness, is nevertheless so necessary for all sinners, that there is no pardon without it (West. Conf. of Faith XV, 3).
15. The forgiveness of sin for which repentance is an indispensable necessity is the forgiveness of sin included in justification, and therefore there is no justification without repentance.
16. Prior to regeneration in union with Christ, sinners can neither believe, nor repent, nor perform deeds appropriate to repentance because they are dead in their trespasses and sins.
17. Regeneration is such a radical, pervasive, and efficacious transformation that it immediately registers itself in the conscious activity of the person concerned in the exercise of faith and repentance and new obedience.
18. Faith, repentance, and new obedience are not the cause or ground of salvation or justification, but are, as covenantal response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the way (Acts 24:14; II Peter 2:2, 21) in which the Lord of the Covenant brings his people into the full possession of eternal life.
19. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are his disciples, who walk in the Spirit and keep covenant with God, are in a state of justification and will be justified on the day of judgment; whereas unbelieving, ungodly, unrighteous, and impenitent sinners who are covenant breakers or strangers to the covenant of grace, are under the wrath and curse of God, and on the day of judgment will be condemned to hell forever, unless they flee from the wrath to come by turning to the Lord in faith and repentance (Psalm 1; John 5:28, 29).
20. The Pauline affirmation in Romans 2:13, “the doers of the Law will be justified,” is not to be understood hypothetically in the sense that there are no persons who fall into that class, but in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified (Compare Luke 8:21; James 1:22-25).
21. The exclusive ground of the justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his obedience, which is simply the perseverance of the saints in the way of truth and righteousness, is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification (Heb. 3:6, 14).
22. The righteousness of Jesus Christ ever remains the exclusive ground of the believer’s justification, but the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Heb. 12:14).
23. Because faith which is not obedient faith is dead faith, and because repentance is necessary for the pardon of sin included in justification, and because abiding in Christ by keeping his commandments (John 15:5, 10; 1 John 3:13, 24) are all necessary for continuing in the state of justification, good works, works done from true faith, according to the law of God, and for his glory, being the new obedience wrought by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer united to Christ, though not the ground of his justification, are nevertheless necessary for salvation from eternal condemnation and therefore for justification (Rom. 6:16, 22; Gal. 6:7-9).
24. The “works” (Eph. 2:9), or “works of the Law” (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), or “righteousness of my own derived from the Law” (Phil. 3:9), or “deeds which we have done in righteousness” (Titus 3:5) which are excluded from justification and salvation, are not “good works” in the Biblical sense of works for which the believer is created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10), or works wrought by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:22-26), or works done from true faith (I Thes. 1:3), according to the law of God, and for his glory, but are works of the flesh (Gal. 3:3) done in unbelief (Gal. 3:12) for the purpose of meriting God’s justifying verdict.



25. The Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone does not mean that faith in isolation or abstraction from good works justifies, but that the way of faith (faith working by love), as opposed to the “works of the law” or any other conceivable method of justification, is the only way of justification. (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 11, 20. “Indeed, we confess with Paul that no other faith justifies ‘but faith working through love’ [Gal. 5:6]. But it does not take its power to justify from that working of love. Indeed, it justifies in no other way but in that it leads us into fellowship with the righteousness of Christ.”)
26. The Roman Catholic doctrine that justification is a process in which the unjust man is transformed into a just man by the infusion of sacramental grace confuses justification with sanctification, and contradicts the teaching of Scripture that justification is a forensic verdict of God by which the ungodly are received and accepted as righteous on the ground of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.
27. The Roman Catholic doctrine that faith merits (congruent merit) the infusion of justifying grace, and that faith formed by love and performing good works merits (condign merit) eternal life contradicts the teaching of Scripture that justification is by grace through faith apart from the works of the law.
28. In a right use of the law, the people of God neither merit nor seek to merit anything by their obedience to God, but out of love and gratitude serve the Lord of the Covenant as sons in the household of the Father and in this way are the beneficiaries of his fatherly goodness (Mal. 3:16-18).
29. The proclamation of the gospel of sovereign grace must include not only a setting forth of the sufficiency and perfection of the Redeemer Jesus Christ as the only name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved, but must also include an earnest appeal to sinners to come to Christ in faith, to forsake sin and unrighteousness, and to perform deeds appropriate to repentance (Acts 26:19, 20).
30. Jesus Christ cannot be received as Savior without submission to him as Lord in one and the same act of faith, and he cannot be received as Savior and Lord unless he is presented as Savior and Lord in the proclamation of the gospel.
31. Because faith is called for in all gospel proclamation, exhortations to obedience do not cast men upon their own resources to save themselves, but are grounded in the promise of the Spirit to accompany the proclamation of the whole counsel of God with power so that the response of the whole man called for in the gospel is wrought in the sinner.
32. The election of God stands firm so that sinners who are united to Christ, justified, and saved, can never come into condemnation; but within the sphere of covenant life, election does not cancel out the responsibility of the believer to persevere in penitent and obedient faith since only they who endure to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13).
33. Though believers are never without sin in this life, they have no excuse for sinning inasmuch as they have died and are risen with Christ; nevertheless, their sin does not bring them into condemnation only because it is covered by the blood of Jesus to which the believer has continual recourse in prayer.
34. The justification, sanctification, and life of the believer reside wholly and exclusively in Christ Jesus, and therefore the proclamation of the sole-sufficiency and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ is a source of perpetual assurance, encouragement, and comfort to believers in their warfare against Satan in obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

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

## TRUE REPENTANCE

*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*  
—Acts 2:38–39

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord...Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.* —Acts 3:19, 26

*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.* (First of Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses, 1517)

**O**n the level of experience, repentance is not at all difficult to describe. One would be hard-pressed to find a better definition of repentance than that which is given by the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 33, question and answer 89. “It is a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 121).

There are three outstanding parts to this teaching of the Catechism about repentance. Repentance is, first, a sincere sorrow of heart. This particular part of the explanation reflects the first of Luther’s Ninety-five Theses. Sorrow of heart over sin is the opposite of the Romish teaching of indulgences that repentance is a deed to be done, or a gift to be offered to God, by which the faithful obtain forgiveness.

Second, repentance is a fundamental orientation toward God. True repentance cannot be merely a sincere sorrow of heart over sin. It cannot be a sincere sorrow that is self-motivated. It cannot be a sincere sorrow of heart that one is ashamed of himself. It is not that the sinner is sorrowful over the consequences of his sin, the suffering of some kind of evil because of his sin. Nor is it that the sinner is sincerely sorrowful for his sin in the expectation that in the way of his sorrow God will grant him assurance of pardon. The Catechism is definite on the exact orientation of this sincere sorrow of heart. It is God-centered. The cause of this sorrow of heart is that “we have provoked God by our sins.” This sorrow reckons with sin as displeasing in God’s sight, contrary to the glory of his infinite holiness.

The third part of repentance, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, is “more and more to hate and flee from them.” This third part adds to the first part. Repentance

is both sorrow over sin and hatred of the sin. Repentance sees sin not as a friend whose loss must be grieved. Much less does repentance see sin as something to be accommodated or sheltered. Sin is the mortal enemy to be driven out and destroyed. This third part of repentance also includes fleeing from sin. The representation of the Catechism is powerful. It pictures sin as a dreadful, corrupting power that is constantly working to overcome the believer. Knowing its awful power, the believer out of his sorrow for his sins and hatred of them must flee from them. Those sins call to him, but he will not listen. They seek to take him into their grip and dominion, but he cannot allow it.

It is evident in this teaching of Lord’s Day 33 that true repentance is a great mystery. As a mystery it can be compared to the mystery of the cross of Jesus Christ. As a mystery it partakes of the same offense as the cross. As a mystery repentance is not at all according to man’s mind or thought. Repentance is not acceptable at all to the flesh. Like the cross, true repentance is completely contrary to the pride of man. It is beyond all the reasoning and understanding of the natural man. The natural man will always and inevitably distort and corrupt the precious doctrine of repentance to make it what it is not. In doing so he is sure to incur the wrath of God for abusing such a magnificent and glorious gift.

What is the mystery of repentance?

Repentance is a glorious shame.

Repentance is the life that confesses only death.

Repentance is the valuable and precious gift that results in deep sorrow and grief.

Repentance is the fruit of the cross that declares the believer unworthy of it.

Repentance is the good that denies all good of the believer.

Repentance is the shame that cannot flee from God but must come into his presence with its shame over sin.

Such is the paradox of repentance. It is that the repentant sinner comes into God's presence and should in God's presence declare why he has come. "I am unworthy." "I am dead, devoid of life." "I am a sinner." "I am ungodly." "I have transgressed all thy commandments and kept none of them." "I am a debtor." "I am thine enemy." That penitent sinner continues. "I deserve thy indignation, judgment, and wrath." "I am unworthy of thy mercy and grace." "I have forfeited thy peace." "I deserve to be cast out of thy sight."

The paradox of repentance continues to speak after such a manner before God. There are things that repentance will not say before God. "I come in my penitence." "I come in my faith." "I come with my worship, my devotion, my commitment, my loyal service." Repentance is the good that can only speak of the evil that belongs to the believer. It is the good that denies all good to the believer. Repentance speaks after the manner of Psalm 51:4: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

What is it that makes repentance so paradoxical? What is it that makes repentance so great a mystery?

It is that repentance is the intrusion of a completely foreign, seemingly destructive power into the nature of the elect, the power of a broken heart. It is the power of circumcision, the power of the circumcision of the heart, far deeper than any physical rite with its physical effects (Deut. 30:6, 8). It is the power of baptism, not the washing away of the filth of the flesh but the washing of the heart as the power of regeneration that brings with it true conversion (Ezek. 36:25–26, 31). It is no moral improvement but a thorough renovation.

First, repentance is the mystery that it is because it is the power of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is the power of his death as the radical separation of his body from his soul, for the latter to enter into paradise even as the former entered into the grave. It is the power of his death as his separation from his earthly walk and ministry in the likeness of sinful flesh, having finished the work that his Father in heaven gave him to do. When Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished," that finished work accomplished by him at the cross included the finished completion of the repentance of every member of Christ in his blessed body. His death *is* their repentance. Their repentance is the glorious, necessary, Spirit-wrought fruit of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Their repentance is the realization of the effectual power of Calvary's cross.

This power of the death of Jesus Christ that is true repentance is shown in a line that runs through the Heidelberg Catechism. The source of that line is found in question and answer 43:

What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

A. That by virtue thereof our old man is crucified, dead, and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 100)

The necessity of repentance is described powerfully in question and answer 86 as the work of the crucified and risen Christ in the heart:

Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that everyone may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 120)

Not only does this doctrine of the Catechism explain that repentance is the necessary result of the renewal of Christ after his image; it also teaches that this repentance is part of "the whole of our conduct." It is not an action to be taken up here and there, upon some occasion. Much less is it some kind of introductory matter to be left behind once accomplished for the sake of some perceived benefit. In the words of Martin Luther's first thesis, repentance must belong to the entire life of believers.

Question and answer 89, explaining conversion as the fruit of the work of Christ alone, identifies repentance as "the mortification of the old man," the power of the death of Christ already explained earlier in the Catechism, question and answer 43. "It is a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them" (Q&A 89, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 121).

Second, repentance is entire, heartfelt agreement with the living and holy God according to the truth of his holy will revealed in his law. It is agreement with all the requirements of God's holy law. It is agreement with the full penalty of that law. It is the deeply humble recognition that as totally depraved sinners the repentant ones



personally deserve all the punishment pronounced in the law of God against them for their sin. Repentance finds everything within only condemnable.

True repentance, as agreement with the living and holy God, goes further. The law is no cold, abstract code of conduct, determined by some distant legislative body, the enforcement of which belongs to an objective, impartial judiciary. God's law is the expression of his holiness, how the creature that is man must live as honoring and glorifying the God who has made him. Every transgression against God's law is an avowed insult against his infinite glory and holiness. The sinner provokes God to his face, incurring his just displeasure. True repentance, therefore, is such an agreement with God that the sinner must hate, loathe, and abhor himself as a sinner.

Repentance, as the character of the entire life of believers, is expressed in their hearts and on their lips. It was the testimony of Job, the saint tried and tested by God and vindicated by God before Satan. Note Job's word upon being shown the glory of God: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?" (Job 40:4). "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). Repentance was the testimony of Isaiah before the presence of the Lord's glory: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). Seeing the holiness of Christ exhibited in the miracle of the great catch of fishes, Peter testified, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). It was the testimony of the publican in the temple of God in Jesus' parable: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (18:13). The apostle Paul, being slain by his sin occasioned by the commandment, gave this testimony as regulative for the church: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

The Form for the Administration of Baptism, in the first of "the principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism," declares powerfully that this sacrament teaches life-long repentance:

This the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, whereby the impurity of our souls is signified, and we admonished to loathe and humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation without ourselves. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 258)

The same teaching is presented in the Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, in the first part of true examination:

That every one consider by himself his sins and the curse due to him for them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) He hath punished the same in His beloved Son Jesus Christ with the bitter and shameful death of the cross. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 268)

Take careful, thorough notice of the doctrine of repentance taught in the above. Indeed, these passages show that repentance must be the character of the entire life of believers. But they also speak with one voice of the proper object of repentance: one's own person. That proper object is not the particular sins committed by the sinner. The proper object is not even the sinner's depravity, the power and principle of sin that dwells in the regenerate as long as he lives on the earth. The proper object of true repentance is the person who is the sinner. He is the transgressor because of his transgressions. He is the totally depraved because of his depravity. He is the one who has incurred the wrath of God because of his sins and his depravity. He is the one who is wretched and miserable, who cries out, "Woe is me!" He is the one who stands in the presence of God to say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

This self-imputation of sin and depravity is part of the deep mystery of true repentance. That the sinner should take the side of God against himself. That he should loathe and abhor himself, as God in his holiness loathes and abhors sin. That he should judge and condemn himself before the throne of God. That he should humbly acknowledge that, indeed, he is worthy of the full punishment of all his sins and of his depravity.

The mystery is that he does not attempt to minimize or excuse his sin. The mystery is that he does not try to hide his sins under some superficial goodness. The mystery is that he does not try to present to God some kind of a balance, some good to set over against the evil. Yes, a sinner having some sins and maybe even some depravity. But also look and see! Here is some repentance. Here is some faith. Here are some good works and obedience. The mystery that is true repentance will bring nothing before God but the wretchedness and misery of sin.

The mystery of true repentance has indeed learned to express itself after the manner of the first section of the Heidelberg Catechism. Out of the law of God, repentance has learned the true knowledge of the greatness of its sins and miseries. Repentance has learned its entire incapability of doing any good and its inclination to all wickedness. Repentance has learned never to reason away or argue against the justice of God but to submit humbly to it. Repentance has learned what is truly due for its

disobedience and rebellion: the just judgment of God's law, being accursed by God forever.

What makes this true repentance such a mystery is that it is repentance according to the gospel of God in Christ Jesus. It is the gospel that is represented by the passages heading this article, Acts 2:38–39 and 3:19, 26. This gospel of repentance may be boiled down to this: repent of your sins because Christ gives repentance. What a mystery!

This repentance according to the gospel is wholly foreign to an attractive, popular repentance that is far more widespread, a repentance that is legal in nature. This legal or legalistic repentance is found throughout the children of men. It is the repentance of political leaders who know they need to produce public apologies to rescue their offices or their careers. It is the carefully crafted apology of a minister or a consistory that has been advised by a higher power that an apology is the only way to escape further trouble from a potential protestant or from a broader assembly. But it becomes evident that the repentance is not true. Sometimes the way the apology is written or spoken betrays a refusal to acknowledge the real wrong that was done. Sometimes it betrays contempt for those truly wronged by further insulting them, often blaming those wronged, that they fail to understand or have evil motives. Such apologies sometimes show false repentance, with their makers continuing on in the very things for which they apologized.

We have all been trained in this way of legal repentance. It has been inculcated into us by our parents and teachers. It is the practice of our society for the repair of

relationships that have been damaged by wrongdoing. It is part of the practice of counseling, sadly too often forgetting what true, gospel repentance is.

What is this way, the way of legal or legalistic, false repentance?

It is the way of giving to get. It is the way of doing something good to get something good in return. Its way is very clear: you got yourself into this mess; you need to get yourself out. You need to be sorry. You need to change your behavior. You need to explain yourself to the people whom you have wronged. You need to ask their forgiveness. Only in that way can you undo the damage you caused. Only in that way can you regain the trust you have lost. Only in the way of your apology can you heal the breach that you broke.

This legalistic repentance is no mystery at all. It is merely the practice of law. The token of repentance is put forward by way of an apology. So often the apology is not only expected to be accepted, but also acceptance is required. The apology must be received with gratitude. The matter must not be spoken of or brought up again. The relationship must be restored. The wronged must forget the wrong. If the wronged do not forget or cannot forget, then often the force of law passes upon them. They are obligated to forget. This is simply the way of the world, no mystery at all. It is the way identified by Christ in Matthew 5:46: "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?"

(To be continued)

—MVW

## CONTRIBUTION

# CERC'S CONDITIONAL SALVATION

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) in Singapore teaches a conditional salvation. She continues to advance what her sister denomination, the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), has been advocating throughout her controversy, but CERC is now advancing it with greater, unmistakable clarity. Bringing the PRC's controversy to its logical and inevitable conclusion, CERC now openly teaches that in salvation there "are conditions for God," that "conditions are used in a

formal sense," and that "without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins."

### *What is a Condition?*

Rev. Josiah Tan teaches that there are conditions in scripture that must be distinguished from the conditions of a conditional theology. The conditions in scripture are things which God has made to precede other things. The conditions of a conditional theology are

prerequisites that man accomplishes by his own power with God.

In Conditional Theology we define condition as a prerequisite that man must accomplish in any measure of his own and without God. (Class notes, 5)<sup>1</sup>

They are conditions because they are that which the sinner must perform, and that upon which God or the grace of God depends, and without which God and the grace of God are not given or enjoyed. (6)

Explaining the conditional passages of scripture, Reverend Tan says the following:

One thing must be before something else will follow. (5)

This is not Conditional Theology, even though conditions are used in a formal sense. This is because there are some things that God have made to precede other things. (5)

Explaining the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45, Q&A 117, and James 1:6, Reverend Tan says,

This condition is not Conditional Theology. God provides that which he demands of. There is no condition in which man fulfills on his own power, therefore it is ALL OF GRACE. (5)

In these statements Reverend Tan reveals that there are indeed conditions that man fulfills by God's grace. Reverend Tan supposes he escapes the charge of teaching a conditional salvation merely because he defines a *condition* as that which man "must accomplish in any measure of his own and without God."

He is mistaken.

It matters not one whit whether man accomplishes the prerequisite of his own power and without God or whether man accomplishes the prerequisite by the grace of God. The Pelagian teaches that man fulfills the condition of faith by his own power; the conditional Reformed theologian teaches that man fulfills the condition of faith by God's grace. Both are still conditions; both make man's activity decisive in salvation; both make man's activity precede God's activity.

Rev. Ronald Hanks rightly defines a *condition* as something which must *first* happen before God's work of salvation can begin or continue:

Conditions are necessary prerequisites. Something cannot be true, cannot happen, unless something else, a prerequisite or prerequisite, is first true or first happens. In theology and in the doctrine of salvation, a condition is something upon which God depends, some response or work of man upon which He depends in order to begin or continue the work of salvation.<sup>2</sup>

Conditional Reformed theologians define *conditions* the same way: man's activity precedes God's activity. Dr. Klaas Schilder, father of the conditional covenant, defined a *condition* as "the *way* by which the elect *come to* and are *assured* of salvation...God...does not give B without A, C without B, and D without C."<sup>3</sup> He explains:

Do you mean by *condition* something which God has *joined to something else*, to make clear to us that the *one* cannot come *without the other* and that we cannot be *sure* of the one, unless we are at the same time *assured* of the other? Then we say unconditionally: "conditional is the password!"<sup>4</sup>

Reverend Tan's definition of a *condition* still makes his theology conditional. By defining a *condition* as that which God has made for other things to follow, and by admitting that conditions are used in a formal sense in scripture, Reverend Tan opens the road to a conditional salvation in his theology.

### *Conditional Salvation*

The critical question about what makes salvation conditional is: Is there something that man must *first* do (by grace) *before* God saves him? Reverend Tan says yes. There is something that man must *first* do (by grace) *before* God saves him:

Jesus Here is teaching that for salvation/justification/forgiveness of sins to follow, something must happen prior, that is a man believing in Jesus. That is a man, abasing himself and casting

1 Rev. Josiah Tan is doing a series of classes on the recent controversy in the PRC. Before his fourth class, the session of CERC sent notes to the congregation, which Reverend Tan then used for his presentation in that class. The quotations are taken from those notes, which can be found at <https://bereanprsg.files.wordpress.com/2022/04/cercs-4th-class-notes.pdf>. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from these class notes are given in text.

2 Ronald Hanks, *Conditions and Means*, unpublished paper (April 18, 2022): 1.

3 Klaas Schilder, "Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger," in Jelle Faber, *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism* (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 132.

4 Schilder, "Extra-Scriptural Binding," in Faber, *American Secession Theologians*, 78. The emphasis is Schilder's. The above quotations of Schilder and the citations are taken from David J. Engelsma, *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant: The Declaration of Principles* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2013), 179.



himself completely on Jesus. Without this, salvation will not follow. (5)

Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins. While we remain in the sin of an unforgiving spirit against others, there is no forgiveness for us. (12)

These statements teach a bald, naked conditional salvation. If a man does not *first* believe in Jesus, salvation will not follow. If a man does not *first* abase himself and cast himself completely on Jesus, salvation will not follow. If a man does not *first* forgive others, God's forgiveness of that man will not follow.

Reverend Tan boldly ventures into places where no Protestant Reformed minister has dared to venture, but he brings the current Protestant Reformed theology of man's activity preceding God's activity to its logical and inevitable conclusion: there are conditions for salvation. Reverend Tan frankly admits that in passages of scripture where conditional language is used, "conditions are used in a formal sense" (5). The reason for this is "because there are some things that God have made to precede other things" (5). He also frankly admits that where conditional language is used in scripture, those conditions are "'Conditions' for God, not for man" (6).

This revelation is shocking but logical and inevitable.

Reverend Tan's theology of man's activity (by grace) preceding God's activity is inherent conditionality. God's activity depends on, is contingent on, and waits for man's activity (by grace). Without man's activity (by grace), God's activity cannot come to pass. Conditions are inherent in such a theology. Reverend Tan must be commended for admitting that in such a theology "conditions are used in a formal sense" (5) and that there are "'Conditions' for God" (6).

### *A Response to CERC's Conditional Salvation*

Let it be absolutely clear: we reject the teaching that man must believe in Jesus for salvation/justification/forgiveness of sins to follow. This teaching contradicts scripture and the Reformed confessions.

The plain teaching of scripture is that our believing in Jesus follows—not precedes—his forgiveness of our sins. Our believing follows—not precedes—his justification of us. Our believing follows—not precedes—his saving of us.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be

holy and without blame before him in love...In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. (Eph. 1:4, 7)

As many as were ordained to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

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. 8:30)

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (Heb. 9:12)

The Reformed confessions also teach that our activity of believing and forgiving follows God's activity of sovereign election:

Men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation. (Canons of Dordt 1.9, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 157)

The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him, who first manifested so great love towards them. (Canons of Dordt 1.13, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 157)

Protestant Reformed ministers, contrary to Reverend Tan's teaching, have long condemned the idea that there are conditions for God to fulfill for salvation:

But can it not be argued that God fulfills the condition by His grace? No, for it is absurd to say that God promises salvation on the condition that He will fulfill it.<sup>5</sup>

As churches we have even rejected, and rightly so, the idea that there are certain conditions in the work of salvation which God Himself fulfils, faith as a condition to the covenant, conversion as a condition to eternal life, good works as a condition of assurance, and that because God fulfils them, they are not a denial of God's sovereignty in salvation.<sup>6</sup>

5 Herman Hanko, *Ready to Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997), 179.

6 Ronald Hanko, *Conditions and Means*, 2.

## *Does Scripture Teach that Man's Activity (by Grace) Precedes God's Activity?*

Reverend Tan quotes a number of scriptural passages in support of his view that man's activity precedes God's activity, as for example:

Luke 13:3 "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Rom 10:10 [*sic* 9] "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (4)

Explaining these passages, Reverend Tan says, "Jesus here teaches 1) One thing must be before something else will follow" (5). Without man's activity of believing and repenting, "salvation will not follow" (5).

Reverend Tan is severely mistaken that these passages teach that man's activity precedes God's activity for salvation.

These passages command men to believe, repent, and confess that Christ is the only savior. If men refuse to obey the command, they will perish everlastingly in their sins. When a minister preaches these commands, God sovereignly works faith by his Holy Spirit in the hearts of his elect, so that they believe, repent, and confess Christ. That they believe, repent, and confess Christ are fruits—and only fruits—of God's sovereign election. Their believing, repenting, and confessing Christ are not first, nor do they precede God's activity.

The Reformed confessions teach with absolute clarity the proper order of salvation. Man's activity of believing, repenting, and forgiving is never first. God's activity of justifying, forgiving, or saving never follows man's activity. God is always first; man is always subordinate to and follows God. The Canons teach that our believing, repenting, and forgiving proceed from God's eternal election:

This elect number... God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of His glorious grace. (Canons of Dordt 1.7, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 156)

It is gross false doctrine to pervert the order of God's salvation by making man's activity precede God's activity.

It is gross false doctrine to teach that man's believing, repenting, and forgiving precede God's justifying, forgiving, and saving. This is conditional salvation—God's salvation is conditioned on man's will—by grace, of course.

## *Repentance is Not Part of Faith*

Reverend Tan teaches that repentance is part of faith:

Repentance is part of faith. (14)

You can't have faith that lays hold of Christ without repentance. (14)

Let it be said unmistakably: we absolutely reject the teaching that repentance is part of faith. Repentance is *not* part of faith. Repentance is distinct from, and a fruit of, faith. True faith lays hold of Christ *without* repentance.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that faith is "a certain knowledge" and "an assured confidence" (LD 7).<sup>7</sup> Christ makes me a partaker of him and all his benefits by a true faith (LD 20). I am righteous before God "only by a true faith in Jesus Christ" (LD 23). I receive and apply the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ as my righteousness before God "by faith only" (LD 23). I "receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith" (LD 31). Those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith "bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (LD 24).

Repentance, or conversion, on the other hand, is a fruit of faith—not to be confused with a part of faith. Repentance is "the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man" (LD 33). Repentance is "a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them" and "a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works" (LD 33). Repentance is a fruit of thankfulness brought forth by those who have been implanted into Christ by a true faith.

The Catechism repudiates the doctrine that true faith lays hold of Christ by faith and repentance. Faith and repentance are distinct: "I am a member of Christ by faith," *that so* "I may fight against sin and Satan" (LD 12). I cannot lay hold of Christ by my God-worked repentance because even though I have a true faith in Jesus Christ, my conscience still accuses me "that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil" (LD 23). Repentance—the good work of turning from sin and delight to live according to the will of God—proceeds from a true faith and may not be confused as a part of faith.

To teach that repentance is part of faith is serious false

<sup>7</sup> Page references in *Confessions and Church Order* for quotations from the Catechism are as follows: LD 7: 90; LD 20: 103; LD 23: 106–7; LD 31: 118; LD 24: 107; LD 33: 121–22; LD 12: 96; LD 23: 106.

doctrine. It is to corrupt the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone, for justification would be in part by the sinner's repentance. Then the sinner would be justified by faith that includes repentance. This is to teach justification by faith and faith's works.

### *Devastating Consequences*

The doctrinal difference between CERC and the Berean Reformed Protestant Fellowship (BRPF) could not be sharper. Let all who think that the members of the BRPF who left CERC were sinful rebels who disobeyed the session think again. We left for the truth's sake. The false doctrines and apostasy in CERC have become irrefutably evident.

CERC: This condition is not Conditional Theology. God provides that which He demands of. There is no condition in which man fulfills on his own power, therefore it is ALL OF GRACE.

BRPF: There are absolutely no conditions for salvation whatsoever, whether for God or man. Salvation is absolutely unconditional because God is sovereign.

CERC: Jesus Here is teaching, that for salvation/justification/forgiveness of sins to follow, something must happen prior, that is a man believing in Jesus. That is a man, abasing himself and casting himself completely on Jesus. Without this, salvation will not follow.

BRPF: For man to believe in Jesus, God must first save, justify, and forgive him. Without God's saving, justifying, and forgiving, man's believing and repentance will not follow.

CERC: Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins.

BRPF: Without forgiveness of sins there is no repentance.

CERC: Repentance is part of faith.

BRPF: Repentance is distinct from, and a fruit of, faith.

CERC: You can't have faith that lays hold of Christ without repentance.

BRPF: True faith lays hold of Christ without repentance.

That CERC now teaches that "conditions are used in a formal sense" (5), that there "are 'Conditions' for God" (6), and that "repentance is part of faith" (14) is the logical and inevitable conclusion. The controversy in

the PRC was always about conditional covenant fellowship—man's obedience obtains God's fellowship. Man's obedience precedes God's blessing. For years the PRC denied that the false doctrine in the controversy was a conditional covenant fellowship. Now CERC and Reverend Tan bring the PRC's controversy to its logical doctrinal conclusion: there are indeed conditions for salvation.

The conditional doctrine of Reverend Tan has devastating consequences for the child of God. He lives in the fear and doubt that if he does not believe, repent, and forgive (by grace), he will be condemned eternally. He lives in the constant fear that if he does not forgive his brother (by grace), God will not forgive him.

More significantly, Reverend Tan's theology of man's activity preceding God's activity robs God of his sovereignty. God's activity waits for man's activity. Scripture teaches, on the contrary, that God is always first: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). All that man does—good and evil—proceeds from God's eternal counsel: "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (4:28).

CERC has not learned from her sister's mistakes and weaknesses. CERC embraces them, along with all her false doctrines.

In 2015 the false doctrine in the PRC was "The way to the Father includes obedience. The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father." (Man's obedience precedes Father's fellowship.)

In 2018 the false doctrine in the PRC was "We do good works so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness." (Man's good works precede God's grace and Holy Spirit.)

In 2018 the false doctrine in the PRC was "If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do." (Man's doing precedes God's saving.)

In 2022 the false doctrine in CERC is "Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins." (Man's repentance precedes God's forgiveness.)

The lie is unmistakably clear in all these false doctrines: man's activity precedes God's activity. Man must first act before God acts. God's activity is conditioned on man's activity. CERC now champions that lie as truth. Every member of CERC must live under the teaching that if any of them does not forgive his brother, God will not forgive him. Every member of CERC must live under the teaching that if he does not first repent, abase himself, and cast himself completely on Jesus, salvation will not follow him.

The conditional salvation doctrine of CERC is deadly poison. From such an evil doctrine flee!

—Aaron Lim





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

## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

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

*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. — 1 Peter 2:11*

**D**early beloved! I beseech you: abstain from fleshly lusts. You are strangers scattered throughout the Babylon of this world. You are surrounded by the false church, the ally of the ungodly world, and together they speak against you as evildoers. In the world you must go through a season of heaviness through manifold temptations.

You are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Beloved of God, though hated by the world. You live in the sphere of grace. You have been begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ! You are a chosen generation. You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people. You are the Israel of God.

You are strangers and pilgrims here by the work of God's grace.

A stranger is one who is a foreigner in another country that is not his home. Your home is not this world. Your home is in heaven. Your life is hid with Christ there. You seek the things above and not things here below. God has prepared for you a city that has foundations, and your citizenship is in that city. You have an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.

A pilgrim is a temporary resident. Oh, how fleeting is your life here. Seventy years? Some last that long, but the majority of men perish long before that. Eighty years? Only if strength is great. Our years are cut off, and we fly away. All flesh is as grass and the goodliness of it as the flower of the field. The grass withers, and the flower fades. The wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. For his dearly beloved the Lord returns as he promises to take them to their eternal home.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as pilgrims and strangers, abstain from fleshly lusts. How fleshly is the Christian yet. He has eternal life in a body of death. He has the Spirit among the flesh. He must live in his body and serve God with his body, but his body is full of sin, and at the root of that sin stand fleshly lusts. The body is a body of lust. Fleshly lusts are all those carnal desires that root man to the earth and that turn his eyes away from heaven to this world. They are all that glitters and gleams, tastes good, and pleases the flesh. They are all the affections of our sinful nature. The very thoughts of the flesh are enmity against God!

Abstain from them! Keep yourself separate from them.

Do you not know that they war against the soul? The soul is the habitation of the Spirit. Soul is regeneration in man whereby man is able to see, understand, and perceive heavenly and eternal things. It is, as it were, the sanctuary of our spiritual life with God. And fleshly lusts war on the soul to seek to destroy it and overthrow it.

Abstain from them! How foolish would a man be thought who would run to a den of murderers who would destroy him. How foolish must a pilgrim and stranger be thought to run to those lusts that seek to destroy him. How contrary is it to our lives as pilgrims and strangers to run to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. Dearly beloved who are pilgrims and strangers, who already have heaven in your hearts and over whom the flesh can have no victory, abstain from fleshly lusts.

—NJL