



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. — Ephesians 2:4–6

But God! That is the contrast in the text: the living God and dead man; the beautiful, gracious God and ugly, sinful man; the loving and merciful Father and wretched and hopeless man.

In the context the apostle had spoken of the great power of God that he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in order that he might appear as head over all to his church, the fullness of him who fills all things in the church. And the apostle intended to speak of God's power in the gracious salvation of the church and in his merciful deliverance of the church. But the greatness of that grace and the fervency of God's mercy are measured against the backdrop of the dreadful condition of the church by nature. Man is dead in trespasses and in sins. It is the very deadness, and thus the hopelessness, of man that necessitates such an astounding work of God's grace.

Man always wants to be something, to have some part in his salvation, to be first in some sense. But if man is by nature dead, then the only hope of man's salvation is the grace—the pure, powerful, irresistible, wonderful, and wonder-working grace—of God, beginning in eternal election, continuing to the cross, and carrying through all the way to man's everlasting salvation in heaven.

By grace are ye saved!

And so to impress on us the graciousness of our salvation, the apostle takes up a relentless description of man's natural deadness. We were dead in trespasses and in sins, living in them and having our delight in them. We thought, desired, planned, willed, spoke, and acted according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. Walking in the lust of the flesh and of the mind, we were children of wrath even as others. Quite worthless were we: worthy only of damnation.

Desperate, terrible, and hopeless was our condition.

What does scripture say elsewhere? We are blind, naked, poor, imprisoned, loving iniquity and hating righteousness, slaves of sin and of the devil, black as hell, miserable, wretched, guilty, and worthy of eternal punishment. And to make matters worse for man, he does not even know it. He laughs and plays, eats and drinks, and is merry. He tears down his barns and builds bigger barns as he accumulates more and more things in the

world. He runs in the way of sin, greedy to satisfy his lusts and appetites. And after many years he lays down his head on his silken pillow one night and awakes in hell. There was no way out for us. And such was our hopeless condition that we did not look for a way out but gladly walked the broad way to hell.

But God!

The living God. The gracious and merciful God. You, being dead in trespasses and in sins, has he quickened together with Christ.

Dead sinners, quickened together with Christ. Christ our life, our food, our drink, our all in all; he who is head over all fills us with his fullness and gives grace for grace.

Wonder of grace. Astounding mercy. God has quickened us together with Christ.

This is the complete spiritual antithesis of the deadness of the natural man and of his flesh. We are alive now. We have been quickened with Christ. In the same sense in which we were spiritually dead in trespasses and in sins, so we are now alive in Jesus Christ. If in the deadness of man by nature he walked after the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, then now he walks in newness of life, according to the working of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in him. If man was dead, so that in all his thinking, willing, and desiring he was motivated by enmity against God and hatred of the neighbor, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; if he was dead in sins and unto unrighteousness; he is alive now against sin and unto righteousness; alive now with an enlightened mind and heart and spirit; alive to God and to the things of the Spirit of God; alive with love for God and for the neighbor. If he was the slave of Satan, of the flesh, and of sin, now he is the servant of the living God, of righteousness, and of Jesus Christ. You cannot express this contrast, this antithesis, too strongly. Being dead in trespasses and in sins, God has quickened us.

And this quickening is no mere return to a former life. It is no mere return to the state of Adam and to that primitive state of natural and moral perfection in which Adam served God but could fall. And this quickening is not a return to a mere earthly and outward morality.

The quickening is a resurrection, an advance into immortality. So Christ said that whosoever lives and believes in him shall never die. To be quickened is the

state in which death and sin and the devil have no more dominion over that man; to be quickened is the life of perfect freedom—freedom from condemnation; freedom from the crushing dominion of sin; freedom from the power of sin and death; freedom to serve the living God, to love him, to delight in him, to know him as our God and to be known as his children. To be quickened is to understand spiritual things spiritually, to be enlightened to see all things in the light of the revelation of God and the purpose of God for all things in his eternal covenant of grace.

You has he quickened!

So this quickened life is as far above the life that Adam lived in Eden as the heavens are above the earth and as far as Christ is more glorious than Adam, for Adam was of the earth earthy, but Christ is the Lord from glory. This quickened life is the immortality, glory, power, and incorruption of heaven. God has quickened us, who were dead in trespasses and in sins.

Amazing wonder of grace.

But still more: God has raised us up and set us in heavenly places. These things belong together, and these three can never be separated. Whomever God quickens he raises up and sets in heavenly places. To be raised up and to be set in heavenly places refer to the glory and dominion of the church over all things. God by his exceeding great power raised up Christ from the dead and set Christ at his own right hand and gave him dominion and power and glory and honor. God made Christ head over all, the victorious Lord of all, who has all power in heaven and on earth. He is exalted to God's right hand. Christ holds the book of God's counsel in his hand and does all God's pleasure. Christ controls every creature and moves it infallibly to its appointed end.

And having quickened us, God also raises us up and sets us in heavenly places. We partake with Christ of his glory, dominion, and honor. As the head is glorious, so must the body partake of that glory and dominion. The elect church and the individual believer are lifted to the heights of dominion and power and sit already in heavenly places.

All those elect children of God who were dead, he quickens; raises to an immortal glory; and exalts to victorious dominion over sin, death, the world, the kingdom of darkness, hell, and the grave.

All this is done with Christ.

Without him we are nothing. Without him we are dead. Without him we walk according to the course of this world. Without him we are only slaves of Satan. Without him we fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Without him we are only worthy of condemnation. I want to impress this on you. You are alive, but you

do not ever possess that life of yourself. You possess the life of Christ as you are with him and in him.

It is not I who live but Christ in me!

With Christ, then, we are quickened, raised, and seated in heavenly places.

With Christ means, first of all, that Christ is the ground of our quickening. God first raised Christ because Christ, in order to accomplish our salvation and earn the righteousness that is worthy of immortality, gave himself to the tribunal of God and was declared guilty and accomplished all the will of God for our salvation. And God raised up Christ. We being dead, he came into our night as the incarnate Son of God, and he took on himself the cause of our death, namely sin. So God made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin; God made Christ a curse for us, who was in himself the eternally blessed one and who was the perfectly righteous man. And Christ Jesus, our Lord, made the perfect, voluntary, satisfying sacrifice in order to obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins, the righteousness of God worthy of eternal life, and on that basis to obtain eternal life for himself and for us.

Through his obedience and because of his perfect righteousness and holiness and perfect sacrifice, death lost its right to have dominion over us; because Christ made satisfaction to the justice of God, he freed us from condemnation. And in Christ God raised us up and set us in heavenly places because Christ accomplished all the will and good pleasure of God for our salvation and delivered every one of his elect from sin, condemnation, and death.

Second, that we are raised together with Christ means that he is the source of our life. As the head he was raised to immortal life; as the head he went to heaven to appear in the presence of God for us; as the head he was exalted and became a quickening Spirit by whom the whole body lives. We are nothing in ourselves. All our life is hid with Christ in heaven. We live now, yet not us but Christ in us; and the life that we live, we live by the Spirit of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.

How are you alive? Think of Christ! That is how you are alive now. Death has no more dominion over Christ. He conquered sin, death, hell, and the grave and overcame Satan and all his dominion. In that sense you are alive now. In that sense you can never die now.

Now! That must be pressed. We are alive in Christ; we are raised up in him; and we are exalted to immortal glory with him. Now! The text presents this as an accomplished fact; so that as surely as Christ lives, we live with him.

By faith! Is that not what the apostle means by "in Christ"? We are in him by the bond of faith. We are

engrafted into Christ by a true and living faith. By that faith we are made partakers of all that Christ possesses. We are joined with him, made bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, his holy bride. Whatever is possessed by Christ the head is enjoyed by the church his body.

When we live *by faith*, then, surely this means that this life is an article of faith. We believe this truth that we are alive. We lay hold by faith on this reality and say, "Being dead in trespasses and sins, I have been quickened together with Christ. In Christ there is not now and never was condemnation to me. Sin in me is put to death; the dominion of Satan has been broken." This life in Christ belongs to the things unseen. It does not yet appear what we shall be. We know that when Christ appears we shall be like him. Yet how far away that seems. We are yet in body and soul on the earth. It does not appear that we reign gloriously with Christ over all; for we are often the subjects of the oppression of the ungodly, the assaults of the world, and the temptations of Satan. It does not appear that we exalt triumphantly over all our foes, but we appear to go down to defeat time and again. We have these heavenly treasures, this immortal life, in earthen vessels. We lie in the midst of death; we live in the body of this death—mortal, corruptible, weak, and shameful.

Nor does it appear that we have been delivered from sin's power. For this is the case with us according to the apostle: while we have a delight in the law of God after the inner man, we find another law in our members warring against the law of our mind to bring us into captivity to the law of sin. The flesh warring against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would. The good that we would, we do not; and the evil that we would not, that we do. And we cry out, "Wretched men that we are! Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?"

Faith is in us the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of those things not seen. We rise above and out of that deep misery and shame by faith. By faith we lay hold on Christ and look upon our crucified Lord, who shed his blood for us and for whose sake God has forgiven us all our sins. By faith we stand before God, reconciled to him through the death of his Son. By faith we believe that God raised up Christ and set him at his own right hand and that we are quickened with him and raised up with him. By faith we know that we are in him, that he is our head, that we are his members and inseparably united to Christ, so that he is responsible for us. His work is imputed to us; what he does, we do; what is done to him is done to us; when he died, we died with him; and when he was raised, we were raised with him and ascended far above all heavens. That is an accomplished fact in Christ; and by faith, faith alone, that is all ours.

By faith this resurrection, exaltation, and glorification

of the church are also our present experience. Now! We live! And we are raised up and sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus! Alive in the midst of death. That is true. But alive. Alive to God. Alive to the truth. Alive to heaven and to spiritual things. Alive to the things of the Spirit that we thought were foolish. Given power to become the sons and daughters of God.

This life and glory for the church are not merely what will be realized in the future. In a sense this reality of our life is first—first, before we even believe or ever lay hold on Christ by faith. He comes to us. He takes up his abode with us. He engrafs us into himself by faith and indwells us by his quickening Spirit. This is first. Christ implants within us the seed of regeneration, the beginning and principle of his resurrection life. We die to sin, and we are made alive to righteousness. He makes us new creatures. Quickened with him, all things have become new.

And alive and not able to die, we advance ever more toward the perfect day. Alive, yet the perfect manifestation and realization of this life in body and soul with our whole being, without the possibility of sin or death any longer, are yet to come. Raised with Christ now, we shall be raised in perfection. Our sitting with him shall be made perfect when we will live and reign with him in heaven, sitting on thrones and ruling in the whole perfect creation after sin, death, and the grave all go down to everlasting defeat.

God has done this! In Christ! By grace!

For his great love wherewith he loved us. God, God alone, God by a wonder of grace has done these great things for us. God in his great love and overflowing mercy has done this. God will perfect what he has begun in us in the day of Christ.

All God's wonders in us are the revelation and the realization of his love. Because he loved us, he has done this! He loved you and me, dead sinners. He loved us who were his enemies; he loved us who hated him with an implacable hatred. He loved us while we were yet dead in trespasses and in sins. He loved us from all eternity with an unchanging and ever-fervent desire to have us with him forever.

You see, that is the point of the total abasement of man in what precedes this text. That is the point of the apostle's relentless description of man's depravity. God did not love the lovable. He loved the ugly, the worthless, the condemned, and the hopeless. He loved them. He did not love me because I loved him; he did not love me because I responded to him; he loved me while I was dead in trespasses and in sins and walked according to the course of this world.

For by grace we are saved. The beauty of God is his grace. The beauty of God that shines out in his grace is given freely, sovereignly, and eternally to the unworthy objects of that grace. By grace he elected us; by grace he

eternally beheld us in Christ; by grace, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; by grace he quickens us; and by grace he will perfect us in the day of Christ. All by grace because he loved us who were worthy only to die.

But God! You hath he quickened. He raised the dead! By grace he does the impossible for the salvation of his beloved.

On account of his great love toward us. Not merely, you understand, through his love or by his love or even out of his love; but because he loved us he quickened, exalted, and glorified his church in Christ. The love of God is the divine cause and motivation for all that God does by grace to save us. Why me? He loved me.

His love knows no bounds and stops at nothing to deliver his beloved. Hell and death cannot quench God's love. His love overcomes and has the victory over sin and death. The love of God is his panting after us, his eternal desire for us, his desire that we might taste and know and see that God is good. And God's love must be satisfied. God satisfies his own desire for us. Because he loved us,

he quickened us, raised us up, and set us in heaven; and because of his love and by his grace, he will perfect that which he began in us.

And I ask, what did God desire? His mercy explains that. He is the fountain of richest mercy. He is blessed himself as the merciful God. He desired that we be lifted from the depths of our terrible misery of sin and death and that we be blessed eternally in him to live with him and enjoy him forever to the praise of his glorious name as the only good and ever-blessed God.

And how great was that love; how rich was that mercy of God; and how great was his grace toward us? Behold the death of his Son! God spared not his own Son. God gave his Son to the death of the cross that he might be for us the power of an endless life, to feed us, to nourish us, to join us ever more tightly and mysteriously with him, to transform us and change us from glory to glory.

By grace are ye saved!

Hallelujah!

—NJL

EDITORIAL

PROFESSOR ENGELSMA GOES MAD

Introduction

Prof. David J. Engelsma continues to lead the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in her devilish assault on the gospel of Jesus Christ and her antichristian advancement of Man. Professor Engelsma's theology is that man's activity of repentance is a prerequisite to God's activity of forgiving man's sins. In the matter of justification, man precedes God, and God follows man. In the matter of justification, man is not justified by faith alone, but man is justified by his repenting. This theology is not from heaven but from hell. This theology is not of God but of the devil. This theology is not for the abasement of man and the glory of God but for the glory of man and the abasement of God. God's people have been warned regarding Professor Engelsma's theology that it is another gospel, which is no gospel (Gal. 1:6–7). God's people have been warned regarding Professor Engelsma himself to let him be accursed (vv. 8–9). And all men have been warned that those who truly believe Professor Engelsma's theology are not justified but are damned (2:16). Regardless of whatever other storm and bluster continues

to come from the professor's pen, let all men remember that Professor Engelsma's theology is justification by prerequisite repentance. Let no man be distracted by the professor's braying and blating about this issue and that issue. The issue is justification. Either justification is by faith alone apart from the activity of man, or justification is by man. Either justification is by faith alone without prerequisite repentance, or justification is by man. Justification by faith alone is the gospel and Jesus Christ and heaven. Professor Engelsma's justification by prerequisite repentance is the lie and the devil and hell.

Professor Engelsma's method for leading men to perdition has been a series of email articles addressed to his family, which articles he has intended for public circulation. To this point, *Sword and Shield* has published all of these email articles, along with editorial responses. There was profit to this because Professor Engelsma is still the theologian of the PRC. His articles have advanced the controversy considerably, so that everyone can see for himself the doctrine that animates the PRC in the year 2022. The soul of the PRC in 2022 is not particular grace.

The soul of the PRC in 2022 is not the unconditional covenant. The soul of the PRC in 2022 is justification by prerequisite repentance. Professor Engelsma's articles have shown this: "The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance."¹

In April, May, and June 2022, Professor Engelsma churned out several more articles. This was after his solemn and repeated promise to his family and to all of his readers that he would write no more on the subject, which promise he breezily dismissed a few days later with a few yuk-yuks and a few hardee-har-hars. Professor Engelsma's promise was rash, quickly and easily broken with great hilarity. His rash promise makes him a liar who goes back on his word, as he himself acknowledges. Worse, though, is his dismissing his broken word as some little thing. And worst of all is his making a big joke out of his confessing of his sin. "Nevertheless, I am here going back on my word, for which sin I make confession: *peccavi*. I have already confessed to your mother."² For someone who believes that man's repenting must precede God's forgiving, Professor Engelsma is awfully cavalier about his own repenting.

The series of email articles that Professor Engelsma published from April to June 2022 are not all worth publishing, and perhaps none of them are. They are full of bluster. They are full of speculation. They are full of lies. Quite frankly, I sometimes think that Professor Engelsma has gone mad and is being ridden by a lying spirit. Whatever the case, we are not publishing these articles in this issue. Nevertheless, for the sake of those who may have Professor Engelsma's articles foisted upon them as the last word on the matter, I do plan to make some comments on the articles. Two of them will be dealt with in this editorial. Perhaps we can deal with the others in a future issue.

"Schism in the PR Churches" by David J. Engelsma (May 2022)

Empty Promises

In his email article entitled "Schism in the PR Churches," Professor Engelsma addresses the question "whether the controversy and division are schism or, as those who have left us claim, reformation." Professor Engelsma's answer: "In this letter, I will prove to you, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the division is sinful schism, not glorious reformation."

The letter does not live up to the promise. For seven pages Professor Engelsma loudly and repeatedly asserts

that Rev. N. Langerak and I are guilty of schism. But loud assertions are as far as Professor Engelsma can go. What he offers as proof are only more assertions. When he comes to assert the facts of the case, he twists and mutilates those facts until they are unrecognizable. He makes up events that did not happen, and he denies events that did happen. There is no other way to say it: Professor Engelsma is a liar. By the end of the letter, the reader does not have proof "beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the division is sinful schism." The reader has only Professor Engelsma's assertions. The reader has only Professor Engelsma's word, and Professor Engelsma's word is no good.

Nevertheless, Professor Engelsma's letter has been well-received in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The letter confirms for the denomination that she was right to put Rev. N. Langerak and me out of her fellowship. The letter confirms for the PRC that the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches are wicked schismatics who divided the precious bride of Christ. Professor Engelsma's letter hardens the PRC in her apostasy. The Protestant Reformed denomination now believes more than ever that her murder of Christ at her assemblies by putting out Christ's prophets was good and right.

Such hardening of the PRC in her apostasy is good for the true church of Christ. It reminds us in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) not to look for the vindication of our cause from our mother church. Our cause is the cause of the gospel. It is the cause of the unconditional covenant of grace. It is the cause of the perfect and completed work of Jesus Christ for every aspect of our salvation, including our enjoyment of that salvation. Our cause is the cause of Christ. Christ loves his truth, and Christ vindicates his truth against every unrighteous judgment of man. Therefore, let the members of the RPC not expect—or desire!—an apology from the PRC. Let us not expect or desire an admission from the PRC that she was wrong. Let us not expect or desire a confirmation from the PRC that the cause of the RPC is right and good. The cause of the PRC is not the gospel, and the RPC need no vindication from unrighteous men. Oh yes, the RPC need vindication. All men must know that our cause is the cause of Christ and that he graciously saved us by his gospel. But that vindication will never come from unrighteous men. That vindication comes from Christ by his gospel now, and it will come from Christ publicly in the day of judgment. So let the PRC harden even more in her condemnation of us. Let the members cry, "Schism!" until their veins bulge, their faces turn purple, and their throats go hoarse. It is not their judgment that matters.

1 David J. Engelsma, "Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc? Non!, or, 'Don't Kill the Rooster!,'" as quoted in Engelsma, "Ignorant, Lying, or Merely Mistaken," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 12.
2 David J. Engelsma, "AL on Canons, 5.5," April 2022.

Much of what Professor Engelsma writes in his letter has already been addressed. The charge of schism against us is old and cold by now. Professor Engelsma tries to warm up the charge for his readers, but it has been answered often. I refer interested readers to Rev. Nathan Langerak's speech at the 2021 annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, which speech was entitled, "Reformation, Not Schism."³ I also refer interested readers to Dewey Engelsma's blog, *astraitbetwixtwo.com*. Finally, there are many past issues of *Sword and Shield* that deal with the charge of schism. See, for example, the editorials of April–June 2021.⁴

This editorial will not repeat all that has been written before but will only point out a few of the more egregious lies in Professor Engelsma's email article.

Sword and Shield

Professor Engelsma's proof for my supposed schism is that I refused to submit to the decision of my elders regarding editing *Sword and Shield*.

I begin with AL. His discipline in Byron Center began with a decision of his consistory forbidding him to edit a new magazine that, in the judgment of his elders, was divisive in the PRC. AL refused to submit to the decision. But neither did he submit to the decision of his elders, while protesting the decision of his consistory to the broader assemblies in the PRC, Classis East and synod.

Everything about Professor Engelsma's assertion is wrong. Everything, that is, except for my initials. My initials are indeed "AL." Professor Engelsma has adopted the goofy convention of referring to me as "AL." He does not refer to me as "Reverend Lanning" because his denomination has told him that he may not. Nor does he refer to me as "Andy," though the rest of his denomination does. I wonder what is holding him back from calling me "Andy." Does he think that he somehow spares himself the guilt of my unjust deposition and discipline, which were murder? Does he think that his hands do not drip blood as long as he refrains from calling me "Andy"? Whatever the case, Professor Engelsma has decided to call me by my initials, "AL." Well, then, Professor Engelsma gets my initials right, but that is all.

Professor Engelsma is wrong that the elders of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church judged that *Sword and Shield* was divisive in the PRC. The decision of Byron Center's consistory in November 2020 requiring me to resign as editor of *Sword and Shield* never stated that

Sword and Shield was divisive. I am sure that most of the elders at Byron really did think that the magazine was divisive. When the church visitors at the regular meeting with the council in October 2020 told the council that the magazine was divisive in the denomination, the council as a whole did not defend the magazine. There is no doubt that most of the elders personally thought that the magazine was divisive. But when it came to their official judgment, the elders deliberately and craftily kept any mention of division out of their decision requiring me to resign. If they had mentioned that the magazine was divisive, then they would have had to condemn the *content* of the magazine. They would have had to evaluate whether the magazine taught the truth or the lie. The elders wanted nothing to do with that debate over content. They knew that the content was the truth. Their problem was that they hated the truth. They hated what the truth did to their congregation. They hated that the truth ruffled feathers and made some in the congregation not want to come to church anymore. But the elders could not say anything like that in a document. Therefore, the elders deliberately did not enter into a debate about the content of the magazine, but they would only talk about conduct and manner. In their written judgment the elders very deliberately did not state that *Sword and Shield* was divisive. You can read for yourself what the elders said. The following recommendation carried word for word.

Recommendation: That the Byron Center PRC consistory require Rev. Lanning to resign as editor of the *Sword and Shield* publication for a time, and until such time that the consistory may approve of his involvement as editor. This would include all activity normally required of, or assigned to, an editor's position.

Grounds:

1. BCPRC's congregation is in a fragile state. Rev Lanning has a flock that is in turmoil and at this time his focus must be on the preaching of the Word and care of the congregation. The position of editor requires much time as Rev. Lanning also ministers to the many needs of the congregation he is called to serve at Byron Center PRC. Included in the many additional activities required of an editor are: meetings, writing articles, reviewing articles, answering various forms of correspondence and letters that are typical for

3 See Nathan J. Langerak, "Reformation, Not Schism," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 11 (December 15, 2021): 10–18.

4 Andrew Lanning, "An Answer to Deposition (1)," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 14 (April 2021): 7–9; "An Answer to Deposition (2)," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 15 (May 2021): 7–14; "An Answer to Deposition (3)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 1 (June 2021): 6–11.

that position, and interacting with the governing board regarding general business activities and issues. Being an editor reduces the important time spent with members of his own congregation, getting to better understand her concerns and needs and being more involved in shepherding the flock. The additional time gained from not being editor would allow this aspect of his ministry to more greatly flourish. Jer. 23:4. “And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord”.

2. Rev. Lanning has not asked permission, been given approval, or sought the advice of his consistory to accept the position of editor. On June 17, 2020, the Byron Center PRC consistory ruled that “Rev. Lanning erred in not seeking the advice and approval of the consistory before agreeing to take on the work of being editor of the *Sword and Shield* publication”. According to the Form of Ordination, it is the duty of the elders in regard to the welfare and good order in the church, “to be assistant with their good advice to the ministers of the Word” and “to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word”.

Respectfully submitted.
Your brothers in Christ,
Tim Block
Terry Kaptein
Harlow Kuiper

Professor Engelsma is also wrong when he asserts that I “refused to submit to the decision” that I resign as editor of *Sword and Shield*. In reality, I protested the decision of the consistory. Protesting was my right as a member of the church and as a minister of the gospel. Protesting was also my submission to the authorities who were called to judge the case. By protesting, I acknowledged that the judgment of the matter in light of the scriptures belonged to the elders. In the meantime I continued to edit *Sword and Shield* until my protest could be heard and answered. I was very open with the consistory in this regard, informing both the consistory as a body and the committee that was assigned to meet with me that I understood the *status quo* would hold until the consistory had a chance to judge my protest. I asked the consistory and the committee to inform me if they thought differently. Neither the consistory nor the committee ever told me to do any differently. So I continued to edit *Sword and Shield*, with the consistory’s tacit approval. You can read my protest for yourself.

December 1, 2020

Dear brethren of the consistory of Byron Center PRC,

Greetings in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has made us free in him.

I write this letter to you regarding the consistory’s decision of November 10, 2020, Article 4.b. of the minutes: “Motion to approve the recommendation of the committee [to require Rev. Lanning to resign as the editor of *Sword and Shield*]. CARRIES.” I ask that the consistory declare the decision to be in error, thus rescinding the requirement that I resign as editor of *Sword and Shield*.

I write this letter in the form of a protest, so that I am able to appeal if need be. However, I do not write with an adversarial spirit. Rather, I humbly beseech you as brethren that you not entangle me with this yoke of bondage.

I have only one ground for my protest. I believe this ground to be so weighty that any ground the consistory has already used would fall away. My one ground is that the consistory’s decision robs me of my Christian freedom to confess the name of Christ before men as the editor of *Sword and Shield*. In light of Galatians 2:3-5 and 5:1, my only possible response to this must be not to give place by subjection even for an hour, and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made me free.

Explanation:

1. The issue in the consistory’s decision is not the editorship of *Sword and Shield*. Being the editor of *Sword and Shield* is a matter of adiaphora. A man could be the editor and glorify God, or he could not be the editor and glorify God. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). If the consistory had *suggested* that I resign as editor of *Sword and Shield*, I could have considered that suggestion. Although I would almost certainly have continued editing *Sword and Shield*, I could at least have considered that suggestion and the consistory’s reasons, without having to reject it outright.
2. As soon as the consistory *required* me to resign as editor, the consistory took away my Christian freedom to confess the name of Christ before men as editor of *Sword and Shield*. The issue is not whether there are also other ways for me to confess Christ, such as writing for the magazine, preaching the gospel, teaching my family, and my Christian walk. The issue is that I am free in Christ to confess his name before men also as the editor of a Reformed magazine. Regardless of every other opportunity that I may have to fulfill my calling to confess Christ, the consistory has targeted my Christian freedom as an editor and brings that Christian freedom under the consistory’s compulsion.

3. The only moral reason that the consistory might compel me to resign as editor is if being editor is sinful. Neither I nor anyone else have Christian freedom to sin. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). Being the editor of *Sword and Shield* is not sinful. The holy purpose of *Sword and Shield* is the believer’s confession of Christ as he is made known in Scripture and as he is confessed by the Reformed faith. From the preamble of the constitution of Reformed Believers Publishing: “The members of Reformed Believers Publishing have organized for the express purpose of witnessing to the Reformed truth. The organization is rooted in the office of believer, by virtue of which every believer has the privilege and calling to confess the truth and contend against the lie.”
4. As far as the consistory’s oversight of my labors as pastor, the only reason the consistory might compel me to resign as editor is if being editor contradicts my calling as a minister of the gospel. I am to devote myself to the ministry of the Word. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). My calling as a minister of the Word is also laid out in the *Form for the Ordination of Ministers of God’s Word* and in the Church Order, Article 16. Editing *Sword and Shield* does not contradict my calling as a minister of the gospel as laid out in Scripture and the confessions, but fits perfectly within that calling, and thus is for the spiritual good and the spiritual care of Christ’s flock in Byron Center. Editing *Sword and Shield* fits especially in my calling according to Article 55 of the Church Order: “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.”
5. The consistory’s compulsion will not stop with the matter of being editor, but before long the consistory will also compel me to stop writing and to stop preaching certain things. This is because the one cause that unites my editing, writing, and preaching is the cause of Jehovah God’s glory in Jesus Christ and his gospel. That gospel exposes the sin of the Protestant Reformed Churches in our present controversy and points us to our only hope outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ. The evidence that the consistory’s compulsion will not stop with being editor is that the consistory has already declared my sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14 to be schismatic. That sermon said the same thing as my editorials in *Sword and Shield*. For

me to accede to the consistory’s compulsion in the matter of editing *Sword and Shield* means that eventually I will have to subject the gospel itself to the consistory’s compulsion, which may never be.

6. The matter of Christian freedom is no small matter. This freedom was purchased by Christ’s blood. It is “our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 2:4). This freedom is unbreakably connected to Christ’s gospel. When Christian freedom in Christ is subjected to man’s compulsion, then the truth of Christ is also eventually subjected to man’s compulsion. Paul refused to submit to the compulsion of men against Christian freedom “that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal. 2:5). To subject my Christian freedom to men’s compulsion in this would be to despise the blood of Christ that purchased my freedom and to despise the truth that brings me freedom.
7. Christ’s apostle shows what is the only possible response for all Christians whose Christian freedom is taken away by compulsion. That response is to give no place by subjection, but to stand fast in one’s liberty. “But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 2:3-5; 5:1).

In light of all this, I ask that the consistory declare its decision to be in error, thus rescinding the requirement that I resign as editor of *Sword and Shield*.

Warmly in Christ,
Rev. Andy Lanning

What did Byron Center’s consistory do with my protest? They did not answer it. They put it on a stack of at least a dozen other protests and ignored it. Instead of dealing with my protest, the consistory recommended my deposition for my preaching. Professor Engelsma publicly charges that I did not submit to the decision of my consistory and that I should have been protesting and appealing the consistory’s decision. But Professor Engelsma lies. I did protest the decision. And I could not appeal the decision because the consistory refused to answer my protest.

But while we are on the subject of *Sword and Shield*, let us hear what Professor Engelsma had to say about *Sword and Shield* during the very time that this was unfolding.

Remember that the committee's advice requiring me to resign from *Sword and Shield* had first been presented to the consistory by October 2020 and was adopted by the consistory in November 2020. What was Professor Engelsma saying about *Sword and Shield* in October 2020? This, in response to one Ray Kikkert, who was attacking *Sword and Shield* as being schismatic by its very existence:

Dear Ray Kikkert,

This is in response to your attack on the new magazine, "Sword and Shield," now in circulation among the members of the PRC.

Your criticism of the magazine as virtually (sinfully) divisive, with appeal to the magazine, "Concordia," that played a role in the schism in the PRC in the early 1950's, overlooks at least two significant facts.

First, when "Concordia" came on the scene, the Rev Herman Hoeksema recognized the magazine in an editorial in the "Standard Bearer," welcomed it, and advised members of the PRC to receive it. Although I am presently away from my home and study, so that I cannot now confirm this memory, I am quite sure that my memory does not betray me.

Incidentally, the author of the article you quote was not "Rev Hoeksema," but Professor H.C. Hoeksema.

The second fact—of greatest importance—is that "Concordia" was not schismatic by virtue of its mere existence, but by virtue of its content. Its message was a conditional covenant—another form of the heresy of salvation by works. As the first few issues of "Sword and Shield" prove, beyond any doubt, the message of the new magazine is not a corruption, or even weakening, of the gospel of sovereign grace. On the contrary! It is sound doctrine with the necessary polemics that defends sound doctrine.

To appeal to the appearance of "Concordia" in the past, as though this weighs against "Sword and Shield," is egregious error.

You may subscribe or decline to subscribe as you please. But you may not, rightly, attack the magazine as schismatic. Bold explanation and defense of the truth is not schismatic. Ever! Nor may you liken its appearance to that of "Concordia." "Concordia" proposed and defended the heresy of a conditional covenant. "Sword and Shield" nails its colors to the mast of salvation by sovereign, particular grace.

My question is: why the excited opposition? Why not, rather, enthusiastic support?

Cordially in Christ,

Prof. David J Engelsma

Professor Engelsma is double-tongued. In October 2020 he emphatically denied that *Sword and Shield* was

schismatic. Now, not even two years later, he allows for the possibility that *Sword and Shield* did divide the churches. He throws *Sword and Shield* and the editing of *Sword and Shield* at Reverend Langerak and me as if it were this that divided the churches. I ask Professor Engelsma his own question: "Why the excited opposition? Why not, rather, enthusiastic support?" And I answer it for him: because Professor Engelsma too is now opposed to the *content* of the magazine. Let the reader judge from the scriptures whether the content has been faithful or not.

Doctrine, Doctrine, Doctrine

Professor Engelsma asserts that my sermons "were thinly disguised attacks on his consistory and on his colleagues in the ministry of the PRC as 'vipers' and a 'whore of Babylon.'"

Professor Engelsma is wrong. For one thing, Professor Engelsma's facts are all jumbled. That is, he is still lying. In my sermons at that time in the PRC, I did not call the ministers of the PRC "vipers," nor did I call the denomination the "whore of Babylon." Now I certainly say that. I believe with all my heart that the ministers of the PRC are the vipers that Jesus condemns in Matthew 23. How do I know? Not because I am inspired or because I know anyone's heart but because the ministers' behavior reveals it, just as Jesus pointed to the scribes' behavior when he called them vipers. The Protestant Reformed ministers build the tombs of the prophets with all kinds of praise: Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof. The Protestant Reformed ministers condemn the unjust deposition of the prophets from the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. But the Protestant Reformed ministers then turn and kill the prophets in their own midst: VanderWal, Langerak, and Lanning, along with many other elders and deacons. That kind of hypocrisy is what makes the Protestant Reformed ministers vipers.

But when I was still Protestant Reformed, I did not know that this is what the Protestant Reformed ministers were. I did not yet know to call them vipers.

And now I certainly say that the Protestant Reformed denomination is not only a whore but that she is the whore of Babylon described in Revelation 17–18. She is a manifestation of that great whore and an aspect of that whore. The Protestant Reformed denomination is antichrist. She is that aspect of the antichrist that is the false church. How do I know this? Not because I am inspired or because I know anyone's heart but because the denomination's behavior shows her to be so. The denomination carries around a cup. In that cup is wine. The wine is her false doctrine. The wine is her teaching

that man precedes God. The wine is her teaching that man's experience of covenant fellowship depends upon man's working. That wine represents the whore's adultery and whoredom. That wine represents her departure from Christ. The whore takes her cup of wine and makes men drunk with it, so that they are ready to serve antichrist. The wine of false doctrine fills men's heads with Man. False doctrine makes man drunk with his own self. The Protestant Reformed denomination now carries around such a cup filled with the wine of the wrath of her fornication. By her doctrine she helps prepare the way for antichrist. She rides the beast of antichrist and seduces men to fall in love with Man. Remember that antichrist will need a denomination of churches to help him win over conservative Reformed people too. Antichrist will not only need churches to help him win the heathens and pagans. He will not only need churches to help him win the liberal Christians. He will also need a denomination to help him win conservative Reformed people to his cause. That denomination will appear very conservative. That denomination will talk a lot about conservative things. That denomination will be full of good people living good lives. They will vote against abortion. They will go to church more than anyone else. They will regularly check to see that the Reformed creeds are still in the backs of their psalters. If anyone would ever tell those people that they were whores and publicans and sinners, they would be highly, highly offended. But for all of that denomination's good appearance, that denomination will carry a cup of false doctrine, which is the wine of the wrath of her fornication. She will cause men to drink that cup so that they become spiritually drunken and insensible and believe a lie. The Protestant Reformed denomination is that denomination. She has a conservative appearance and maybe always will. But she holds in her hand that cup of dreadful wine. That is why I say that she is the whore of Babylon.

But when I was still Protestant Reformed, I did not know that yet. I did not yet know to call the PRC the whore of Babylon.

What I did say then, and what I still stand by, is that the sin of false doctrine is as odious to God as a homosexual orgy. I said that in a sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14. Those who walk in lies are to God as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah. We are so blind that we think false doctrine is a minor thing but that homosexuality is a really disgusting and wicked thing. God's word through Jeremiah disabuses us of that notion, comparing those who walk in lies to the men of Sodom. That is what I preached, calling the denomination to repentance for

her sin of minimizing the disgusting nature of her false doctrine.

But Professor Engelsma's facts aside, his assertion that my sermons "were thinly disguised attacks on his consistory and on his colleagues in the ministry of the PRC as 'vipers' and a 'whore of Babylon'" merely continues his denomination's favorite practice of demolishing straw men. My sermons were not about people, whether ministers or consistories or editors of the *Standard Bearer* or anyone else. My sermons were about doctrine. My sermons were about the gospel, the defense of the gospel, and the condemnation of the lie. Anyone can listen to the sermons to hear for themselves. You will not find condemnation of men but a rebuke to a denomination regarding doctrine.

When the PRC and Professor Engelsma say that I attacked my colleagues, they build a straw man. When the PRC and Professor Engelsma condemn me for attacking my colleagues, they demolish their straw man. But what they have not yet done is actually deal with my sermons! They have only pulverized a straw man, a scarecrow, a ragamuffin. The sermons stand unscathed.

I have never known a more fearsome foe of scarecrows everywhere than the Protestant Reformed Churches. The church visitors beat the stuffing out of this straw man. They handed it to Byron Center's consistory to thrash it some more. Byron Center in turn handed it to Classis East and the synodical delegates to drub it some more. Now Professor Engelsma stumbles upon that old raggedy scarecrow in his denomination's basement and hauls it back upstairs to deliver a few more wallops. Poor raggedy scarecrows everywhere must be terrified. I begin to think that "PRC" stands for "Pulverizing Ragamuffins Constantly."

But What about Reverend VanderWal?

Professor Engelsma is strangely silent about Rev. Martin VanderWal. Professor Engelsma charges Rev. N. Langerak and me with schism. He writes his entire letter about only two men. "The two ministers who are the main cause of the division in the PRC are guilty of schism." But Professor Engelsma forgets (if he ever knew or cared) that Reverend VanderWal was the first minister to be charged with schism. Reverend VanderWal has the distinct privilege of being the first minister put to death by the PRC in her fury against the gospel. Neil Meyer (then in Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan) was the first elder, being deposed from office in 2015 and placed under discipline for several years while the rest of us in the PRC snoozed away. Reverend VanderWal and Deacon Craig Ferguson (then in Wingham Protestant

Reformed Church in Ontario) were the second and third officebearers to be killed for the sake of the gospel, in May 2020. Long before I was deposed on the charge of schism (January 2021) and long before Reverend Langerak was suspended on the charge of schism (April 2021), Reverend VanderWal and Deacon Ferguson were “relieved of their duties” on the charge of schism. Relief of duties was a novel and un-church-orderly invention of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy. For a denomination that hollers so much about the church orderly way, the denomination has shown herself to be decidedly un-church-orderly. Whatever “relieved of duties” means, it amounted to being suspended from office, and it included being placed under discipline.

What makes Reverend VanderWal’s case pertinent is that the charge of schism was so bogus that eventually it had to be dropped. The charge of schism was the favorite charge of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy. It was leveling that charge against Reverend VanderWal, Reverend Langerak, me, and others for well over a year, but the hierarchy could never get the charge to stick. In May 2019 several concerned men were fed up with the censorship and false doctrine of the editors of the *Standard Bearer*. We wrote a sharp letter to the board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) and another sharp letter to the editors. We demanded that the board get control of its magazine for the sake of the truth, for which the magazine had been established. In high dudgeon the editors brought formal charges of schism against the three ministers. This charge of schism was essentially the same charge that would repeatedly be made against us in 2019, 2020, and finally in 2021. In 2019 it was the editors of the *Standard Bearer* who charged us with schism. In 2020, after *Sword and Shield* appeared, several consistories wrote open letters warning that the magazine would divide the churches. In 2021 Byron Center’s consistory, Trinity’s consistory, Crete’s consistory, Peace’s consistory, Classis East, Classis West, and the representative delegates of synod all joined in finally suspending Reverend Langerak and deposing me. Finally, after years of trying, they had gotten the charges to stick.

But what about Reverend VanderWal? Way back in 2019, when he was first charged by the editors of the *Standard Bearer* with the sin of schism, his consistory relieved him of duties and placed him under discipline. But the charge was so ridiculous then, as it would be in the years to come, that the consistory of Wingham Protestant Reformed Church eventually had to drop the charges. You can read for yourself what they had to say.

June 17, 2020

Dear Congregation,

Consistory would like to draw your attention to the following announcement:

Charges of public slander and schism have been leveled against our pastor, Reverend VanderWal, by the editors of the *Standard Bearer* for comments he made in his blog and also for his involvement in a group of men who wrote a letter of concern to the *Standard Bearer* Editors. The consistory initially sustained these charges. According to Articles 79 and 80 of the Church Order the sin of schism requires suspension from office after seeking the judgment of a neighboring consistory. Because deacon Ferguson was also involved in the group who wrote the letter of concern to the *Standard Bearer* Editors, the consistory decided that he also must be suspended.

These suspensions, however, never took place because the consistory never sought the judgement of a neighboring consistory. The consistory initially decided to work with our pastor Reverend VanderWal and deacon Craig Ferguson for a period of time with the hope that suspension could be avoided. In the meantime, the consistory relieved them of their duties as pastor and deacon. This was announced to the congregation in a letter dated May 15, 2020. In a follow up letter dated May 19, 2020 the consistory clarified their previous letter by informing the congregation that our pastor Reverend VanderWal and deacon Craig Ferguson had been placed under discipline.

The consistory has come to see that placing these two brothers under discipline was in error. The Personal discipline under which these men were placed (as stipulated in Article 76 of the Church Order) can only be implemented after suspension occurs according to Article 79 of the Church Order. Suspension under Article 79 requires that a neighboring consistory concurs with the charges brought against these men. The judgment of a neighboring consistory was never sought, therefore the personal discipline of these men ought not to have been implemented at this time. The consistory recognizes the serious consequences that came out of this discipline and humbly apologizes for the error.

As the consistory continued to deal with our pastor Reverend VanderWal and deacon Craig Ferguson, it has come to the point where consistory can no longer sustain the serious charges of public slander and schism leveled against them. The consistory has therefore retracted the charges of public slander and schism against our pastor Reverend VanderWal and deacon Craig Ferguson and restored them to the full duties of their respective offices. The consistory

also apologizes to our pastor Reverend VanderWal, deacon Craig Ferguson and to the congregation for the mistakes it has made in dealing with this very complicated situation.

We give thanks unto the Lord for His mercy, that we may continue to forgive, just as Christ has forgiven us.

James 4:10 “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

On behalf of the Consistory

Rod Crich, Clerk

But Professor Engelsma will not deal with Reverend VanderWal. If he did, the case would show that all of Professor Engelsma’s charges of schism are empty. Just because the PRC eventually found a way by hook and by crook to make the charges stick does not mean that the charges were ever just.

The Old Paths

But let us hear what our Protestant Reformed forebears used to say about schism. Let us hear their instruction about what is reformation. Here is Homer Hoeksema from 1961.

The second form of reformation is that of secession. When the carnal element begins to dominate; when the institute itself becomes corrupt; when the word is adulterated, the sacraments are profaned, false teachers tolerated, Christian discipline not exercised, or perverted; and when your protests are not heard but are futile, for you are persecuted on account of them; then your church is manifesting the marks of the false church, and then reformation through secession becomes mandatory. In obedience to the word, when it becomes a question of denying the word of God or leaving a certain institute, the question of a certain institute or preserving the true church—no believer, beloved, may hesitate. In obedience to the word, you must either seek affiliation where the marks of the true church are already manifest, or you must act to institute the church anew.⁵

**“Letter to My Family *in re* the RPC:
the Heresy on the ‘Right’”
by David J. Engelsma (May 23, 2022)**

Madness

When I read this particular email article from Professor Engelsma, I thought to myself, “He has gone mad.” Mad with deceit. Mad with a lying spirit. Mad in the delusion into which God has delivered him. For example, how could the professor write the following with a

straight face: “It becomes increasingly evident there is now a serious doctrinal issue in the controversy”? Is this a joke? Now—now!—there is a serious doctrinal issue in the controversy? Before it was just all church politics, but now it is doctrinal?

Earlier it seemed that the controversy was strictly church political—the schism caused by the RPC. And the fact remains that the discipline of Andy Lanning and of the now suspended Rev. Langerak was grounded upon their schismatic conduct, not at all upon any doctrinal issue. This is incontrovertible...

But of late, and so early in the history of the RPC, there are startling doctrinal developments in the RPC.

What did Professor Engelsma think was going on in the PRC since 2015? A doctrinal controversy was raging, which controversy has continued unabated to the present day. Did Professor Engelsma fall asleep somewhere during that time, so that he does not see that the same doctrinal issues in the controversy in 2015 are the doctrinal issues in the controversy in 2022? What did Professor Engelsma think was the issue with the sermons of the then Rev. David Overway? What did Professor Engelsma think that he himself was protesting to synod in 2017? What did Professor Engelsma think that he himself was writing in a letter to the *Standard Bearer* in 2019? What did Professor Engelsma think *Sword and Shield* has been developing for two years? What did Professor Engelsma think all of our articles back and forth with him over the last year have been about? After all of that, the professor can seriously say that only *now* it becomes evident that there is a serious doctrinal issue in the controversy?

Madness.

The letter does not improve but descends even further into madness from there. Professor Engelsma pontificates about what “the RPC and their leaders” think. He becomes wild in his imaginings about the RPC’s thoughts and motives, so that reading his pontificating is like reading the insane ravings of a deranged lunatic. He imagines that the RPC saw themselves as “more PR” than anyone else when we were still in the PRC, that we worked for schism, that we tried to “purify” the PRC of “such weak PRs as myself,” that we are the “Wheat RPC” and the PRC are the “Chaff PRC.” It is chilling how sure Professor Engelsma is that his imagination is reality. He is sick, but he does not know he is sick.

Madness.

What especially drives Professor Engelsma insane is

⁵ Homer Hoeksema, “Reformation: Option or Mandate?,” https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=lectures.

Malachi 3:7. “Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?” Professor Engelsma is absolutely sure that this text teaches that man’s activity of returning to God precedes God’s activity of returning to man. The professor is absolutely sure that it is heresy to teach that the text is meant to expose Judah’s unbelief. My exegesis of the text as the law and not the gospel has been a burr on his brain for more than a year now. In this letter he returns to my exegesis in order to charge that the RPC reject God’s commands to his people. Rejecting God’s commands to his people? Nonsense. We just don’t want to be saved by the law. As for the exegesis of Malachi 3:7, perhaps someday Professor Engelsma will get around to explaining the response of Judah: “Wherein shall we return?” That sure sounds to me like Judah’s unbelief being exposed, and that sure does not sound to me like Judah’s turning. And perhaps someday Professor Engelsma will get around to Luther’s exegesis of the passage as the law, which exegesis is identical to mine. But until then, Professor Engelsma cannot handle my refusal to believe that Malachi 3:7 teaches that man precedes God in a vital sense in salvation.

Madness.

In his fevered state Professor Engelsma accuses the RPC of the “heresy on the right,” which he defines as a denial of sanctification. The RPC deny sanctification? The RPC do not issue the call of the gospel? The RPC deny the law? The RPC do not exhort and command obedience? That is all news to me. Professor Engelsma’s claims are not the judgments of a sound mind.

Madness.

Lies

Professor Engelsma continues his program of lying his way through his controversy with the RPC. Referring to article 31 of the Church Order, Professor Engelsma asserts, “The simple, fundamental, obvious fact is that neither Andy Lanning nor the now suspended Rev. Nathan Langerak protested their discipline by their respective consistories.” This lie is popular. Professor Engelsma has taken to repeating it as often as he can, and members of the PRC have long ago been conditioned to repeat this as a knee-jerk reaction to the ecclesiastical murder of Reverend Langerak and me. When we tell a well-behaved PR that we were murdered by the assemblies, his conditioned response is, “But you didn’t protest.”

Well, we did. Often. And so did many, many others. There were so many protests, many of them sitting unopened in the consistory’s inbox, that I don’t know if we will ever know the exact number that were submitted. Reverend Langerak addresses his own protest elsewhere in this issue. And Elder Andy Birkett addresses this in his recent posts on Dewey Engelsma’s blog, *astraitbetwixtwo.com*.

As for my own protest against my discipline, every level of Protestant Reformed assembly saw my protest. I protested to Byron Center’s consistory. I have published that protest previously in *Sword and Shield*.⁶ When Byron Center did not sustain my protest, it was sent along with the material of my deposition to Classis East, so that all the delegates saw and judged my protest. Present at Classis East were the delegates representing synod, so that they also saw and judged my protest. Every level of denominational assembly was represented in judging my protest. The simple, fundamental, obvious fact is that Professor Engelsma is a liar when he says that we did not protest our discipline.

As if that were not enough, after I was deposed and after First Reformed Protestant Church had separated from the PRC, the council of First church addressed a letter to the Protestant Reformed Synod of 2021 showing the error of my discipline.⁷ First Reformed Protestant Church technically did not have to do this. We were no longer Protestant Reformed. But First had enough regard for her mother, who was once a nurturing woman, that First’s council felt obligated to send a protest against my discipline even after we were no longer Protestant Reformed.

And as if that were not enough, I have heard that there is still a protest against my deposition coming to the Protestant Reformed Synod of 2022 from somewhere in the PRC. (I write this before synod meets and without any desire and probably without any ability to get an agenda, so I cannot confirm whether this protest is actually coming. But I trust the source.)

So for Professor Engelsma to say that we did not protest our discipline is a lie, and a whopper of one at that.

Prerequisites

As for Professor Engelsma’s doctrine, he remains impenitent in his teaching that man’s activity of repenting is a prerequisite to God’s activity of forgiving. The professor takes umbrage at my stating it that way and accuses me of deliberately misrepresenting him. I refer the reader to previous issues of *Sword and Shield* where I have

6 Andrew Lanning, “Protest of Suspension,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 1 (June 2021): 12–14.

7 Council of First Reformed Protestant Church, “Letter for PRC Synod 2021,” <https://firstrpc.org/documents>.

cataloged Professor Engelsma's own words on the matter at length. I believe that I am giving a fair and honest evaluation of Professor Engelsma's doctrine. I also believe that Professor Engelsma takes such offense at my statement of his theology because he knows the stench his theology gives off.

I once again encourage the professor to own that stench. Let him reveal to everyone that he is actually teaching prerequisites. *Prerequisites* is exactly the word that he needs to be precise and accurate. And I am sure the professor could explain convincingly to everyone why it is orthodox to speak of prerequisites in justification. He is already teaching it, after all. Here he is in his own words from his "Letter to My Family *in re* the RPC: the Heresy on the 'Right': "Justification is by means of the believing of the one who is justified, so that believing, with its essential component, repentance, precedes the justifying act of God."

What word exactly captures that doctrine of justification? *Prerequisite!*

Professor Engelsma's doctrine is not justification by faith alone but justification by faith as a doing. It is not justification by faith alone but justification by repenting. Don't believe his doctrine, for it goes to hell.

Development

As he has done in his past email letters to his family, Professor Engelsma develops his false doctrine to a further state. Thus far he has been teaching that repentance is a prerequisite for justification. With this recent letter the professor teaches that the law of God is the power of the believer's sanctification and the power of the believer's obedience. The law, or the "serious exhortation," is what affects and causes the believer's obedience.

Commenting on Jesus' salvation of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11), Professor Engelsma writes,

When Jesus spoke the justifying declaration to the adulterous woman in John 8, "Neither do I condemn thee," He immediately added, as in one breath, "go and sin no more." The work of salvation is two-fold: the change of legal status

and the change of actual spiritual condition. As this added word of Jesus, "go and sin no more," shows, this second work of grace is effectual by means of serious exhortation, exhortation that expects, and works, obedience to the exhortation.

Professor Engelsma is working with the doctrine of sanctification. The forgiven adulteress' sanctification was her new life in Christ. As Professor Engelsma says, it was "the change of actual spiritual condition." But when Professor Engelsma teaches what causes this change, he says that "this second work of grace is effectual by means of serious exhortation." The "serious exhortation" is the command "Go and sin no more." The "serious exhortation" is the law. Professor Engelsma is not teaching here that the serious exhortation is the rule, standard, and guide of the believer's obedience, which would be true. He is not teaching here that the law is the rule for the believer's grateful life, which would be true. Rather, he teaches that the believer's obedience "is effectual" by the law. He teaches that the law affects, or causes, the believer's obedience.

It will be interesting to see where Professor Engelsma goes with this. Undoubtedly, he will develop it further.

As it stands, Professor Engelsma is giving the law a power that God forbade the law to have. God does not work the believer's sanctification by the law but by the gospel. God does not work the believer's obedience by the law but by the gospel. It was Jesus' word "Neither do I condemn thee" that both justified and sanctified the woman. It was Jesus' word "Neither do I condemn thee" that both forgave the woman's sin and that caused her obedience. Jesus' word "Go and sin no more" was the rule, guide, and standard of the woman's obedience. It showed her what it meant to obey, but it did not affect her obedience.

This is the truth of the law/gospel distinction taught in Canons of Dordt 3-4.5-6.

Yes, it will be very interesting and instructive, indeed, to see where Professor Engelsma goes with this.

More madness, likely.

—AL

Regardless of whatever other storm and bluster continues to come from the professor's pen, let all men remember that Professor Engelsma's theology is justification by prerequisite repentance.

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

TRUE REPENTANCE (2)

God be merciful to me a sinner.—Luke 18:13

The necessity of repentance is the cross of Jesus Christ. That the cross of Jesus Christ is the necessity of the believer's repentance is the heart of the preaching of the gospel in the passages from Acts 2–3 considered in the previous article.¹ Why must those who heard the preaching repent of their sins? Why the command of the gospel to them to repent of their sins? Because Christ gives repentance. He is the savior who gives repentance as part of his promise “unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The necessity of repentance is that God sent Christ “to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (3:26).

This necessity of repentance must therefore be carefully and clearly distinguished from that necessity of repentance which is legal, that is, according to law. The principle difference between repentance of the gospel and repentance of the law is that repentance of the law is according to the principle of the law: “Do this and live.” Two other features must be added to the repentance of the law. The first is that the repentance of the law must be perfect before it can be accepted by God for salvation. The second is that repentance is a condition that man must fulfill prior to the grace of God in forgiveness. According to this legal, conditional manner, repentance is what man must do in order to receive something from God. As a legal obligation laid upon man, it must be his to perform as his own agent or as his own work that he alone performs. Repentance according to law must be seen as a fundamental doctrine of the heresy of Pelagius, what God requires of a man to perform; for repentance must be man's to perform, God's grace waiting upon man's work.

In complete contrast to repentance as necessary according to the law is the necessity of repentance according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus Christ is the complete savior who gives all of salvation, including repentance. He is the one who turns his people away from their iniquities. He is the one in whose name repentance is preached. He is the one who pours out his Spirit upon his people as the Spirit of repentance and supplication.

That repentance is the necessary fruit of the cross is the public, emphatic declaration of Jesus Christ from the cross.

He signified this necessity of repentance according to the gospel in his word of glorious triumph, “It is finished.”

This glorious word from Calvary's cross does not merely look back at the work of atonement. Indeed, the word of Christ does indicate that he fully accomplished his glorious work of atonement, shedding his blood for the covering of the sins of all the elect given him by the Father. His word is also the declaration that he fully established with his suffering and death the ground for every blessing of salvation to be given to his elect. But the word spoken by Christ from his cross also declares something about the future. It speaks of an end achieved. What was truly finished? What was the goal that was accomplished at the cross? The goal of the everlasting salvation of all the elect for whom Christ died. In that cross of Jesus Christ *is* the salvation of all his own, given him by the Father. In that cross are their eternal life and their everlasting glory in that life. In that cross is all the way to that eternal life of heaven, from their regeneration to their glorification. In that cross is every part, every aspect, every feature of that salvation. In that cross are their justification and sanctification, their faith and repentance, and all their perseverance in the same. In that cross is every good work that they shall perform to the glory of the God of their salvation. The word of Christ, “It is finished,” is the victory that overcomes the world, the victory that lives in the hearts of God's people by faith.

Including repentance. Including especially repentance. Crucifixion with Christ is the mortification of the old man (Rom. 6). It is the triumph over sin exclaimed by the apostle in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ.”

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 16 shows that repentance is the necessary fruit of the death of Christ on the cross.

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)

¹ Martin VanderWal, “True Repentance,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 1 (June 2022): 36–39.

“By virtue thereof...” All the repentance of the believer is by virtue of the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross. The Reformed confession gives this explanation in its second section, “Of Man’s Deliverance,” and that as prior to the third section, “Of Thankfulness.” Before any good works and before the working of true conversion by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, all the believer’s repentance is found in the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross. That is, the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross are the necessity of all the believer’s life of repentance.

As the mortification of the old man is the necessity of the cross of Jesus Christ, declared as an article of faith by the Heidelberg Catechism in its second section, all the believer’s life of gratitude is the fruit of the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the necessity of the mortification of the old man in the believer. It is also the necessity of all the good works of repentance that proceed out of his true conversion.

Why is this necessity so important? Why is it so important to know that the source of all the believer’s repentance is the cross of Jesus Christ? As stated previously, it is important to know in order to safeguard against all legalistic errors about repentance. The believer must be able to distinguish his repentance as the gift of God the Holy Spirit working that death of Christ in him from all false repentance that is the believer’s work and his doing. In this knowledge he is equipped to give all glory to God in his repentance, reserving none for himself. In this knowledge he is also equipped to truly rejoice in his repentance, knowing its value as God’s gift to him of grace alone through the cross of Christ. He is also comforted to know that God has respect to his own work in the believer, to bestow grace upon grace. Thus is the believer rescued from wondering whether his repentance is “good enough,” which must truly lead only to doubt and to the foolish attempt to make his repentance more pleasing to God by adding more of his own efforts and works.

The necessity of true repentance by the cross of Jesus Christ is also important for its strength in the believer’s heart and mind. The believer must know that his repentance is itself partaking of the wondrous, supernatural power of the cross. When he comes before the cross of his savior by faith, the believer must know that his sins, so heinous in the sight of God, made Christ’s sacrifice necessary. Through the gospel of the cross, the believer must learn the hatred of God against sin that was expressed in the wrath of God borne by the savior in that glorious sacrifice. From the deep wrath of God shown in the punishment of his only begotten Son, the believer must learn to loathe and abhor himself as the sinner. As much as the Christian spends his life growing in the knowledge of what the cross signifies about his sin, the fruit of that knowledge is his deepening and growing sorrow over his sins and his depravity.

This strength of repentance is the strength of weakness.

The glory of repentance is the broken spirit and the contrite heart. The victory of the cross in the believer is his godly sorrow that he has broken all the commandments of God and is still inclined to all evil. By, with, and in the death of Christ on the cross is the believer’s death to sin. It is death. It is pain. It is sorrow and shame. It is wretchedness and misery. It is emptiness and desolation. It is a broken spirit and a contrite heart. It is utter and complete self-denial, self-abhorrence, and self-loathing. It is the inability to find anything good in oneself but only great evil. It is the understanding that in him, that is, in his flesh, dwells no good thing, leading him to cry out, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24).

It should be evident also how true repentance is first as the necessary fruit of the cross of Jesus Christ. It is death that must precede resurrection. It is the emptiness that must come before fullness. It is crucifixion before resurrection. It is woe before weal. It is poverty before riches. It is also first as servant before master. It is death for the sake of life. It is emptiness for the sake of fullness, crucifixion for the sake of resurrection, woe for the sake of weal, sickness for the sake of health.

However, true repentance does not end with the life of forgiveness and salvation. The new man does not end the old. Both repentance as death and quickening as life must always be present together in the believer. He is at the same time dead and alive. He is at the same time poor and rich, sick and healthy, empty and full. He lives in the doctrine of the three things that are necessary to know for the comfort of belonging to Jesus, his faithful savior. This is the paradox of the Christian life represented as a beautiful thread running through 2 Corinthians. Second Corinthians 4:11–14 is but one example of this thread. The presence of both together in the life of the Christian is also powerfully represented in so many of the psalms. In the same psalm there is weeping and lamentation as well as joy and praise. Psalm 40 has in it verses 3–4 as well as verses 11–13, words of gladness and joy in salvation as well as words of humble pleading for mercy for the guilty.

What must be noted in the above truth so powerfully represented in scripture is that repentance over sin is not combined with joy and gladness over salvation to bring about a balance. It is not joy tempering sorrow or sorrow tempering joy. Repentance remains forever repentance. It remains self-abhorrence, self-loathing, and self-denial as long as the child of God lives on the earth. His growth is not that he repents less and less, having less and less to be sorrowful about. His growth is growth in repentance. Just as he grows in the joy of his salvation, so he grows in the knowledge of his sin and misery. As he grows in the awe and wonder of what his savior with his precious blood has done for him, the child of God must also grow in sorrow over his sin, which made the shedding of his savior’s blood so necessary.

All of the above is the reason that repentance must not be seen as a deed or a collection of deeds or merely certain works to be performed. Much less can the above be a reason that repentance should be thought at all to be that deed, or collection of deeds, which *makes* their doer to be repentant and therefore fulfilling a condition in order to obtain salvation or assurance of salvation.

Why must repentance be instead understood and confessed to be what the Heidelberg Catechism describes in Lord's Days 16 and 33 as the mortification of the old man, as "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)?

To answer the question it is profitable to consider the first of Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

The above statement, heading the list of Luther's theses, was fundamental to the aim of his theses posted for disputation: the end of the sale of indulgences by the church. What Luther found so hateful about the sale of indulgences was that it proposed a monetary substitution for true repentance.

Pope Leo X had authorized the sale of indulgences to raise money for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The pope had personally authorized John Tetzel to offer indulgences. The supposed ground for the selling of indulgences was the understanding that the purchase of indulgences with money was the same as doing a deed of repentance. It was a monetary substitution for the act of acknowledging sin and was the denial of some earthly possession as signifying true repentance. The pretended biblical ground for granting remission of sin for such deeds was the Latin Vulgate's translation of Matthew 4:17, "*Paenitentiam agite*," literally translated into English as "Do repentance."

Luther's first thesis drove to the heart of this erroneous translation of Matthew 4:17 as the foundation for the support of the system of indulgences. Repentance is not a deed undertaken, performed, and then finished to a level of satisfaction. Never must the believer say, "I've finished repenting." Never must he say, "I did my repentance." Never must he move on from repentance, as if he completed that which was required of him. Repentance is not a deed but "the entire life of believers."

But there is more to this first thesis than what is to be the character of the life of believers. The thesis also teaches concerning the will of Christ for believers. Exactly where in this thesis Luther addressed the commandment of "our Lord and Master Jesus Christ," he did not express its relationship to believers as a command. He did not write, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he commanded that the entire life of believers be one of repentance." But Luther wrote, "[Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ] willed the entire life of believers to be one of

repentance." Why must the entire life of believers be one of repentance? Because Christ wills it and because Christ works it! The command of Christ is the gospel that he graciously gives what he commands. He gives it of himself. He works it by his grace and Spirit, causing the fruit of his cross to flourish in his redeemed people.

The truth that repentance must characterize the entire life of the believer is taught powerfully by Christ himself in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18). The point of the parable is the contrast between the Pharisee and the publican. "[Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (v. 9). The parable's description of the Pharisee in his prayer is the comparison "unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." The rebuke of that self-trust is the humble, repentant prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (v. 13).

Self-trust in self-righteousness Jesus made clear in the prayer of the Pharisee. In this short prayer the pronoun *I* is spoken five times. The Pharisee speaks of his righteousness in terms of his own works. It is clearly the prayer of a legalist.

As clearly as the prayer of the Pharisee is self-centered, self-righteous, and legalistic, this prayer is clearly also a prayer whose character is repentance, albeit in a horribly twisted manner. This "repentance" goes down to a separation of identity. Though God is thanked for this separation, this separation is not self-loathing or self-abhorrence. It is thanksgiving for not being "as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (v. 11). This "repentance" is fasting, withholding food from oneself as an expression of sorrow over sin. This "repentance" is the parting with one's wealth and goods. "I give tithes of all that I possess" (v. 12).

Brought before God in this prayer is the *doing* of repentance. Much like the money used to purchase indulgences, this repentance is not of "the entire life of believers." It is not the mortification of the old man as "sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins." It is not repentance according to the gospel of Christ but repentance according to law.

In the sharpest contrast to this perverse prayer of the Pharisee is the repentant prayer of the publican. He has nothing good of himself to bring before God. Of self-righteousness he will not speak. He will not speak of his going up to the temple to pray. He will not speak of his prayer. Before the presence of God's holiness, he cannot speak of himself as having done any good. The publican must stand afar off, not even daring to lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven. He must smite upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

(To be continued)

—MVW

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

MY PROTEST

In one of his recent letters, Prof. David Engelsma joined those who have hurled stones to kill us. Later I will deal with the main content of his recent shameful letters. Now I note only that he wrote the following about me and my unjust suspension from office:

What is of fundamental importance, neither did he submit, under protest, either to the decision of his consistory that he not edit the new magazine or to the decision of suspension from office.¹

He is a liar. Below is my protest that I submitted to my consistory at Crete Protestant Reformed Church.

I also submitted to the consistory a protest regarding an announcement read to the Crete congregation about First Reformed Protestant Church's Act of Separation. And I wrote and submitted a protest to the June 2021 Protestant Reformed Synod about Rev. A. Lanning's deposition. Perhaps at a later date I will publish these protests.

The answer to my protests was suspension.

I note also that Professor Engelsma wrote in the same letter the following about Reverend Lanning and me:

They were not disciplined for the sake of the gospel of grace. The grounds of their discipline had

nothing to do with the gospel. The attempt to portray themselves as martyrs for the truth's sake is sheer, unadulterated posturing and falsity.

Professor Engelsma cleverly mentioned the grounds of our discipline. There was not a stitch of truth in the grounds of our discipline or in the men who came up with them or in those who voted to adopt them. We have contended from the beginning that the grounds were a concoction sucked out of the thumbs of those who were intent on getting rid of us in order studiously to avoid the issue of our doctrine. The grounds were the same kinds of grounds as were used by those who stoned Naboth to death, murdered his children, and stole his inheritance. The issue is not the grounds but whether the truth was at stake at that moment in the Protestant Reformed Churches and whether our deposition and suspension were motivated by hatred for that truth and its condemnation of the lie. I included in my protest dialogue and quotes. These were submitted to the consistory, and the men whom I quoted admitted that that is what they had said. I will let the reader decide after he reads my protest about the involvement of the gospel and the truth in my suspension.

Protest to the Consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in re Decision to Require Me to Resign as Editor of *Sword and Shield*

Dear Consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church,

With this document I protest the decision taken at the consistory meeting on February 11, 2021 in article 12 to require me to resign as editor of *Sword and Shield* and to discontinue writing for and promoting the publication.

Article 12 from the Consistory Minutes of February 11, 2021 reads as follows:

Motion made and supported to require Rev. Langerak to resign as a contributing editor of the *Sword & Shield* and discontinue writing for and promoting the publication.

Grounds:

- a. Rev. Langerak continues writing in and promoting the *Sword & Shield* as a co-editor with Andy

Lanning, a deposed minister of the PRC who continues to live in the sin of schism.

- b. Rev. Langerak's participation has caused, and continues to cause unrest and division in our congregation.

Motion made and supported to elide ground b and replace it with "For the sake of the effectiveness of the preaching in our congregation." Motion to elide fails.

Motion as originally moved carries. Andy Birkett records a negative vote.

By this decision I am aggrieved.

I. I protest the disorderly and uncharitable way in which the motion was brought to consistory.

¹ David J. Engelsma, "Schism in the PR Churches," May 2022.

- A. Christ requires in 1 Corinthians 14:40 “Let all things be done decently and in order.” He also requires in 1 Corinthians 16:14 “Let all your things be done with charity.”
- B. The item to discuss my editorship of *Sword and Shield* was not on the agenda of the consistory meeting. It has not been on the agenda and has not been a subject of discussion by the consistory. The matter of my involvement with and writing for *Sword and Shield* had not come up in the consistory in any discussion in many months.
- C. The decision contradicts previous decisions of the consistory without interacting with them at all.
1. The consistory previously made a decision that the magazine was non-ecclesiastical and thus rejected charges of sin from the three editors of the *Standard Bearer* against their minister.
 2. Regarding my involvement in *Sword and Shield* the consistory made the decision involving a letter to the congregation in which they did not charge that my involvement is divisive, but in which letter the consistory stated that it has always encouraged its ministers to write and that my writing in *Sword and Shield* was no different from this and in which they encouraged the congregation to read all things with discernment, also *Sword and Shield*.
- D. Suddenly, without warning, contrary to its previous decisions, and without any prior discussion about the issue, the consistory by fiat declares without any grounds that my participation in *Sword and Shield* has caused, and continues to cause unrest and division in our congregation. This is disorderly in the extreme and is an example not of charity but ecclesiastical brutality.
- II. I protest that the decision and grounds are a violation of the 9th commandment, bearing false witness against the minister and his writing in *Sword and Shield*, misrepresenting the majority of the discussion and the false witness against the minister and his preaching in that discussion.
- A. The minister has never had anything unorthodox alleged against his writings, nor has there been any allegation of unorthodoxy in *Sword and Shield* as a whole.
1. The minister’s writing has stood for the truth of God’s sovereign grace against corruptions of that truth that appeared and are appearing in the Protestant Reformed Churches. While the truth always divides, it is unlawful to lay the blame for that division on the truth. To charge the whole venture with divisiveness is to lie against the truth.
 2. James 3:14-15, “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish.”
- B. This decision and grounds do not reflect honestly the discussion that was had in the consistory room when the motion was proposed and afterward when the motion was discussed.
1. The motion was made when the consistory was treating the agenda item *discussion of the preaching and spiritual health of the congregation*.
 2. The motion was made in the middle of a sustained attack on the character and preaching of the minister. For years the consistory has approved my preaching and has brought no accusations against my conduct in office. With the installation of three new elders that situation changed. At the January meeting already the attacks on the preaching began. Those attacks continued at the February meeting with angry and vehement denunciations of the preaching.
 3. Some of the statements that were made from my notes of the meeting and the discussion are as follows:
 - a. “He preaches angry.” In response to the question of when this anger manifested itself, the response was that, “he has been preaching angry for years.”
 - b. “His preaching is discouraging.”
 - c. “His preaching does not feed the sheep.”
 - d. “His preaching does damage to the sheep.”
 - e. Referencing an article by Herman Hoeksema from the *Standard Bearer*, “He uses the pulpit to spit out his personal gall.”
 - f. “If he keeps preaching this way, then he better be ready that I will not shake his hand.”
 - g. “He gives the same sermon every Sunday, he only hangs it on a different text.”
 - h. “We keep hearing about grace and not by works.” This was a complaint and in the context of the complaint that the preaching is discouraging, does not feed the sheep, and does damage to the sheep.
 - i. After the motion to remove me from *Sword and Shield* was on the floor and after some discussion about my involvement with the magazine along with more expressions of dissatisfaction with the preaching the statement was made, “I do not know why we are even talking about *Sword and Shield*. This is not about *Sword and Shield*. That is just a magazine. This is about the preaching that comes off our pulpit. That kind of preaching has to stop. We must do something about it tonight.” The “something” that had to be done tonight, was the removal of me from the pulpit.
 - j. This was all sprinkled with specious and gratuitous *ad hominem* arguments about the perception and character of the minister.

- k. When the elders were pressed for specifics about what was wrong with the preaching nothing was forthcoming. They avoided addressing the issue of the orthodoxy of the preaching. None of this was carried on with charity, but by denunciation, with much emotion and rhetoric.
 - 4. I have taken the quotes above from my notes of the meeting.
 - a. There were many things said. God knows what was said, for he is with us in the judgment.
 - b. “And said to the judges, take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment” (2 Chronicles 19:6).
 - 5. I have been preaching in Crete Protestant Reformed Church since December 7, 2007 and my preaching has been orthodox, Reformed, Protestant Reformed preaching, being the faithful and sober exegesis of the text and application in general as well [as] in particular.
 - a. This is my duty according to the *Form for Ordination*, “That they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord, revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostle[s]; and apply the same as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers; instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproving, according to everyone’s need.”
 - b. This evaluation is according to the testimony of the consistory at its many meetings over 14 years in which the subject of my preaching has come up. I have ever preached Christ Jesus, our Lord, to you as the heart of every sermon as the consistory has repeatedly testified and so Christ came in that and spoke [to] you.
 - 6. Christ received such a beating at the meeting as to make one’s heart tremble.
 - a. Such an attitude and attack on the preaching is not against me, but against Christ and God according to Christ’s own words, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Mat. 10:40).
 - b. The *Form for the Ordination of Ministers* exhorts the congregation and by implication the elders to take the lead in this, “Receive this your minister in the Lord with all gladness, “and hold such in reputation,” Remember that God himself through him speaketh unto and beseecheth you. Receive the Word, which he, according to the Scripture, shall preach unto you, “not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.” Let the feet of those that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things be beautiful and pleasant unto you.”
 - c. My preaching has ever been “according to the Scripture,” and none has alleged otherwise, and it is Christ’s word.
 - 7. None of the calling toward the preaching exhorted on the elders in the Form for Ordination was in evidence in the meeting.
 - a. While several attacked the preaching, others sat by mute while it happened. There were some who stood and said they disagreed and could not let such an assessment pass.
 - b. The men who made the false accusations against the preaching cannot lead the congregation in carrying out their calling to receive the word of God among them and count the feet of them that bring it beautiful: they themselves will not receive it and condemn the one who brings it.
 - c. The elders who so attacked the preaching without ground or evidence, who studiously avoided the question of the orthodoxy of the preaching, who refused to give concrete examples of their assertions, and who by baseless name-calling condemned the preaching, must be required by the consistory to retract their unfounded accusations against the preaching and turn from their disgraceful attitude toward the minister and the ministry of the gospel in their midst, or to prove by specific protest and charges against the minister that their accusations have merit.
- III. I protest that the decision to require me to resign from *Sword and Shield* and cease writing and promoting the magazine is contrary to my calling to confess Christ before men.
- A. Christ calls all believers and office bearers to confess him with boldness before men.
 - 1. “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 10:32-33).
 - 2. “Also, I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8-9).
 - 3. This is the chief calling of the believer in all his life and the chief calling of the minister in all his work. This calling does not depend on the permission of a consistory but on Christ himself. I carry out this calling in *Sword and Shield*.
 - 4. Confessing myself to be more in dread of Christ, than of you, or any other men, I will not resign as

editor of *Sword and Shield*, will not stop writing for the magazine, and will not stop promoting it. Indeed, seeing that its witness to the truth of God's sovereign grace, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the unconditionality of God's covenant, and the continuing total depravity of the regenerated believer by nature is maligned by baseless accusation and name-calling, rejected, and hated, I will write and promote this truth all the more vigorously to the glory of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom alone belongs the glory for our salvation and upon whom our salvation alone depends.

B. It must be clear to the consistory that though the Protestant Reformed Churches have officially rejected false doctrine and heresy that compromised the unconditional covenant, justification by faith alone, and the perfect sufficiency of Christ's merits alone for fellowship with God by faith alone and without works, these decisions have not been received.

1. This is clear because there has been precious little explanation of the decisions, almost no explanation of the subtle ways in which the truth has been undermined, introduction of new language into preaching and writing that is supposed to prompt godliness but undermines the gospel, teaching that there is something that man must do to be saved, and a determined effort evidenced in preaching and writing to bring in again the doctrine that was condemned. The writings in the *Standard Bearer* are making this plain. Conditional covenant theologians are being recommended to the people. Confusion is being spread.
2. We are in the middle, then, of an unsettled doctrinal controversy of the greatest importance involving the doctrines of the standing and falling church. The issue is simply this: faith and obedience is not the way to the Father; faith and obedience is not the way to fellowship with the Father; faith and obedience is not the way God realizes his covenant promise in us. This is federal vision thinking and language and it is being dressed up in new garb and being presented as the truth. To teach that faith and obedience are the way to the Father, faith and obedience are the way to fellowship with the Father, and faith and obedience are the way God realizes his covenant denies justification by faith alone, the unconditional covenant, and the perfect sufficiency of Christ's merits.
3. Now we can add to that the idea that the regenerated believer is not totally depraved according to his flesh, that the works of believers obtain the possession of salvation, that the works of believers

are of value for their relationship with God, that the believer wills good of his own accord and thus also must do good of his own accord, and that believers obey and then they receive God's blessing. All of these are extensions of the doctrinal controversy that was faced by the PRC.

- C. In the face of that subtle and terrible threat that will destroy souls and churches the minister of the gospel not only, but every office-bearer and believer, is called to oppose it with all his might.
 1. He must oppose the specific threat.
 2. As Martin Luther taught, "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest expression every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."
 3. *Sword and Shield* has done that. It has stood for the truth valiantly and has been maliciously and publicly slandered unheard and without evidence. The consistory now engages in this same disreputable attack by calling my involvement in the magazine's defense of the truth divisive. It is not merely that it is divisive because one of the editor's has been deposed, but, going back on its own previous assessment, that it *has been* divisive.
- D. The message of the magazine is the same message that I have preached publicly in my ministry.
 1. *Sword and Shield* belongs to my confessing of Christ as a believer in a non-ecclesiastical setting and before the world of men. My preaching constitutes my official confession of Christ.
 2. If my witness to Christ as a believer is attacked and slandered and arbitrarily and without ground called divisive, then that must continue to my witness of Christ in my preaching, which can also then likewise without ground and arbitrarily be called divisive. It has already begun and was carried out by elders while others sat idly by while it happened or encouraged those that were doing it.
 3. The elder said it best who said that this matter of my resignation from *Sword and Shield* is not the issue, but my preaching is the issue and "it has to stop" and "tonight."
 4. Not wanting my witness in *Sword and Shield*, it must necessarily follow that my witness in the preaching must come under condemnation, for they are one and the same: they are a testimony and confession of Christ as the only way of salvation by faith in his

name over against the false doctrine of faith and obedience as the way of salvation in the Protestant Reformed Churches that is showing itself by declaring the truth antinomian and by adding works to faith as the way to fellowship with God.

5. It would be unfaithfulness to Christ to flee any part of the battlefield. I fear him more who can kill the body and soul in hell, rather than those who can merely kill the body.

IV. I protest the decision as an infringement on my liberty to confess Christ as a believer and an effort to bind my conscience and bring me into bondage to man's opinions, wisdom, and perceptions.

A. The Apostle Paul defended the gospel by exactly such a defense of his liberty.

1. "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And that because [of] false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:3-5).

2. Paul did not reject circumcision as a thing damnable in itself. For he was circumcised and so he also circumcised Timothy. To be circumcised or not was his liberty in the gospel.

3. He rejected circumcision for righteousness and thus those who declared the salvation of Titus in jeopardy if he was not circumcised and who thus made it a sin for him not to be circumcised.

B. The same is my defense of my involvement in *Sword and Shield*.

1. To write or not write in *Sword and Shield* is a thing indifferent in itself. If someone attaches sin to my writing the truth in a magazine that has stood for the truth, and about which the consistory previously said there was nothing wrong with my writing in it, then I cannot give it up without giving up the gospel that gave me that liberty.

2. The consistory has done precisely that by declaring that my involvement has and continues to be divisive, a baseless assertion without ground or evidence, that I must reject.

3. I have in Christ Jesus the liberty to write or not to write in a magazine. But now that you have declared it sinful by declaring it divisive, I cannot, without compromise of the gospel of grace and the liberty that it gives to me, give place to you, not for one hour.

C. This in accordance with the Apostle's exhortation, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ

hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

1. The consistory would take away my liberty and declare it to be sin.

2. The consistory would entangle me with their declarations of sin (divisiveness), entangle me in the wisdom of men, in the perceptions and opinions of men, and in the fear of man, which is a snare.

V. I protest the decision because by it the consistory declares the truth of God and the gospel to be divisive, which charge I must reject as an attack on the truth.

A. It cannot be denied by anyone that *Sword and Shield* has written and promoted anything other than the Reformed, Protestant Reformed truth, and that over against false doctrine that makes works part of the way to fellowship with God, and so compromises justification by faith alone, the unconditionality of the covenant, and the perfect sufficiency of Christ as the only way to the Father (John 14:6).

B. The ministers who are writing in the magazine have shown themselves to be faithful ministers of Christ and his truth and opponents of the lie that militates against it. Not one word has been alleged against their doctrine.

C. The consistory calls my participation in this divisive.

1. By that I understand sinfully schismatic for that is the only divisiveness that can be condemned. For the truth always causes unrest and division.

2. Passages could be cited almost without number showing that. For instance, Christ says that when he comes he brings a sword: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword (Mat. 10:34).

3. It is ever true that when the Word of God, the truth of God, which is Christ, comes that there is unrest and divisions. Only the preaching of the truth can do that. Through that Christ keeps his sheep. When the Word of God, the pure gospel of salvation by grace alone comes there are divisions, but the consistory means that those divisions are caused by my mere involvement in *Sword and Shield* and that thus I am causing schism. Not merely after the deposition, but from its inception the magazine and my participation has been branded as divisive.

4. This I reject. The truth however and wherever it comes does not cause schism. Schism is division from Christ, to separate from Christ, the only head. The truth never does that. The truth ever gathers Christ's sheep, it ever feeds them, and it ever unites his sheep to Christ, though it cut off the whole world in the process and though all men rail against it and hate it. My writing in *Sword and Shield* has been the truth and will continue to be the truth.

5. It is evil to lay the blame for the divisions on Christ and his truth. This may never be done and I cannot acquiesce in such a decision that so boldly does exactly that.

D. The consistory's calling is not merely to point out that there is division, for when the truth comes, there always is division.

1. The consistory's calling is not merely to decry the division. But the consistory's calling is to analyze division properly. This the consistory did not do, but simply laid the blame for division on me and on a magazine that proclaims the truth, and that without any evidence, but by baseless assertion.
2. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:18-19 does not only point out divisions, but the cause of them and thus where the blame lies: "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."
3. He notes that there was division. This division is the reason that the church came together for the worse.
4. The blame for division is not laid at the feet of the truth, or those that taught the truth, but at the feet of heresy, a word to be understood in its broadest meaning as the bad doctrine itself and the lack of faith and love for the truth that leads to heresy and the rejection of the truth.
5. That the truth has come clearly and pointed the lie out clearly is not the cause of division, but the rejection of that word from a lack of faith and love of the truth. Division was and is being caused in the PRC by false doctrine that is abounding. At the feet of that false doctrine and those that teach and defend it, the blame for division must be laid.

VI. I protest the decision because it infringes on my calling as a minister of the word by preaching *and writing* to declare the truth and refute the error.

A. This calling of the minister is laid out in Scripture.

1. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto [you] of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jud 1:3).
2. Paul and the other Apostles along with the prophets not only preached against false doctrine and false teachers, but wrote against them as well, which writings are our Bible, and also including other letters that are mentioned in the Bible (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9, 11; Col. 4:16).

B. The calling is easily proved from history and from our forms.

1. All the great Church Fathers and Reformers were avid and able preachers and writers against the lie.
2. The origin of our churches is tied with the formation of the RFPA and the *Standard Bearer* and the writing against false doctrine.
3. Our consistory has gone on record that they encourage their ministers to write and this has a distinguished history in our church.
4. It is implied in the *Formula of Subscription* that ministers write when it says "by preaching or writing."
5. The Form for the Ordination of the Ministers says, "That they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord, revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostles; and apply the same as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers...and refuting with the Holy Scriptures all schisms and heresies which are repugnant to the pure doctrine."

C. To this task the minister, and your minister in particular, has bound himself with an oath not only at his ordination, but his vow taken when he signed the *Formula of Subscription*:

1. "We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing..."
2. "We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod, but that we are *disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors.*"

D. Regarding my writing:

1. I have been shut out of the *Standard Bearer* and am forbidden to write either letter or article by editorial fiat until such a time as I confess the sin of breaking the ninth commandment of which they have accused me, a charge that they for over a year now have held against me but neither pursued with me nor with my consistory.
2. *Sword and Shield* is a platform given to me by the Lord to carry out this work particularly as to writing in the midst of an unsettled controversy over the unconditional covenant, justification by faith alone, and the perfect sufficiency of Christ's merits alone for fellowship with God, a fellowship entered by faith alone.

E. Regarding my preaching:

1. The discussion at the consistory when this motion was taken made perfectly plain that my testimony in *Sword and Shield* as it also comes in the preaching is also unwanted. The very analysis that there is a

controversy and how that is to be dealt with was called into question.

2. If the consistory wants to sit back in the midst of this contest, that is unfaithfulness on their part, for their vows are the same as mine, but then to hinder a man who will, is worse.
 3. The consistory is forbidding me to carry out my calling and be faithful to my vow as it pertains to *Sword and Shield* and at the very meeting where this was passed it was also made plain that the preaching needs to change too.
- F. Preaching and writing are obviously connected and thus I cannot resign, such would be unfaithfulness to my calling and my vow.
1. The works are in essence one: proclaim the truth and militate against the lie.
 2. To abandon one is ultimately to abandon the other. It is flight and disgrace.
 3. It is doing the work of the Lord deceitfully: “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). I am unwilling to bring myself under this curse of the Lord either by resigning from *Sword and Shield*, or by tailoring my preaching to the delicate sensibilities of those that do not want to hear sound doctrine and refutation of the lie, but want to hear peace, peace and smooth things, “Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:8-10).
- VII. I protest that by this decision the consistory lords it over their minister and engages in an unholy censorship of the truth.
- A. Article 84 of the church order, which is one of the most important articles in the church order, says, “No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders and deacons.”
1. Lording is a sin in Christ’s church because he is the sole lord and all the members are brethren. Lording is to assume authority where one has none and to dominate in the church by one’s opinions rather than by the word of God.
 2. Particularly regarding my witness and confession of Christ in *Sword and Shield*, a paper that is non-ecclesiastical by its own declaration and acknowledged to be such by the consistory’s own decision,

my right to give a witness does not rest on consistorial approval or disapproval, but rests on the command of Christ alone, “Confess me before men.”

3. It also belongs to my office of believer to give that witness and confession not first of all to my office of minister. It rests on my anointing that I have received from Christ to be a prophet to him and confess his name.
 4. It belongs to my freedom of conscience and liberty in the gospel to give that testimony before men.
 5. By demanding that I resign, the consistory has assumed the position of lord over my liberty, my conscience, and seeks to take away my right to confess Christ as a believer in this magazine. I will make this very plain. If I tell you that I am going to buy a car, a Ford, and you as a consistory take a decision that I must buy a Chevrolet, and further declare that since the whole congregation likes Chevrolet, that buying a Ford is and would be divisive, then you have made yourselves lords and assumed authority where you have none, and are ruling by opinion, and not the word of God. The consistory has simply asserted based on majority vote with no demonstration from the word of God that participation in *Sword and Shield* is and has been divisive, by which I understand sinfully dividing in Christ’s church. The consistory has declared by majority vote something free to be sinful. This is by definition lording.
 6. By including in its grounds the charge of divisiveness (schism) the consistory further lords it by making charges of sin against a righteous endeavor and against the truth, which I have only ever written, and which no one has otherwise alleged. The lords—not God, Christ, and Word of God—have now determined that writing in *Sword and Shield* is divisive and thus is sin.
- B. Involved in the lording is unholy censorship and that of the truth in direct violation of your calling and my calling in Article 55 of the church order that says, “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.”
1. The history of the article is that it was originally about censorship. That was what Rome did to the Reformation. That was what was brought into the Reformed Churches. That article was thankfully changed in 1905. Censorship is not the way to control unwanted writings, but refutation is the way to handle them. Open exposure and condemnation. That is biblical and Reformed. That is what is necessary especially today in the doctrinal climate we are in.

2. Censorship is what is going on. I am very familiar with censorship. My writings were censored in the *Standard Bearer* repeatedly until tiring of even the censorship the editors and staff unceremoniously removed me from a rubric. This motion also constitutes censorship. That was what the Roman Catholic hierarchy was very good at to make sure the truth did not get out.

3. *Sword and Shield* has only proclaimed the truth. The consistory has declared that divisive and demanded I remove myself from it. I cannot agree with that attitude and action toward the truth. I believe that it is an attempt to censor the truth and its free expression.

C. Still more, *Sword and Shield*, has defended the truth by refutation, the very requirement of Article 55, and has exposed error and false doctrine.

1. *Sword and Shield* is an instrument to do what Article 55 requires of all of you and the motion and grounds condemns the whole venture as sinful. Not merely that it is now that one of the editors is deposed, but that it *has been*.

2. I cannot agree with that. The consistory should urge the congregation to read *Sword and Shield* and their pastor's writings in it and not cater to the whims of men.

VIII. As a rather minor point, the consistory's ground one is merely an assertion and does not give a reason why it is a ground for requiring me to resign and stop writing or promoting the magazine. The reasoning behind it can only be guessed at.

A. In answer to it, and refuting it, the ground makes the consistory guilty of hypocrisy.

1. If ministers cannot work with other ministers or associate with other ministers who are charged with sin by our churches, certainly a position that I can go along with, that by implication would apply to the elders too.

2. I wonder out loud if the elders hold themselves to this standard in their associations?

B. Further, our ministers, including those under your oversight, are/were members of associations with men who hold to false doctrine, are divorced and remarried, and caused schism in their own denominations.

1. We not only work with them, and stand with them on associations, but also send our prospective professors to their seminaries to be educated, and have them at our seminary for conferences.

2. I again wonder out loud if the consistory justly applies this standard they set?

C. Further, the consistory seems not to reckon with the reality that the charge against the deposed minister and all the accusations against him are open for protest, and

that if I believe that they conflict with the word of God I may not hold them as settled and binding in my conscience or life without obeying God rather than men.

1. If you charge a man with sin and I do not believe he is guilty of sin, and then you excommunicate him, and I still do not believe he is guilty of sin, not only am I going to protest that unjust and evil application of discipline, but I will associate with the man you cast out as well.

2. I firmly believe, and have so informed the synod by way of protest, that the decision to depose Rev. Lanning was sinful, and that for it, the churches will be judged by Christ Jesus.

3. Christ did just that with the blind man healed by Christ that the rulers cast out of the church for confessing Christ. John 9:34-35 "They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

4. What a lovely action by Christ to associate with a man that the church sinfully cast out.

I request that the consistory rescind its decision and declare it to be in error.

Since the whole motion to require me to resign is based on the action of [the] denomination to depose Rev. A Lanning, I request that the consistory have a discussion of the decision and grounds for his deposition to see that those grounds are fallacious and the action was sinful and that discussion be had on the consistory protesting that decision to depose. Still more, urgently, that discussion be had in the consistory to see that the false doctrine that was condemned is in fact rearing its head again in the churches. If this doctrine gains the upper hand, then we will lose the gospel to the destruction of the churches, our generations, and souls. Herein lies my greatest concern and the main reason I will not resign. The truth is at stake at present in the PRC. This I regard as the most important point. I must continue the battle.

I request that the consistory require retraction and apology on the part of the elders who assailed the preaching, or, if they maintain their charges against the preaching, that they be required to file formal charges against the minister's preaching with the consistory to prove their charges.

Cordially in Christ,
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

The answer to my protest was suspension. Crete Protestant Reformed Church was finished with contending earnestly for the faith and with the gospel.

—NJL

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.—Romans 12:1

IMPLICIT FAITH

That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.
—1 Corinthians 2:5

Implicit faith is a fatal dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. It is the teaching of the hierarchy of Rome as a means of self-preservation. Implicit faith is imposed upon “the faithful” according to their essential position as “the faithful.” Their position (and salvation) as “the faithful” is their faithfulness to the hierarchy of Rome, with the pope at its head.

Simply put, implicit faith is the doctrine that the faith by which one is saved is a belief that whatever the church teaches is true, even though one does not personally know what the church teaches. The content of faith is the teaching of the church. This faith does not consider whether or not what the church teaches is true or false. The reason it is called *implicit* is because it does not have respect to doctrine that is *explicitly* spelled out so that the believer can understand what the church teaches. Implicit faith is not concerned with various teachings or doctrines that can be spelled out with words. Implicit faith simply rests upon all that the church teaches.

By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*Magisterium*),...receives...the faith, once for all delivered to the saints...The People unfaithfully adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.¹

There are a number of reasons for the doctrine of implicit faith as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The first reason is that the body of doctrines established and taught by Rome is a chaotic, entirely confused and erroneous mass of tangled doctrines. In addition, there are three sources of doctrinal authority for Rome: the Bible, the writings of the fathers, and the traditions. That there are these three authoritative sources is evident from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Many of its statements

have footnotes that give authoritative references. Unlike the Reformed Heidelberg Catechism, the *Catechism* of the Roman Catholic Church cites not only scripture but also decisions of various councils and writings of the church fathers. The recognition of these three authorities and of the authority of the church to determine what is truth is seen in the following quotation from the *Catechism*:

It is clear therefore that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls. (29)

This additional quotation gives the right to interpret scripture to “the Magisterium”:

The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him. (30)

A second reason for the doctrine of implicit faith is the staggering volume of material that the Roman Catholic Church presents as the proper object of the faith of the faithful. Doctrines, teachings, and decisions of assemblies and councils have come into being through the centuries of Rome’s history. Theologians who dedicate their lives to poring through this material cannot comprehend it all, much less find enough consistency to come to any certain conclusion about exactly what must be believed.

Suppose a son of a Reformed denomination would desire to make confession of faith in one of its churches. Suppose that that son’s consistory would tell him that in order to confess his faith he would have to confess submission to

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 28. Pages for subsequent quotations from the *Catechism* are given in text.

all the decisions taken by the assemblies of the denomination. Could he stand before God and God's people and say that he submits to all those decisions, decisions not only of the synods but also of the classes and consistories of the denomination? Impossible would be that much reading of the *Acts* of synods, of the minutes and committee reports of all the denominational assemblies and bodies. It would be impossible even to obtain all the material, most of which would not have been published. The only faith that he could confess would be an implicit faith.

Besides, what if those taking up special offices in a church would be required to submit to all the decisions of the assemblies of the denomination? Could even the professors of theology consciously agree to uphold all the decisions of those assemblies, when the professors do not know them all? Must they not instead profess implicit faith?

Implicit faith is not confined within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church. Implicit faith is indeed taught and maintained by that apostate institution. However, implicit faith is not just a name. Implicit faith is not merely a name to be affirmed or rejected by an institution. Nor is it merely a name to be denied by an institution or persons, so that it does not exist wherever it is denied. Even though this false dogma has been deliberately and openly rejected in Protestantism, today implicit faith is an open, striking phenomenon in Protestantism. Implicit faith is found in much of evangelicalism and even in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles.

Implicit faith has respect to institutions. Implicit faith underlies the statement, "Whatever." "Whatever the consistory decides." "Whatever classis decides." "Whatever synod decides." For officebearers delegated to broader assemblies, implicit faith looks to certain respected leaders in the church. "Whatever" direction these leaders lean is sure to be the direction the assembly will move. When officebearers abdicate their responsibility to know and understand matters before them in the light of scripture for the sake of following the direction established by their leaders, there is implicit faith. In these same circles, where leaders and assemblies are questioned, deep hostility is the result. The cause for that hostility is that implicit faith is certainly under attack.

Implicit faith is the reason that celebrity pastors can gain such a following. Though found guilty of abuse or financial malfeasance or heresy, they continue uninterrupted to enjoy their following and prominence. Prominent leaders abuse the authority of church institutions to cover their oppression of members of churches or even of other officebearers, and these leaders further abuse the authority of the institutions to silence those speaking out against the oppression. Those bold enough to stand against the openly oppressive face deep hostility

and resentment from others who have fastened all their well-being to the institution. "How dare they question the integrity and validity of these time-honored and God-favored institutions and their godly leaders?"

Implicit faith is really a form of idolatry. It is a form of idolatry that transfers what belongs to God alone to the creature. Implicit faith is truly trust in and devotion to an institution that substitutes the institution for God. It is trust in and devotion to certain men who are often prominent in such institutions rather than simple trust in and devotion to God alone.

This evil idolatry of implicit faith thinks that when it says "God," it is really saying "church" and that when it says "scripture," it is really saying "decisions." Implicit faith cannot lay hold on the invisible, spiritual God and cannot find the solid foundation of God's word alone. Implicit faith must find a carnal object, one that can be detected and known with the earthly senses. So implicit faith lays hold on the visible church and makes it a substitute for all that is spiritual. The confession of implicit faith is not that of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe an holy catholic church." But implicit faith confesses, "I believe in the church." "I believe in my church." "I believe in my denomination."

It is a point that can be debated whether one is confronted with hierarchy in the church or oligarchy (rule by a few) in the church. Looking at the situation from a formal viewpoint, one sees hierarchy. Emphasis is placed on the federation or denomination rather than on individual churches. Authority is exercised from the top down. The more major the assembly, for example, synod, the greater the authority is perceived. But looking at the same situation more deeply, it becomes evident that the major assemblies themselves are controlled by a few men. No real discussion takes place on the floor of such assemblies. The majority of delegates cannot explain the matters debated on the floor, let alone argue *pro* or *con*. The delegates know how they ought to vote, being guided by the few esteemed and honored oligarchs among them.

Both hierarchy and oligarchy are oppressive in the church of Jesus Christ. Both are contrary to the word of God and the freedom of that word as the liberating power preached to the church of Jesus Christ as the company of believers and their seed. The gospel constantly calls the people of God out of bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The truth makes them truly free, free to worship and serve their God from the heart.

As opposed as hierarchy and oligarchy are to the liberty of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so opposed is implicit faith to true faith in that gospel. How is such liberty so easily traded away for the yoke of hierarchical bondage? How is such a gift as true faith so easily traded away for implicit faith?

One answer to that question is that hierarchy is a powerful temptation of Satan to lead the church astray from its true foundation: Christ alone, as taught by scripture alone. The enemy of the church gradually closes the eyes of her members and slowly robs the members of their discernment. The devil works subtly to shift loyalty to Christ over to loyalty to the church. Satan will shift fidelity to the truth of God's word over to fidelity to ecclesiastical decisions that at first honored that truth. Satan will encourage trust in the men who bring the word of God, rather than trust in the word that they bring. In short, Satan will work to substitute implicit faith in the place of true faith.

For the maintenance of true faith and the rejection of implicit faith, there are signs of hierarchy and the implicit faith that complements it.

The first sign is the abuse of article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt. One phrase is taken out of this article and given a position of supreme importance: "Whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 390). As this phrase is given a position of supreme importance, the phrase's absolute character is made to stand on the foreground. Of supreme importance is "majority vote" and that in connection with the word "whatever." Of supreme importance is how ecclesiastical decisions must be taken in the churches. These decisions must be received as "settled and binding." Not merely considered but actually and truly "settled and binding." Every member must submit to these decisions.

The strength of this first sign becomes evident when members and officebearers express reservations about matters before a meeting of a broader assembly. They are fearful that their words might be found to be contradicted by a synodical decision, that they might need to repent of them or at least repudiate them. The strength of this first sign is also apparent when men in leadership remain tight-lipped about their views because synod has not spoken.

The second sign is closely connected with the first. A reason is given for this settled and binding character of the majority decisions of assemblies. That reason is the Holy Spirit's guidance of these assemblies in making their decisions. Quoted so many times are the words of Acts 15:28: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us." These words were first applied to the council of Jerusalem, whose occasion and meeting is recorded in Acts 15. The Holy Spirit convened that assembly. The Holy Spirit gave its delegates the words that they spoke. The Holy Spirit gave those delegates their deliberations, both their speeches and their thoughts. Finally, the Holy Spirit gave the council its final decision, which was published by the council and distributed to the churches through the apostles. That council of Jerusalem, part of sacred history, is declared to be not

only the model and example for all subsequent councils, that is, the deliberative assemblies of the churches. But that council is also declared to be proof and evidence that all the deliberative assemblies of the church have the same operating guidance of the Holy Spirit as did the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. For this reason it would surely be proper that the deliverances of these councils (consistories, classes, and synods) begin with the phrase "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us" and that such deliverances ought then to be received in the churches as the deliverances not of men but of God the Holy Spirit.

Bolstering this second point is what is said to be true of the officebearers at such assemblies: they operate in the power of the Holy Spirit as they exercise their offices in the deliberative assemblies. The authority that they exercise in their deliberations is the office of Christ. Christ by his Holy Spirit operates through these offices.

Members of churches are then blanketed with writings, sermons, and speeches that emphasize the Holy Spirit's guidance of the deliberative assemblies. A common feature of all these presentations is that their beginning point is neither the word of God nor the deliberative assembly that is so prominent in the word of God, rule of the local congregation by elders ordained in that local congregation. The beginning point is the deliberations and decisions of the most major assembly, the synod. There is the authority. There is the rule of Christ.

These first two signs in combination yield their results for implicit faith. Decisions of synods will be questioned. The decisions will be questioned sometimes in simple discussions among members of the church and sometimes in protests. Those questions and protests will be met with anger or with the appeal to be content with the Spirit's work in the churches or with direction to read the *Acts of Synod*. But those questions and protests will not be met with the simplicity of scripture. True faith is thus discouraged in favor of implicit faith.

Another result for implicit faith is that decisions of hierarchical assemblies become confused and bewildering. Their decisions become an incoherent mass, which ends up being self-contradictory in multiple ways. As true faith that seeks understanding according to the rule of God's word is confronted with this mass of decisions, that faith is deeply discouraged. Where is the straight line of the truth? How does one sort this all out? Far easier it is for implicit faith to take over and use the confusion to maintain loyalty to the institution responsible for the confusion. "Never mind the mess. Our leaders know what they are doing; all we need to do is trust them. They will lead us in the right path."

(To be continued with a third sign of hierarchy)

—MVW

DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (7)

My satire, sustained satisfactorily, subsides. Shepsema, sullen, speechless, his septic suppositions smashed in pieces like a potter's vessel, swoons. His devotees—disheartened, disconcerted—despair. Satisfied, Jamestra and Paulsema serenely stride straightway, their spotless stage safeguarded by six stout steeds, steering straightly—*gerechtvaardigd naar huis terug*—as sweet hosannas ring: “In Christ's coach we sweetly sing, as we to glory”—without works—“ride therein.” *Welgelukzalig zijn allen, die op Hem betrouwen! Die zichzelf verhoogt, zal vernederd worden, doch wie zichzelf vernedert, zal verhoogt worden.*

Introduction

As I said in my previous metaphor about chasing Norman Shepherd through the forest of scripture verses with which he impales his readers, my plan was to send my imaginary bloodhound after him, and I would wait at the end, knowing he was merely making a large circle and would eventually return to his hiding place. Now I believe I have located that hiding place, and the time has come for the end of this theological shenanigan. It is shotgun time.

My bloodhound first chased Shepherd quite quickly through James. Although Shepherd insists on it, James said nothing about forensic justification by faith and works. James never would, could, or did. It is a blatant deception but a most *necessary launching platform* to get Shepherd's theory off the ground. After that, my bloodhound pursued him through Matthew. But Matthew 25 said nothing about a forensic justification at the last judgment. That is a critical falsehood. Although it is important to Shepherd's puzzle, James and Matthew are his weakest links, which has been pointed out numerous times.

Still after him, my bloodhound's pursuit revealed Shepherd is completely wrong about Paul. Shepherd tries to make Paul say that justification is by a penitent and obedient faith, that is, a working faith. In fact, Paul said, “If that were true, ‘then Christ is dead in vain’” (Gal. 2:21). Paul taught that as God engrafts us into Christ by his Spirit and Christ begins to live in us, we are justified by a faith that is

alone (John 6:44, 65; 15:4–5; Eph. 1:3–4).

Shepherd's third chapter twists John the Baptist's words in an attempt to make them agree with Shepherd that man's repentance is necessary for justification. However, when I examine this, I find that John agreed with Paul against Shepherd. Shepherd attempts the same with our Lord's words, but our savior also rejected Shepherd's contention that repentance is necessary for justification. That ends the third chapter of *The Way of Righteousness* and leaves two remaining chapters.¹

To finish my work after examining the third chapter, I will skip to the fifth and end my exposure of this complete fraudulence. That will be when the chase through Shepherd's forest of scripture passages finally comes to an end, and we will have arrived at Shepherd's secret hideout. There is a name for this place. In literary work it is called a “rabbit hole,” that being a term for things getting *deliberately* buried or intentionally hidden from someone.

No Holy Spirit

I discovered Shepherd's “rabbit hole” by reading his chapter on our Lord's view of justification. It was amazing! Shocking. Even appalling. Having read what Norman Shepherd writes about James, Paul, and our Lord in *The Way of Righteousness*—forty-four pages of so-called Reformed theology—I found that he writes *nothing* about the Holy Spirit. That's right. *Zero*. Three chapters on justification and salvation in James, Paul, and our Lord and *not one* meaningful word, comment, or explanatory sentence about the Holy Spirit's involvement in the faith, justification, and obedience of sinners. *Not one word!* That is appalling.

Oh, yes, there are three *pro forma* verses quoted that *name* the Holy Spirit, but in three chapters there is not one sentence, explanation, or comment by Shepherd about what the Holy Spirit does in the justification and salvation of sinners. *Nothing!*

However, there are some very curious qualifications. First, in these three chapters on James, Paul, and our Lord, God's Spirit is *named* four times. In his chapter on James, Shepherd says, “The Holy Spirit did not

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

give us an obscure, misleading, or defective statement of the gospel in James” (20). That’s all Shepherd says of the Holy Spirit in that whole chapter—just the Spirit’s work in the inspiration of James’ epistle. How sad. By that remark Shepherd’s ulterior motive is showing. Only one mention of God’s Spirit, and that merely to establish solid ground for his theory of James 2:24 before having to deal with Paul’s statements that contradict that theory.

The same absence of the Spirit is found in Shepherd’s chapter on Paul. Shepherd quotes one verse, Galatians 5:5: “By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (39). That’s it. The verse is merely stated. Its appearance and unexplained meaning serve only to support Shepherd’s vital commitment to a *future* forensic judgment, that is, *waiting* for the righteousness we hope for. Shepherd also uses the text to support his false idea that believers secure righteousness *only* at the last judgment. Other than that questionable use of Galatians 5:5, there is not one substantive word of explanation in Shepherd’s chapter on Paul about the actual, decisive work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s coming to faith and justification.

Then, finally, in his chapter on our Lord, Shepherd quotes without comment Matthew 28:19–20, the Great Commission, and Acts 2:38, Peter’s statement on Pentecost (53–54). Both verses *name* the Holy Spirit; but again, not a word of explanation concerning the gracious ministry of the Spirit.

That is the extent of Norman Shepherd’s references to the Holy Spirit in his forty-four pages of so-called Reformed theology about justification in his chapters on James, Paul, and our Lord.

Second, and even more curious, is the fact that Norman Shepherd, in his *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*² defended at the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1978, made several references to the Holy Spirit, but *none* of those references to the Spirit appear in any meaningful way in his three chapters on James, Paul, and our Lord.

Here are those references from 1978 (emphasis added):

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 bring that love to expression through obedience to God (West. Conf. of Faith XI, 2).

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).

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 (1 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.

31. Because faith is called for in all gospel proclamation, exhortations to obedience do not cast men upon their own resources to save themselves,

2 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>. These theses were presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on November 18, 1978.

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.

Observing these references to the Holy Spirit, the reader must keep in mind my earlier *assertion* and *proof* that Norman Shepherd's work involves formal agreement with the complete Reformed understanding of calling, justification, sanctification and glorification; *but all of it is accompanied by significant subtle and subverting qualifications, making all of it conditional.* These qualifications mock God's justice, invalidate Christ's righteousness, deny the decisiveness of the Holy Spirit's work, make the covenant of grace conditional, and undermine the believer's eternal security!

Briefly note these subtle, subverting qualifications.

In thesis 10 there is the false and unbiblical claim that justifying faith is not alone. But Romans 3:28 and 4:5 demonstrate that faith *is* alone.

In 19 notice the subtle qualification of a forfeitable "state of justification." Why? It is forfeitable because only if believers "walk in the *Spirit* and keep covenant with God" will they "be justified on the day of judgment," according to Shepherd's false notion of forensic justification at the last judgment.

In 23 notice the subtle, unbiblical notion of "continuing in the state of justification" by means of obedient faith, repentance, and good works.

In 24 notice the confounding of works of the law and works of faith to make room for Shepherd's notion that the latter are involved in justification. He actually says in his book, "The point in all of this is that Jesus makes justification contingent upon obedience" (61).

Question: Is this the origin of the statement "There is that which a man must do to be saved"?

And in 31 notice what I call Shepherd's formal, covering remark about the Holy Spirit in these words: "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." I call those mere covering words because Shepherd never includes them, elaborates on them, or incorporates them into the response of the "whole man" to the gospel in his chapters on James, Paul, or our Lord. Actually, those covering words completely and conveniently *disappear* down the rabbit hole, as is plainly seen by Shepherd's omission in those three chapters of *any* explanation of the Spirit's decisive work.

Why does Shepherd hide the decisive fact that our Lord, at the very beginning of his ministry, instructed

Nicodemus and all of us about the Holy Spirit—that the new birth and every movement of the elect sinner, from being drawn to Christ to final glorification, is effectively caused by the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 3:8)? Why does Shepherd conceal the fact that Jesus said that no one can come to him unless the Holy Spirit regenerates, indwells, and draws him (6:63)?

When writing about Paul, why does Shepherd bury the fact that Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit would "quicken [our] mortal bodies" (Rom. 8:9, 11)? Why not enthusiastically tell his readers that Paul wrote that we are led by the Spirit, walk in the Christian life by the Holy Spirit, and repent or put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (vv. 4, 13–14)? Why mysteriously hide the fact that Paul said that it is the decisive power of the Holy Spirit that fills the believer with all joy and peace in believing (15:13)? Why does Shepherd mask the fact that no one can say "Jesus is the Lord" except by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3)? Why not elaborate on this God-glorifying verse: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son *into* your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6)? Why did all that go into the rabbit hole?

Very incriminating, especially when we remember how often—thirteen times in three pages—Shepherd trumpets his false view of Christ's blood *alone* justifying the sinner. In this you see that what Shepherd considers important appears prolifically in his writing. Thirteen times the reader is bathed in that false theory, but not once in that chapter—not in a single sentence—does Shepherd explain the precious Holy Spirit's *decisive* activity in the Father's drawing sinners to Christ and the Spirit's *decisive* part in the effective calling, union with Christ, and salvation of those sinners.

And how often in the first three chapters does Shepherd repeat his false statement that sinners are justified by a penitent and obedient faith at the last judgment? I didn't count, but it must have been dozens. This is unbelievable. There must be a hidden reason (hint: there is!) that Shepherd continually teaches that sinners must repent, sinners must believe, sinners must obey, without ever explaining how faith is created in the sinner, how the sinner is enabled to confess Christ, how the sinner is enabled to repent and obey! Why is Shepherd doing this?

Where is the grace of God in forty-four pages about man's repenting, man's obeying, man's believing, and man's being justified? One simply does not read any of it, even though Shepherd *claims* that all of these things are of "pure grace" (63). Also, what of Shepherd's claim in thesis 31 regarding "the promise of the Spirit to accompany the proclamation of the whole counsel of God"? Where is any of it in these three chapters? It went down the rabbit hole.

That is my *first blast* at Shepherd's false theology. It is as plain as day what Mr. Shepherd is hiding from his readers. Three chapters without ever learning anything of God's Holy Spirit.

Instead, Shepherd summarizes his idea of the good news with this: "*The point in all of this is that Jesus makes justification contingent upon obedience*" (61; emphasis added).

Shepherd's Failures

Then, to add *another blast* at Shepherd's theology, I summarize his failures before completing my review of these "garments spotted by the flesh."

First, I have pointed out how Shepherd takes advantage of the English language, using the questionable translation of the English Standard Version, and particularly the mistranslation of the Greek word that may mean either *justification* or *vindication*.³ That translation problem became acute because the King James translators used "justified" when James intended *vindicated* in James 2:14–26. Even Luther, an expert linguist, puzzled by this situation, was tempted to give up on James.

It is my conviction that James guided us to understand which usage was meant because James was definitely opposed to justification by faith and works (as demonstrated) and, therefore, he would have avoided confusion in his usage of that Greek word. This was especially true because James was familiar with how our Lord used the Greek word. James was also familiar with the ongoing controversy in his day regarding justification by faith alone versus the Pharisees' faith-and-works doctrine, which he opposed at the Jerusalem Council.

James' *rule* was this: the *context* decides the meaning intended by that Greek word. If the context involves works, as in James 2:14–26, the Greek word means *to vindicate*; and if the context is without works or against works, the Greek word means *to forensically justify*, that is, justification. Therefore, we have the important clarification of James 2:24 that a man is *vindicated* by works and not by faith alone and of Romans 2:13 that not the hearers of the law will be *vindicated*, but the doers of the law shall be *vindicated*. My proof is that "doers of the law" in Romans 2:13 involves works; and the context points to the future, to the last judgment, which is about vindication.

Second, I reinforced a most important truth in Matthew 25:31–46 by demonstrating that the text is about the *vindication* of God the Father and Christ and definitely *not* about forensic justification, as Shepherd repeatedly and falsely claims. That is his second biggest

blunder. I demonstrated that in Matthew 25 God is vindicated in his election and reprobation by revealing the works the elect and reprobate have done, which also clarifies the following verses: Matthew 12:36–37; 16:27; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:6–13; 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:8; Colossians 3:25; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; James 2:12–13; 1 John 4:17; Jude 14–15; and Revelation 20:12; 22:12.

Third, I demonstrated that Paul's words "justified by faith without the deeds of the law" in Romans 3:28 are clarified in Romans 4:4–5; so it is clear that Paul's meaning is "justified by a faith that is *alone*"—a faith that is not working, not *doing* anything, but just believing—thereby affirming the Reformed confessions (Belgic Confession 24; Heidelberg Catechism LD 7).

Fourth, Shepherd begins with James because Shepherd thinks he finds there the beginning proof of his errant view of faith and justification. Shepherd believes that James introduces some new idea of faith that includes repentance and obedience, which Shepherd labels penitent and obedient faith. From that starting point he makes justification to be by a man's obedient faith—extending obedient faith all the way to the final judgment, which Shepherd repeatedly says will also be forensic justification by an obedient faith—and finally admits that justification is by works (61). That construction turns out to be his weakest link, because, as demonstrated, James never says any of it. Having set up that false theory about James, Shepherd also fails miserably to verify it with Matthew 25, which, as demonstrated, is not about justification. That view is finally shipwrecked on Romans 4:5. Justifying faith "worketh not, but believeth."

Shepherd's next abuse is his attempt to force his idea of final justification by working faith into James' words, claiming that James has the last judgment in the background of his epistle. Shepherd's deceptive use of James 1:21; 3:1; 4:12; and 5:7–9, 12, and 20 was exposed by careful attention to the text and context, pointing out Shepherd's continual misrepresentations based on his shallow, selective English Bible usage.

Fifth, Shepherd develops the idea that in Romans "works of the law" are minor works done by the Jews as their unbelieving efforts to justify themselves so that Shepherd can plausibly dismiss those works as the works Paul rejected for justification, thereby making room for the necessity of obedient faith and its required works for justification. Shepherd even twists Paul's statements that justification is not by works—which Shepherd says were aimed at Jewish efforts of self-righteous unbelief—to

3 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 196.

provide cover for his own faith-works justification. This fabrication crashes because Romans 4:5 makes clear that justifying faith is alone; it does no work or any doing.

Forgiveness in Jesus' Ministry

Now I go into Shepherd's third chapter, which he begins by saying that what is "startlingly new" in our Lord's ministry is that "Jesus himself claims to forgive sin!" (48).

Shepherd mentions the paralytic of Matthew 9:1–8 and calls attention to Jesus' words "Son, your sins are forgiven" (48), but Shepherd provides no explanation for the actual words of Jesus nor for the all-important word "son." Shepherd cannot explain because that would contradict his whole misuse of the text.

Using the Greek perfect tense (*ἀφέωνται*; see Luke 5:20), which indicates that the paralytic's sins had been forgiven before he came to Jesus for healing,⁴ Jesus said to the paralytic, "Your sins *have been* forgiven." Thus the paralytic's coming indicated vindication of his faith. That is why verse 2 says, "Jesus *seeing* their faith"—meaning seeing their faith in him—which was justifying faith and the forgiveness of sins.

Also, the word "son" refers to the son of Abraham and to Jesus' fulfilling the promise of the Abrahamic covenant, giving forgiveness and salvation to God's elect *sons* of Abraham. But Shepherd doesn't want forgiveness sovereignly given because it indicates election and God's covenant faithfulness, of which Shepherd writes nothing in his chapter on Jesus' ministry. Again, by ignoring the context and picking one element from it to suit his purpose, the text of Matthew 9:1–8 is abused; our Lord's ministry as the promised savior of Israel disappears; and Shepherd seems to have proved his point. Typical Shepherd.

The woman in Luke 7:36–50 is another example of that. It is quite characteristic that Shepherd gives no explanation of Jesus' words "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven [Greek perfect tense]; for she loved much" (v. 47). Again, if Shepherd would explain, it would contradict his false theory. All Shepherd finds in this text is that "Jesus...revealed himself once again as the Son of God with power to forgive sin" (49).

However, the Greek indicates much more, particularly against Shepherd. The Greek indicates Jesus said that the woman had been forgiven before she came to Jesus, before her loving deeds were done to him and not because of them. Again, the Greek perfect tense indicates completed action with present effects. That was our Lord's own contradiction of Shepherd's penitent faith

that justifies. Her penitent deeds were *vindication* of her faith in Jesus and used by him to illustrate Simon's lack of forgiveness by his lack of love for Jesus. Having abused another text, thinking it supports his purpose, Shepherd says, "This is the gospel that we find in the gospels" (49). By that comment he thinks he has demonstrated in our savior's own words justification by penitent faith. However, when faithfully explained, that text contradicts Shepherd. The text says that the woman believed in Jesus (was justified by faith alone) and *then* expressed her faith in loving deeds.

See how Jesus confirmed that with his parable of the two debtors. Before the debtors did anything, their debts had been forgiven (Luke 7:42). Then Jesus asked Simon, which of the two would *then* show greater love? That is, which would show greater *response* to having his debt forgiven? To illustrate his point Jesus directed Simon to the woman's loving deeds. Our Lord's teaching is that those who are forgiven much will then (after being justified) love much. But here again you see typical Shepherd. He snatches a few words out of context and holds them up to the reader as proof of his (false) theory. I have demonstrated this insidious technique multiple times.

Then notice another disreputable technique. He links together a few texts that he does not faithfully explain. After Luke 7:36–50, Shepherd goes to Luke 23:34, our savior's words "Father, *forgive* them," to which Shepherd adds Hebrews 9:22: "Without the shedding of blood there is no *forgiveness*." Then, sweeping together the words *forgive* and *forgiveness*, the usual conclusion comes forth. What else? Of course, Shepherd's constant refrain about *forgiveness* of sin by Christ's blood *alone* (49). I have extensively corrected Shepherd on that denial of atonement day, which demands pointing out that his view puts him in company with Nadab and Abihu, who sadly also disregarded the Lord's atonement-day requirements.

Why would this blood-alone trick be so important to Shepherd? Why thirteen times in four pages? Because without Christ's lifelong righteousness, believers are naked! They have no lifelong righteousness that meets the demands of God's perfect holiness, and they never will because their good works (by grace) are always imperfect! They will be forever naked and hiding from God. Exactly what Satan did to Adam and Eve. However, God gave them new skins (robes), the symbol of Christ's lifelong righteousness (because when you take an animal's skin, you take its whole identity and not

4 "Completed Action, conveyed by the perfect stem, emphasizes the existing condition or state resulting from prior action," in Bastiaan Van Elderen, *New Testament Greek Study Aids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary), 8.

merely its blood). Blood alone puts Shepherd in very bad company.

But Shepherd runs with this blood-alone gambit, thinking he has been successful, and adds, “We cannot leave this point without referring to the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14)” (49).

I have previously dealt with Luke 18:9–14.⁵ In a parable Jesus creates a contrast between a self-righteous Pharisee’s trusting in his works for justification and a tax collector’s trusting in nothing but God’s mercy. Shepherd’s comment on this parable is this: “Here was a sinner who acknowledged and confessed his sin before the Lord asking only for mercy” (50). Shepherd adds this loaded statement: “This is what we mean by justification. The sinner is forgiven and is therefore now acceptable before God. He is in a right relationship with the Lord God. He is justified” (50).

This is another fine example of Shepherd’s adorning a text with his theory, while not truly dealing with the text or the context. Jesus’ point in the parable was not to teach how one *is* justified, but how one *is not* justified, that is, how one will never be justified by trusting in anything he does. Remember, the context is this: Jesus spoke this parable “unto certain [persons] which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9). In other words, the parable was addressed to the Pharisees. It was against *trusting in oneself, trusting in one’s doing*.

That is why Jesus made the parable a contrast between works and no works: because he was correcting the Pharisees’ doctrine of justification by faith and works. Even the positions of the two characters and their body language express this contrast between doing and not doing. The Pharisee *stood forward* and *prayed* loudly and clearly, *reciting* all his works (vv. 11–12). The publican stood “*afar off*.” He didn’t go forward. He didn’t recite any works. He did nothing. He didn’t even *look up* toward God. The publican was nothing (v. 13). Jesus made his parable a contrast between a typical Pharisee’s exalting himself by his *doing* and a poor sinner’s doing nothing because he realizes he can *do nothing*.

By this parable Jesus taught the Pharisees that justification is through faith alone in God’s appointed sacrifice, Jesus Christ. That was what the publican’s plea expressed. “Propitiate me! Apply the atonement sacrifice’s blood to me!” This parable proclaims the gospel: faith in Christ alone and nothing of self. Sadly, Shepherd makes it a parable that promotes trust in man’s doing, the very thing Jesus was condemning.

Injection of Obedient Faith into the Words of John the Baptist and Jesus

Shepherd’s next failure is his attempt to inject his view of obedient faith into the ministry of John the Baptist. More classic Shepherd. Shepherd points to John’s preaching and says that John told the Jews to “turn away from sin, to do what was right, and to produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8)” (50). Shepherd adds, “What John is calling for in his preaching is a penitent and obedient faith” (51). We should totally reject what Shepherd is attempting to do with John the Baptist’s words for the following reasons.

Keep in mind that John’s call to repent was proclaimed to those who were supposedly covenant members; so that “when he [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism,” he would naturally have commanded them to “bring forth therefore fruits *meet* for repentance” (Matt. 3:7–8). “Fruits meet for repentance” mean works appropriate to confirm repentance. John went on to say, “Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father” (v. 9).

Remember what I previously pointed out concerning the Pharisees’ *source* of justification and the importance of the special preposition (ἐκ) that the Spirit used in Romans 3:30 to emphasize that *source*.⁶

The Pharisees believed that their covenant membership, signified by circumcision; their (supposed) conformity to the law of Moses; and their being *descended* from Abraham was their *source* of justification (Acts 15:1, 5, 24; Rom. 2:17, 23; 4:13; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:3–6).

Therefore, the context of Matthew 3 indicates that John commanded those who claimed faith in God and presumed that they were justified to demonstrate their faith and justification by “fruits of repentance.” In other words, John demanded the Pharisees to *vindicate* their presumed justification by true repentance.

I call attention to the fact that James’ message to the dispersed Jews was very similar to John’s message to the presuming Pharisees about faith’s vindication by works.

Having said that, notice how slyly Shepherd distorts John’s call to vindicate one’s faith with true repentance: “Of special significance for the doctrine of justification is the fact that John preaches repentance, which is unto the forgiveness of sin” (51). Then Shepherd adds, “The fact that John preaches the forgiveness of sin and warns of a judgment to come brings us into the sphere of justification” (52).

Smooth as oil, sad as cancer. It is totally false. Contrary

5 Stuart Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (1),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 34.

6 Stuart Pastine, “Debating with the Devil (6),” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 15 (March 1, 2022): 26.

to Shepherd's words, justification is not mentioned; and we would not expect John, when preaching to a crowd of supposed covenant members who presumed to be justified, to do that. Rather, as a prophet in Israel, he would command the self-righteous Pharisees to vindicate their presumed justification by true repentance and then receive his baptism as a visible sign (fruit) of that repentance. Shepherd's mistake, again, is to disregard the context and falsely equate John's preaching to evangelizing a crowd of unbelievers rather than the forerunner's announcing Israel's Messiah to God's covenant people.

Also, Shepherd is twice wrong because, as demonstrated, there is no forensic justification in the final judgment that is to come. Hence with John's preaching we are *not* in the sphere of justification! Shepherd is three times wrong because he is incorrect to use John's urgency—"the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9)—in support of his notion that John taught that only penitent and obedient faith will justify a person at the last judgment. Shepherd is wrong because in Matthew 3:10 John warned physical Israel of the impending end of the Old Testament age, not the last judgment. There is nothing in the prophecy of Isaiah 40, fulfilled by John, about the last judgment. Isaiah 40 is all about the coming of Christ and the division in Israel produced by Jesus' preaching the gospel. By the gospel Jesus reconstructs Israel, makes her crooked roads straight, levels the self-righteous hills, and fills in the dirty valleys. He does it with the winnowing fan of the gospel (which separates wheat from chaff) in his hand. Therefore, no last judgment here. It is the final speaking of God's Son, Israel's Messiah, to physical Israel (Heb. 1:2).

As repeatedly observed, when carefully explained, we see that text after text contradicts Shepherd because here, John the Baptist was plainly teaching that repentance is something done after justification that vindicates justification, and therefore repentance is not involved in justification at all but plainly after it. As John says, repentance is "fruit." Matthew 3:8 and Luke 3:8, when carefully understood, also reject and condemn Shepherd's theory of the necessity of penitent and obedient faith to be justified.

Shepherd follows up, after John the Baptist, with a few verses that speak of repentance to reinforce his conclusion about the necessity of penitent faith to be justified. Using

Luke 15—the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—Shepherd says, "Jesus testifies to the joy in heaven over the sinner who repents" (51). This is true, but then Shepherd adds Matthew 11:20–24—the woes pronounced by Jesus on Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their lack of repentance—in order to say, "Jesus says these cities will come under divine judgment because of their obstinacy and their impenitence" (51). That also is true, but the problem is that Shepherd uses those verses to con the reader into his unbiblical conclusion that Jesus taught repentance as a necessary condition for justification at the last judgment, which is not true.

To further support that false inference, Shepherd refers to Luke 24:46–47, where he says that Jesus commanded his disciples to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins...to all nations" (53); which is true, except Jesus did not teach in that text that a penitent and obedient faith is necessary for justification, but he taught that the message to be preached is repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name.

The same is true of Shepherd's next reference to the Great Commission. Shepherd extracts Jesus words "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" to remind the reader that Jesus preached obedience (53). Again, true, but Shepherd intends this reminder to further nudge the reader toward Shepherd's desired conclusion that only obedient faith justifies at the last judgment.

However, Luke 24 and Matthew 28 fail to say anything beyond the fact that the preaching of the gospel demands the response of repentance and faith and that those who do repent and believe will be saved. These texts teach the good news, but Shepherd's shady implication is that such repentance and faith are set forth as *contingencies*, conditions man must fulfill for justification. However, neither of these texts are set forth as conditions for man to fulfill because they are divine demands commanded of sinners who are dead in trespasses and sins. They are impossible demands, condemning demands, but by the wonder of grace, they are demands effectively calling the elect, who are given faith and ears to hear God's salvation in Christ.

Having massaged Jesus' words to make them appear to support his theory, Shepherd has reshaped the gospel demand of repentance and faith in Christ into a requirement for man to gain justification by man's penitent and obedient faith. I say again: smooth as oil, sad as cancer.

Shepherd has reshaped the gospel demand of repentance and faith in Christ into a requirement for man to gain justification by man's penitent and obedient faith.

On and on that sad story repeats: “The demand for repentance is of a piece with the demand for obedience to the Lord” (54). That is Shepherd’s gospel. All demands man must fulfill. All requirements for man’s penitence and obedience—man is the one acting—and not one word of grace or the Holy Spirit’s working in the whole third chapter. It’s all the works of man. Man’s doing repentance and faith for justification. Page after page with no grace until finally Shepherd blurts out his real purpose: “It has become apparent by now that in the proclamation of the gospel, our Lord makes justification and salvation *contingent* upon [man’s] obedience” (59; emphasis added).

Finally, Shepherd comes to Matthew 12:36–37, which he quotes: “Men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be *acquitted*, and by your words you will be condemned” (60; emphasis added).

This is a strange quotation for Shepherd because it is not the King James Version, and it is not the English Standard Version either. Shepherd does not say what version it is. I believe he wants the word “acquitted,” but although his usual quotations are from the ESV, *acquitted* is not there.

Notice very carefully exactly what Jesus said. At the last judgment there will be an *accounting* of what men have spoken and done. Matthew 25:35–45 present that *accounting* for the purpose of vindicating God’s election and reprobation, *not* for forensic justification. Also, the Greek word for *accounting* means to “render payment owed or earned” (Bauer, 90; see Matt. 5:26; 16:27; 18:26, 30; 20:8). Does Shepherd really want to teach that justification is owed to man or earned by man’s words and works? In addition, James’ rule regarding the Greek word for *justification* or *vindication* applies in Matthew 12:37 because that word is used but is translated as *acquitted* in the version Shepherd uses. Applying James’ rule, because the context involves words or works, the meaning of the Greek is *vindicated*, that is, “For by thy words thou shalt be *vindicated*, and by thy words thou shalt be *condemned*.”

Then notice at the last judgment there is *vindication*—the blessed elect take possession of their kingdom inheritance (Matt. 25:34); and at the last judgment there is *condemnation*—the reprobate are commanded to depart into everlasting fire (v. 41).

Then consider Shepherd’s comments: “This verse is talking about justification because it is talking about *acquittal* in the Day of Judgment” (60; emphasis added). No, he is very wrong, as just demonstrated. But then he adds this shocking admission: “*This is justification by works* (‘words’ are ‘works’), and it is the teaching of our Lord” (60;

emphasis added). There it is clear as crystal: Justification for Norman Shepherd is by works!

But wrong again! Justification is without works; it is by a faith that works not but believes (Rom. 3:28; 4:5). But Shepherd adds this: “*The point in all of this is that Jesus makes justification contingent upon obedience*” (61; emphasis added). That too is false.

Then comes the climax of Shepherd’s three chapters: he says that Jesus, Paul, and James all agree—they all “*make justification and salvation contingent upon a penitent and obedient faith*” (63; emphasis added). Pathetically, that makes Shepherd the father of all those who say, “There is that which a man must do to be saved.” However, by now we may all say, “That is nonsense!” Actually, it is more than nonsense.

Paul would say,

“O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?”
Why?

Faith is fixed on Christ. The eye of faith sees only Christ. But by deceitful words Satan fascinates, and a person looks for a moment somewhere else. As soon as you take your eye off the sufficiency of Christ, you have said, “He is not sufficient. He is not enough.”⁷

You are bewitched.

By this time I have adequately and convincingly demonstrated that all of Shepherd’s work, including his final statement that Jesus, Paul, and James all agree and “*make justification and salvation contingent upon a penitent and obedient faith*,” is a deceitful fraud, a false gospel. His work corresponds to the times in which we live—the great deception of 2 Thessalonians 2—that the man who is considered the most sincere and gentle soul could produce the most deceptive theology the church has ever faced.

Hypothetical Grace

Now let us put some things together. Remember how I began this article with Shepherd’s complete omission of any explanatory comments about the work of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration and salvation of the sinner. Now add to that his gospel of justification by works. Here we see these two prominent features of Shepherd’s work come together in his conclusion: justification by *man’s* penitent and obedient working faith and *no* Holy Spirit. Quite bizarre for a theology that claims to be Reformed. But it gets worse.

Shepherd finishes his third chapter by giving his readers this dialectical jewel: “Living, active, penitent, and

⁷ Nathan J. Langerak, “Bewitched!” sermon preached March 20, 2022.

obedient faith can only receive what is promised, and what is promised is pure grace” (63).

Hats on. Remember Shepherd deliberately chose these words and decided how he would put them together. Notice, from his use of *is* three times, we know definitely what *is* promised—it’s pure grace. But what we don’t know is *if* that promised grace is definitely received or only possible to receive because Shepherd’s sentence says it “*can*” be received, and “*can*” is ambiguous in English!

Consider that word *can*. *Can* may mean *able*: he can do that. Or *can* may be only *permissible*: he can do that *if we allow him*. Again, *can* may suggest only *possibility*: he *can* do that if he tries his hardest.

Therefore, Shepherd’s use of “*can*” makes the sentence sufficiently indefinite on purpose. It could mean faith *will* receive promised grace. Or faith *could* receive promised grace. Or faith *might* receive promised grace. But that is the mystery of Shepherd’s words: “*can*” does not state definitely that grace is received. As far as faith’s actually and definitely receiving that promised grace, those words do not say it. Shepherd’s “*promised grace*” is hypothetical grace (read, conditional), just as his final justification and salvation are conditional.

There are better, more definite ways to speak about what faith will receive, but Shepherd chose those ambiguous words because he had something hiding behind them. The basic, deceptive uncertainty of it all is because Shepherd cannot come right out and say that man’s doing is decisive. Both Arminianism and Pelagianism are obvious, and both have been thoroughly rejected by Christ’s church. Shepherd’s only choice is conditionalism. He must keep the decisiveness of salvation hidden. Darkness is the only costume available to his theology. Third time: smooth as oil, sad as cancer.

Remember, Shepherd has said nothing of substance about the Holy Spirit’s effective work in creating and sustaining faith all through this tragic theology, but now at the end of this chapter on our Lord, all Shepherd can say is this ambiguous statement about grace that promises much but actually delivers nothing. But that fits with what he says: “*The point in all of this is that Jesus makes justification contingent upon obedience*” (61; emphasis added). But with conditional grace, there can only be conditional salvation. Observe the shameful nakedness of Norman Shepherd’s thoroughly untruthful theology.

Conclusion

As I stated at the beginning, Shepherd’s whole theological fog would clear up, and he would finally lead us to his rabbit hole and expose all his buried truth. Now, finally, that hiding place is exposed. We are onto it. Shepherd

has hidden any meaningful exposition of the Holy Spirit from his readers so far. In his chapters on James, Paul, and Jesus, Shepherd has curiously concealed all relevant, biblical exposition of the Holy Spirit’s effective work in the calling, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification of sinners. However in Shepherd’s fifth and last chapter, it all comes forth promptly, profusely, and profanely. It will be most profitable digging through it all.

Then, I will go beyond correcting Shepherd’s abuses of scripture into the construction of his theological conditioning and the reason for the things hidden in the rabbit hole. That will all come out in conjunction with his last chapter, the Lord willing.

“The promise of the *Spirit* to accompany the proclamation of the whole counsel of God with power” (thesis 31) never appeared in the first three chapters because it had to wait for the last, most obtuse chapter of all, which finally and thoroughly confounds for the reader the Spirit’s decisive ministry.

The first three chapters serve to convince the reader of Shepherd’s man-centered, conditional salvation, so that the reader’s mind is schooled in Shepherd-thought so that when the reader faces the grand onslaught of contradiction about the Spirit in Shepherd’s last chapter, the reader’s mind will be dulled and unready to challenge Shepherd’s dialectics about the Holy Spirit.

To me, that is the plot. We must prepare now to untangle Shepherd’s final dialectic performance, imprisoning God’s Spirit in the most unwelcome, unintelligible, and unacceptable paradoxes so that Shepherd’s devious words about *man’s responsibility to remain in the state of justification and keep covenant with God* seem to be the gospel when they are the opposite, a gospel of darkness.

Shepherd’s man-centered theology needed a new disguise. Pelagianism and Arminianism are so easily recognized nowadays that their reappearance demanded a new costume. That costume Shepherd provides. All the truth about the natural man being dead in sin and totally unable to know spiritual things has been quietly buried, as well as the truth of the Spirit’s effective work in the elect sinner, until Shepherd has performed all his magic tricks on the scriptures in preparation for the final frame-up to appear, the grand dialectical feat of introducing the Spirit’s work while denying all of it at the very same time. Bang! That will be my last blast at this dialectical diatribe!

“Living, active, penitent, and obedient faith can only receive what is promised, and what is promised is pure grace” was just a sample of what is to come.

Next time, the Lord willing, condemning this debate with the devil.

—Rev. Stuart Pastine



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world:
he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. — John 8:12*

I am the light of the world! What a claim! There is no light in the world apart from me. Without me the world is in darkness. There is no other light in the world besides me. I am the light. All the rest is darkness. Jesus is the light of the whole world. Exclusive. Absolute. Antithetical. He promises unconditionally that all who follow him shall have the light of life and shall not walk in darkness.

Light is the condition for life, movement, fellowship, and communion. Light is thus in scripture the figure of perfection and life. The antithesis of light is darkness. Darkness is the condition of corruption, defilement, iniquity, unrighteousness, and death. The antithesis is in those words *light* and *darkness*. Light is the love of God. Darkness is enmity against God. Light is righteousness. Darkness is iniquity. Light is purity and perfection. Darkness is corruption and defilement. Light is wisdom. Darkness is folly. Light is fellowship with the living God. Darkness is the utter desolation of being forsaken of God in his wrath.

I am the light of the world! Christ is life, joy, happiness, fellowship, righteousness, wisdom, and love for God. Christ is that to men. Outside of him is only darkness, and without him men perish in the darkness. All men move in the sphere of death, corruption, and unrighteousness. Christ alone is able to dispel the darkness and to be light. The world is in darkness, and men walk in darkness. And when the light comes, then men are exposed by the coming of the light as lovers of darkness and haters of the light.

Sovereign light! In the brilliant light of the perfection of God's being, Christ lives as the Son with his Father in the Holy Spirit in perfect communion and life. He is God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of the same essence as the Father! He is light come in the flesh. And as the light of light, he entered our darkness and penetrated down to its deepest part, even outer darkness, upon the tree of the cross. There on the cross he bore our sins and suffered our punishment for the satisfaction of the justice of God and broke the darkness by earning for us perfect righteousness that is worthy of eternal life. As light he arose. As light he ascended. As light he received of God the eternal Spirit to shed him forth in our hearts, so that the light of the glorious gospel of God dispels in our hearts the darkness of sin, guilt, and condemnation and shines with the light of righteousness, joy, and eternal glory.

Christ is the light of the world! Whoever follows him shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Sovereign light! When he shines in the hearts of his own according to his will and good pleasure, then in his light we see light! The light is not dependent on the darkness, but the light overcomes the darkness. The darkness does not come to the light, but the light comes and shines in the darkness. Blessed gospel!

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost: in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. Yes, lest they believe! Sovereign light! If our gospel be hid, so that they do not come and do not follow the light, then it is because the light has purposed that they do not believe and that they perish in their darkness. For Christ is the only light, and outside of him and apart from him all men are darkness.

—NJL