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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.  
—Psalm 27:5*

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## MEDITATION

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or against beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

—Exodus 10:27–11:10

When we last left Moses, Pharaoh was threatening him. “Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die” (Ex. 10:28). A threat of violence! A threat of murder! It is the threat that hard hearts always make against God's servants in hatred of God's cause. It is the cruelty that hard hearts always breathe out as they come to eat up the flesh of God's servants. So sang our Lord: “Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty” (Ps. 27:12).

But Pharaoh did not have the last word. It was not Pharaoh's threat that would hang in the air and reverberate through the ages. Jehovah God had the last word. Jehovah, who had sovereignly hardened Pharaoh's heart, now spoke the

last word of his judgment against Pharaoh. Pharaoh would not kill Moses. But God would kill Pharaoh and all of Egypt in their firstborn.

Exodus 11 opens with a flashback to what God had announced to Moses prior to Moses' meeting with Pharaoh. The second paragraph in the text above should be read, “And the LORD *had* said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt.” After the ninth plague Moses went into the meeting with Pharaoh knowing that Pharaoh would not let Israel go and knowing that God would send yet one more terrible plague upon Egypt. Exodus 11 continues with Moses' announcement to Pharaoh of the tenth plague. Thus, Exodus 10:29 continues in Exodus 11:4. “And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more...And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD,

About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die.”

The tenth plague would be terrible. The firstborn of Egypt were the chief of Egypt’s strength (Ps. 78:51; 105:36). The firstborn of Egypt represented all the rest of the people. By slaying the firstborn, God would destroy Egypt’s strength. By slaying the firstborn, God would slay Egypt.

But before God slew the firstborn, he announced it to Pharaoh through Moses. And Moses, having announced God’s judgment on Pharaoh, went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. It was not Pharaoh’s threats that drove Moses

away. Rather, it was God’s righteous judgment that separated Pharaoh from Moses.

In the righteous judgment of God upon Egypt we see the church’s salvation. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment (Isa. 1:27). The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Why? “That ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Ex. 11:7). By God’s sovereign grace alone, Israel is saved. By God’s sovereign and righteous judgment, Egypt is destroyed. Therefore, God multiplied his wonders in the land of Egypt that all Israel might know that salvation is of the Lord.

—AL

## FROM THE RAMPARTS

### Law and Gospel: Confessed

**T**he distinction between the law and the gospel is a matter of life and death.

Men and women go to hell believing a corruption of this distinction.

Churches send men and women to hell having taught them a corruption of this distinction.

That is not a figment of an overactive imagination. That is the judgment of God. “For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

One of them kills. The other gives life. “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (II Cor. 3:6).

From doing only a little bit of reading, you can see that instruction about the law-gospel distinction played a much larger role in the early days of the Reformed church than it does today.

Perhaps seeking to correct that, Remnant Reformed Church sponsored a lecture on October 31, 2023, on a proper understanding of the law-gospel distinction. You can find a transcript of that lecture in the November 18, 2023, issue of *Reformed Pavilion*.<sup>1</sup>

Simply being able to properly explain the distinction between the law and the gospel does not send one to eternal glory.

The devils can give a proper explanation of the law-gospel distinction.

So can Reformed men and women who stay in departing churches even though the message from the pulpits of those churches is a corruption of that distinction. For such members the distinction between the law and the gospel is merely intellectual, a theological curiosity that is interesting to discuss and debate.

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lanning, “The Good Law and the Glorious Gospel,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 32 (November 18, 2023): 9–23. In the present article all quotations from the lecture are taken from the original, unedited transcript of the lecture. The lecture can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfokYQOu8rc>.

The speech, in the introduction, warned against the threat of viewing the law-gospel distinction as merely an intellectual and academic puzzle. Rather, the perspective that has to be taken is that the “distinction between the law and the gospel is...the most important distinction in the Christian faith.”

Simply giving a proper explanation of the law-gospel distinction does not save.

Jesus Christ does.

And that is who is at stake when discussing the law and the gospel.

What will it be for you? Jesus Christ? Or Jesus Christ plus something else?

The answer to that question, not merely appropriated by the mind but believed by faith, is the difference between life and death. That is why the speaker at the lecture could say, “The distinction between the law and the gospel is salvation.”

As with any discussion of this nature, it is important to clearly define the terms, which the speaker did.

The law was defined as “God’s requirement for what man is to be and for what man is to do.” That definition alone exposes as false many presentations of God’s law that are made by Reformed churches today. Most perceive of the law this way: “The law is the ten commandments. I did not hold up a bank this week, so I kept that commandment. I did not end my neighbor’s life, so I kept that commandment as well. Yesterday I coveted after my neighbor’s things, but today I didn’t, so I am making some real progress. Tomorrow I will work on the first table of the law so that hopefully by Friday at noon I will have kept the whole law!” The law is doable, so that when Sinai thunders down at us with its demand, “Be holy!” we can blithely respond, “Yup, did that.” Neither do churches today teach that the law is something that the child of God does, however imperfectly, as part of his life of thankfulness. Rather, what is taught today is that the child of God’s obedience to the law serves as part of that which contributes to his salvation.

That presentation of the law makes men Pharisees.

But as the speech made clear, the law demands something more than just outward conformity. It demands perfection. It demands you *do* perfectly and you *be* perfect.

And God is the judge.

You stand before him who can see you; before him whose eyes are as lamps of fire; who beholds the heart of man; who sees not as a man sees, judging appearance and judging externally and superficially, but who sees as the all-knowing God, who with his holy eyes looks into you and looks through you, who sees your mind and all of its thoughts, who sees your deeds and all of their motives, who sees your heart and all the things that are therein. You stand before that holy, almighty God.

The law comes to the child of God, and it burns right through the flimsy veneer of righteousness that he has erected, such that that child of God is led to cry out that he has “grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them” and as to his current state is “still inclined to all evil” (see Heidelberg Catechism, LD 23).

The child of God knows that about himself, and the child of God knows before whom he stands, so that whatever others may think of him and whatever shabby cloak of piety he may drape himself in and in which grubby attire he has begun to trust, when the law comes to that child of God, he is exposed—not only for the sin that he committed in his first father Adam but also for the treachery of disobeying the God “who has shown you nothing but mercy.” The child of God wears his “departure from God as a foul garment that is rotted and stinking and torn and filthy” with the transgressions of his sin. At that moment there is only one cry for that child of God: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

In response to that cry, some Reformed churches come to that child of God and say, “Consider your works. They have utility, you know.”

(O wretched church that you are, who will deliver us from your wicked instruction?)

Such teaching transforms a man into a Pharisee.

Or it crushes him under a burden grievous to be borne.

The speech given the evening of October 31 did neither of those things, God be praised.

Having set before the child of God the law of God—the law with its incessant, unrelenting, and unyielding demand to be perfect and to do perfectly—the audience heard the other word of God, the word of the gospel.

What is that word?

The gospel is God’s declaration of his grace in Jesus Christ. There’s really only one thing the gospel says: the gospel says, “Jesus.” The gospel says, “Christ.”

Most of the church world—when it finally gets around to the gospel—says this: “Jesus Christ came to you and saved you. He made you so you can be better. Now you can keep the law. Now you can be acceptable to God through your diligent keeping of the law. By God’s grace, of course. So get busy.”

So what is finally presented to the child of God as the gospel is no gospel at all. It is a mixture of the law and Christ, so that the child of God never knows where the law stops and the gospel starts. I think the church that has been around for many years looks at itself as having arrived, however they might define *arrived*. They need not worry about the fundamentals of the truth any longer; they took care of those things during the church’s founding decades ago. If someone has a question about the fundamentals of the faith, there are books he can read on the topic. It is time now for the church to “develop” the truth—and not *develop* as in coming to a clearer understanding of everything Christ has done but *develop* in the sense of determining

more and more the role that man plays in his salvation, whether that role is faith, repentance, obedience, or any other work they think they can explain as being performed by man. All those things must be plumbed and developed so that we can finally see what it is that God makes of a man in his salvation.

But that mixture of law and gospel is not what makes the child of God acceptable to God, and neither is it pleasing to God.

Substitution makes the child of God acceptable to God. This from the speech:

At the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ we find that fact of substitution. He took the place of, he did it *for*, me and all his people. The matter of substitution that the gospel declares is not this, that Christ is going to make you better; he’s going to make you a better person; he’s going to give you strength so that *you’re* going to do good things, and you’re going to be something good. At the heart of the gospel is this: he did it *for you*, in your place. He did what you don’t do. And he did it perfectly. The gospel declares that substitution about Jesus’ suffering the curse, his taking your leprosy and his taking your filthy, clotted garments and bearing the curse in your place for your sin. There’s substitution. And the gospel declares substitution with regard to his perfect deeds. He did those *for you*, so that when you stand before God and God declares regarding you, “I see no iniquity in you,” that has nothing to do with what you did or didn’t do. That declaration is not anything to do with your obedience, and it is not anything to do with your disobedience.

And then this ringing, triumphant declaration, which declaration is truly good news for the beleaguered, weary, fed-up-with-his-wretched-condition-and-sin child of God:

For that declaration of God in the gospel, as you stand before him, it doesn’t matter



whether you obeyed or did not obey. It does not matter. It does not matter whether you loved God or did not love God. It does not matter whether you are perfect or not perfect. It matters whether *Jesus* obeyed God or did not obey God—and he obeyed God.

Having defined both law and gospel and explained the place each has been given by God, the speech then addressed the *distinction* between the law and the gospel. Negatively, the distinction does not have to do with their author, power, goodness, or honor. Summarized, we could say this: the author of both is God; both the law and the gospel have the power to accomplish the purposes God has given each of them; both the law and the gospel are good, as we see in Romans 7 and I Timothy 1; and both are honorable, as God loves his law and loves his gospel.

It is important to hear that latter point, as there are men who teach the law to their congregations such that the members leave the sanctuary thinking of the law as an ugly thing. This instruction was particularly helpful to me, as I remember hearing a sermon on Galatians 3 where I left the sanctuary in no condition to confess, “O, how love I thy law!” I was conflicted because I knew that the law couldn’t save, but does that mean that the law itself is ugly? Does Galatians 3 teach that the law *itself* is a weak and beggarly thing? The speech served as a corrective to that faulty understanding.

The distinction that is to be made is that God has separate purposes for the law and the gospel. “The distinction between God’s good law and God’s glorious gospel is that he has given

the law certain work, and he has given the gospel certain work.” The law has two functions: to expose a man in his sin and to give him a guide for his thankful Christian life. The gospel in its office saves by declaring to the child of God that he has the righteousness of God and by giving to the child of God all the things of heaven.

The speech was Reformed and grounded its instruction in the word of God and the confessions.

The culmination of the speech was to ask the question, “What’s the significance of this whole distinction? What’s the point of there being this distinction?” The significance of this distinction is that it answers the question of who saves. God? Or man?

In times when the child of God is hearing something else, instruction that leaves him confused about the distinction between the law and the gospel, he can simply ask himself, “What function is the law being given, and what function is the gospel being given?” The answer to that question will inform the child of God whether what he is hearing is the true gospel or the false gospel, which is no gospel. If the law is pressed into the service of a man’s salvation in whatever regard, such that a man cannot be saved apart from his keeping of the law, what he is hearing is a false gospel.

I am thankful for the lecture. I hope Remnant Reformed Church investigates publishing the lecture in the form of a pamphlet so the content can receive a wider distribution.

Such instruction is vital, as at this late date in history, assaults on the law-gospel distinction are fierce.

—DE



## Law and Gospel: Corrupted

They were warned.

I can conceive of nothing more dire, nothing more serious, nothing more urgent. I repeat, I believe the matter that is before us is the true gospel versus the false gospel, which is no gospel, as the apostle Paul instructs us. To teach that we receive the Spirit by works of obedience goes hand in hand with teaching that we receive the fellowship of God by works of obedience, for it is in the Spirit that we have that fellowship. Our pastor teaches both of these things: by obedience we receive the Spirit and by obedience we receive the fellowship of God. I consider this to be a false gospel, opposed to the truth that we receive these and all blessings, including justification and sanctification, by faith alone. From this perspective the matter is serious and urgent beyond what can be fathomed. The damage done to the souls of God's people is insurmountable.<sup>1</sup>

That was written by Mrs. Connie Meyer to the consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church regarding the error that was coming from the pulpit of that congregation.

The error against which Mr. and Mrs. Meyer contended was that which mingled

faith and works, Law and Gospel, and [attached] good works to faith in such a way as to make the confession that we are saved and justified by faith alone meaningless if not impossible. If we err on this point, we err in all. We learn this from Luther too: "On the question of justification we must remain adamant,

or else we shall lose the truth of the Gospel. It is a matter of life and death."<sup>2</sup>

That type of error—where the law and gospel are mingled—continues to be taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) to this day.

I am not now referring to those who promote the theology of Herman Witsius.

Classis East of the PRC is busy dealing with the specter of that long-dead Puritan, who now wanders the halls of their assembly meetings like the ghost of Jacob Marley, dragging his chains of utility and conditionality behind him.

It is bad when mingling of law and gospel appears on the pages of the denominational paper.

It is tragic—and deadly—when such instruction appears from the pulpit.

About the time that the lecture on the law-gospel distinction was given (which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue), Reverend William Langerak, the minister of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, gave a baptism sermon on Lord's Day 34 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The sermon was titled "Love the Lord Thy God."<sup>3</sup>

These two words—one a lecture, the other a sermon—were delivered only nine days apart. But they were worlds apart in their content. In only one of them was the truth of the law-gospel distinction taught—truth which glorifies God alone. The timing of these two expositions will serve the child of God well, as the truth stands out in brilliant clarity when set against the darkness of the lie.<sup>4</sup>

Before we look at what it is to mingle law and gospel, let us first look at what each of them is and to what purpose God has appointed each.

<sup>1</sup> "Letter of Connie Meyer to Hope Consistory" (February 1, 2017), *Acts of Synod 2018*, 147–148.

<sup>2</sup> Connie Meyer letter to Hope consistory dated September 19, 2017. That letter is published following this article.

<sup>3</sup> William Langerak, "Love the Lord thy God," sermon preached on October 22, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1022231510484694>. All quotations of Reverend Langerak are from this sermon.

<sup>4</sup> "Thus, blackness can never be better known than in being placed beside white (Rom. 3:20; 7:13)." Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith* (Lewes, East Sussex: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1992), 43.



We look to Theodore Beza for instruction. First, the law:

It is necessary, before all things, that God, all good and fully of pity, makes us know clearly the cursed pit in which we are. He could do it no better than by informing us, by the declaration of His Law, what we ought necessarily to be. Thus, blackness can never be better known than in being placed beside white (Rom. 3:20; 7:13). This is why God begins with the preaching of the Law. In it alone we can see what we ought to be; and yet we cannot fulfil a single point of it. It in alone, we can see how near we are to our damnation, unless there comes to us some very strong and sure remedy.<sup>5</sup>

And indeed, the stupidity which has reigned in the world at all times and reigns now more than ever, shows clearly how necessary it is that God begins at this point in order to draw us to Himself: by making us know what great and certain danger those are in who think least of it. The fact is, the Law was not given to justify us (for if this were so, Jesus Christ would have died in vain, as St. Paul says; Gal. 2:21; 3:18–21), but, on the contrary, to condemn us, and to show us the hell which is opened wide to swallow us, to annihilate and totally abase our pride, in making the multitude of our sins pass before our eyes and showing us the wrath of God which is revealed from Heaven against us (Rom. 1:18; 4:15; Gal. 3:10, 12).<sup>6</sup>

Now, the gospel:

What we call the Gospel (“Good News”) is a doctrine which is not at all in us by

nature, but which is revealed from Heaven (Matt. 16:17; John 1:13), and totally surpasses natural knowledge. By it God testifies to us that it is His purpose to save us freely by His only Son (Rom. 3:20–22), provided that, by faith, we embrace Him as our only wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).<sup>7</sup>

The Gospel not only shows us the remedy against the curse of the law, but it is at the same time accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit who regenerates us and changes us (as we have said above); for He creates in us the instrument and sole means of applying to us this remedy (Acts 26:17, 18).<sup>8</sup>

God has ordained two separate and distinct purposes for the law and the gospel; and, having considered those purposes, you can understand why Martin Luther said what he did about keeping them distinguished from one another.

The way to discern the one from the other...[is] to put as much difference between the righteousness of the Gospel and of the law as God has made between heaven and earth, between light and darkness, between day and night.<sup>9</sup>

And why he warned so sharply against mixing the two:

It seems such a light thing to mix the law and the Gospel, faith and works; but this does more mischief than human reason can conceive, for it not only blemishes and obscures the knowledge of grace, but it also takes away Christ, with all his benefits, and utterly overshadows the Gospel, as Paul says in this passage.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Beza, *The Christian Faith*, 43.

<sup>6</sup> Beza, *The Christian Faith*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Beza, *The Christian Faith*, 40–41.

<sup>8</sup> Beza, *The Christian Faith*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Galatians* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 83.

<sup>10</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 52.

Beza too warned sharply against seeking salvation in something (the law) that was never ordained by God to save (a purpose reserved for the gospel). Not only is it wrong to mingle law and gospel; it is also utterly foolish.

However, for a long time men have been blind and senseless. Not only do they seek their salvation in that which condemns them wholly or in part, that is to say, in their works, instead of running to Jesus Christ by faith, the only remedy against all that they can be justly accused of before God; but, what is more, they do not cease to add law upon law to their conscience, that is to say, condemnation upon condemnation, as if the Law of God did not condemn them enough (Gal. 4:9, 10; 5:1; Col. 2:8, 16–23). It is like a prisoner to whom the prison door would be opened, but who, turning away from a freedom which he does not understand, goes away and voluntarily locks himself in a prison which is even more secure.<sup>11</sup>

In his sermon Reverend Langerak obliterates the distinction between the law and the gospel.

We pointed that out last week, that one may not separate the law and the gospel. Even though they are technically different, have different places and functions in the preaching, they may not be separated. They go together. That has to do with the fact that the law has to do with our salvation, as I just pointed out.

When something is said to be “technically different,” that means someone must have some kind of specialized knowledge to understand the concepts being discussed. That was driven home when it was further explained that those technical differences have to do with “different places and functions *in the preaching*” (emphasis mine). In other words, let the theologians deal with those differences; but for the rest of you, just know that the law and the gospel “go together.”

The reason that such a great distance needs to be kept between the law and the gospel is not because the gospel is good and the law is bad, as was pointed out in the lecture. But they must be kept separate because, according to God’s counsel and will, they serve two different purposes.

What must be kept asunder, Reverend Langerak joins together.

The Catechism, if you look, links obedience to the first commandment and what God commands there with something that we ought to desire to do as sincerely as we desire the salvation of our own soul. In other words, there’s a connection of the law of God to our salvation. The connection of the law of God to our salvation is a matter of the gospel. We pointed that out last week, that one may not separate the law and the gospel. Even though they are technically different, have different places and functions in the preaching, they may not be separated. They go together. That has to do with the fact that the law has to do with our salvation, as I just pointed out.

Why is it the case that to mingle the law and the gospel is to lose Christ with all his benefits and to overthrow the gospel?

Because it all comes down to what you do with Christ.

To mingle man’s working with Christ’s work would be to say that Christ is not sufficient—about which the Belgic Confession has something to say: “Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior” (article 22).

What caused Reverend Langerak to blend law and gospel was the opening line from question and answer 94 of Lord’s Day 34: “That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own

<sup>11</sup> Beza, *The Christian Faith*, 44.

soul...”<sup>12</sup> About this one rather peripheral line,<sup>13</sup> Reverend Langerak says,

The Catechism, if you look, links obedience to the first commandment and what God commands there with something that we ought to desire to do as sincerely as we desire the salvation of our own soul. In other words, there’s a connection of the law of God to our salvation. The connection of the law of God to our salvation is a matter of the gospel.

That is a lot of freight to put on those thirteen opening words of question and answer 94 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

But is the Catechism teaching here that the law and the gospel are connected? Is the Catechism teaching that even though there may be some “technical” differences, those differences are not all that significant? The answer is a resounding “God forbid!” The Catechism is now in its third section, having to do with thankfulness. It has already dealt with our salvation in the second part—Of Man’s Deliverance. What the Catechism had to say about man’s deliverance could be summarized this way:

Man can do nothing to escape punishment and be received again into God’s favor. The only thing man can do is daily increase his debt. (LD 5)

Jesus Christ is the only savior, and man should not try to find salvation in himself or anywhere else. To do so is to deny that Jesus is a complete savior. (LD 11)

The whole second section of the Catechism is at pains to make clear that man is saved not by man’s working but by faith only, apart from works.

You could say that the second part of the Catechism was written exactly the way it was, anticipating someone’s teaching that “the connection of the law of God to our salvation is a matter of the gospel.”

The Catechism does have something to say about law and gospel and man’s salvation and man’s law-keeping. What does the Catechism say about my relationship to the law regarding my salvation? This: “that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil” (LD 23). What does the Catechism have to say about the gospel, which is my salvation? This: that even though all I can contribute to my salvation is the fact that I continually trample God’s holy law underfoot, keep none of his commandments, and still find myself to this very second inclined to every sort of evil,

notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart. (LD 23)

That is glorious. What a gospel! What a savior! How are you made a partaker of Christ and all his benefits? By faith only (LD 25). Having just painstakingly (and beautifully) laid out the truth that salvation is by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone, does the Catechism now take that all back and add law-keeping as that which contributes to our salvation? Again, God forbid! The truth of what the Catechism is

<sup>12</sup> In full, question and answer 94 reads as follows: “Q. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment? A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures; and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him; expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will.”

<sup>13</sup> I say *peripheral* because that statement does not teach any fundamental truth about the law of God or the first commandment. Perhaps it is for that reason that Ursinus does not so much as mention that line in his commentary. That line certainly does not do what Reverend Langerak makes it do.

teaching here is not to mingle law and gospel so the people are confused about which is which; rather, it is simply telling us, “Listen, you who love yourselves more than anything and desire your own salvation as much as anything, take that same enthusiasm and vigor with which you love yourself and turn that to a love of God’s law.” Reverend Langerak stumbles on this line from the Catechism because he is searching to find the righteousness of man not by faith but by the works of the law. He stumbles on the stumblingstone, which is Jesus Christ, and finds in Jesus Christ a rock of offence (Rom. 9:30–33). To say that salvation is by faith alone is to say, “Not man! Not working! Not the law!” Positively, it is to say, “Christ alone is the way of salvation!” (John 14:6).

Recognizing that he can’t ignore justification by faith alone, Reverend Langerak states it, only to undermine it.

Now, we know that from a certain viewpoint love and faith are different. They’re distinct. And yet here too they may not be separated. And we are even taught that with regard to justification.

A certain viewpoint?

Justification is the heart of the gospel, the article of the standing or falling church, and the source of all comfort for the child of God. Justification by faith alone was the material principle of the great Reformation. But Reverend Langerak can only accord justification this stingiest of acknowledgments: “We know that from a certain viewpoint love and faith are different.”

What else does he have to say about justification by faith alone?

Now, we know that from a certain viewpoint love and faith are different. They’re distinct. And yet here too they may not be separated. And we are even taught that with regard to justification. A mistake we can make is that because justification is

by faith alone without works, we may put it this way: justification is by faith alone without love—because works are works of love. Works are obedience to the law of God, and the law of God is love. We’re justified by faith alone. And yet a mistake that’s made time and time again is to have faith alone by itself, is to posit faith that is alone, which our confessions don’t allow us to do. Faith is never alone. Faith is always accompanied with love. It’s never apart from or separate from love.

Perhaps there were those in the audience that Sabbath morning who still stubbornly clung to the notion that law and gospel should be kept separate and distinct. Reverend Langerak continued his assault on that distinction, trying to beat out of the people any remaining vestiges of a proper understanding of that truth.

And that connection is brought out right here in the explanation of the law of God. Notice when it explains love,<sup>14</sup> it explains it in terms of knowing and trusting God. And anybody that has been taught the Heidelberg Catechism immediately recognizes that those are the two main activities of faith. Faith is not only a bond that unites us to Christ, but faith is a certain knowledge, an assured confidence, trust. Hmm. There’s a connection there, isn’t there?

And a few moments later:

In other words, we may not conceive of the gospel, our salvation, the demand to believe, or even the calling to love God in any way that takes away from the demand of the law and especially the demand of the first commandment.

Reverend Langerak is teaching here that we should not conceive of the gospel in any way that takes away from the demand of the law. Was

<sup>14</sup> When Reverend Langerak uses the word “love,” he uses that synonymously with “works,” as he explains elsewhere. “But change the word *good works* to simply *love God*, because that’s what good works are.”



it the case that he was teaching that such a demand of the law was perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ, whose obedience is imputed to the elect child of God?

No, that is not what was taught. Not *Christ's* keeping of the law perfectly is gospel, but *your* keeping of the law is gospel.

The point that must be made here is loving the Lord thy God is demanded. It is commanded. This is something we *must* do.

Reverend Langerak states explicitly—as he teaches throughout the sermon—that you may not conceive of the gospel in any way that takes away from the demand of the law as that demand is fulfilled by something *you* do.

But that is not the gospel. That is not the gospel at all. What Reverend Langerak is teaching is the lie. The gospel is Jesus Christ, not *my* keeping or fulfilling the demands of the law. There is one righteousness that will stand before God, and that is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. And that righteousness is imputed to me such that I stand before God perfectly righteous. Here is the gospel as found in Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

Nowhere in that presentation of the righteousness with which we must be righteous before God do you read of the law or the keeping of the commandments. To say, “We may not conceive of the gospel...in any way that takes away from the demand of the law” and state that this reference to the demand of the law is something we do is to corrupt the gospel message and to take away Christ and all of his benefits from the people. It is to rob the people of Christ.

Here is the gospel, as stated in the lecture:

For that declaration of God in the gospel, as you stand before him, it doesn't matter whether you obeyed or did not obey. It does not matter. It does not matter whether you loved God or did not love God. It does not matter whether you are perfect or not perfect. It matters whether *Jesus* obeyed God or did not obey God—and he obeyed God. It matters whether Jesus was perfect or was not perfect—and he was perfect. He was perfect for you, in your place, so that the declaration that comes to you is a declaration of what God imputes to you for Jesus' sake, which is the covering of Christ and the blood and obedience of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Here is the gospel, as stated by Theodore Beza:

The Gospel sets forth this same justice to us [the majesty and justice of God], but there it is pacified and satisfied by the mercy manifested in Christ (Heb. 12:22–24).<sup>16</sup>

Here is the gospel, as stated by Martin Luther:

But this most excellent righteousness—that of faith, I mean—which God imputes to us through Christ, without works—is

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Lanning, “The Good Law and the Glorious Gospel,” lecture given on October 31, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfokYQOu8rc>. You can find a transcript of that speech in the November 18, 2023, issue of *Reformed Pavilion*.

<sup>16</sup> Beza, *The Christian Faith*, 42.

neither political nor ceremonial, nor is it the righteousness of God's law, nor does it consist in works. It is quite the opposite; that is to say, it is passive, whereas the others are active. We do nothing in this matter; we give nothing to God but simply receive and allow someone else to work in us—that is, God. Therefore, it seems to me that this righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, can well be called passive righteousness.<sup>17</sup>

Here is the gospel from the word of God:

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference. (Rom. 3:20–22)

Reverend Langerak does not understand the gospel. Not understanding it, he corrupts it. The children of God who enter that sanctuary with their two mules' burden of earth need to hear this: what you are being taught is not the gospel. If you believe Reverend Langerak and take what he is teaching you to heart, such that it becomes the confession of your lips and the belief of your heart, you will be damned. Don't take it from the worm writing this article. Take it from God. "For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

Reverend Langerak continues in this same vein throughout the rest of the sermon. In speaking about the Israelites in Jeremiah 31, who were in captivity in Babylon, and the fact that the streets of Jerusalem ran red with the blood of the slain and the walls were made a ruin, he says this:

And God says, "I did it. I am the one who called Babylon in, and I did it because of

your idolatry. I did it because you did not love me. I did it because you forsook me. That's the kind of God I am. Don't ever underestimate the demand to love me with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength." And we need to see that as part of the gospel. That's gospel. That's an important part of the scriptures and the prophets.

Reverend Langerak explains what he means in this connection.

And in Jeremiah 31 it's put in an unmistakable way so that there's no excuse to preach either a conditional covenant or preach a covenant that has no place for the law of God and loving God, at least not as part of our salvation and renewal of us.

That is the gospel? The demand to love God—which command the Israelites violated—is the gospel? The law is part of our salvation and the "renewal" of us? That is not the gospel. To the members of Trinity PRC, I say this: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6–7).

Here is the law-gospel distinction as it comes to the child of God who has transgressed every commandment, including the first: The law said to love God. You did not do that. Instead, you went whoring on every high mountain and under every green hill and served other gods. You grossly transgressed all the commandments of God and kept none of them. There is only one hope for you, and that hope is found outside of yourself. That hope is found in the one who is pictured in the lamb offered on the altar, the true lamb, who sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against your sins, so that by his passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, he might redeem your body and soul

<sup>17</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, xvii.



from everlasting damnation and obtain for you the favor of God, righteousness, and eternal life (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 15). There is the gospel: Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Throughout the sermon Reverend Langerak gets close to the truth. But whenever he gets close to the true gospel, he runs away from it, revealing a fear of it. The gospel practically jumps off the page in almost every verse of Jeremiah 31, but Reverend Langerak never can quite bring himself to set his feet on it. What is the gospel of Jeremiah 31? “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (v. 3). Can you imagine a more beautiful expression of the gospel than this? Election! Before you ever transgressed one commandment of his, God loved you! What could explain that? Only one thing: Jesus Christ. Ignoring election, Reverend Langerak prefers to focus on a few introductory words from Lord’s Day 34, which words serve as a springboard for him to blend the law and the gospel.

Imagine how a member of that congregation would have responded if, at the conclusion of that sermon, you were to ask him about the law-gospel distinction. This would have been the response: “They go together. They may not be separated. The connection of the law of God to our salvation is a matter of the gospel.”

Where Jeremiah 31 cries out for the pastor to feed his flock on Christ, Reverend Langerak feeds them on man, with devastating consequences.

It is an inevitability that Reverend Langerak ends the sermon the way he does, with one final, full-throated corruption of the gospel:

If now all these other things are true, loving the Lord thy God is part of the perfect, indelible, unchangeable law of God that comes from Jehovah the I AM. But the I AM, Jehovah, is also the one who makes his covenant with us, which covenant is that he turns us, changes us,

renews us. Then do you not see how it’s impossible to be saved, it’s impossible to experience salvation, it’s impossible to be in the covenant and experience the covenant, it is impossible to fellowship with God or experience fellowship with God apart from works?

No, Reverend Langerak, the truth is exactly the opposite of what you taught your flock. The truth is that it is impossible to be saved, it’s impossible to experience salvation, it’s impossible to be in the covenant and experience the covenant, it is impossible to fellowship with God or experience fellowship with God *with* your works.

Luther also had something to say about those who taught that the keeping of the law was necessary to receive salvation (“to be saved”).

The devil practices these two things most busily. He is not content to trouble and deceive many people through his false apostles but also labors to overthrow the Gospel and never rests until he has brought this about. Yet such perverters of the Gospel can abide nothing less than to hear that they are apostles of the devil; they glory more than anyone else in the name of Christ and boast that they are the most sincere preachers of the Gospel. But because they mix the law with the Gospel, they are perverters of the Gospel, for either Christ must remain and the law perish, or the law must remain and Christ perish; Christ and the law are incompatible and cannot reign together in the conscience.<sup>18</sup>

All of the things listed by Reverend Langerak—salvation, experience, and fellowship; and listed in such a way as to stick in the eye of his congregation and the denomination the reality that he never believed whatever true things might have been said by his synod in 2018—can only be true for a child of God by keeping law and gospel as far apart as light and darkness.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 51.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Rom. 8:1–4)

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. (Gal. 3:21–22)

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. (2 Cor. 3:6)

For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior.

Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. (Belgic Confession 22)

We believe that we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator

and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us. (Belgic Confession 26)

The end of article 23 of the Belgic Confession was written to condemn Reverend Langerak's theology.

And, verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed.

If this sermon by Reverend Langerak sounds familiar to you—and it should—it is because you have seen his theology before. This corrupting of the law–gospel distinction and this stripping of Christ from the people through a righteousness that comes by way of faith and works was the theology of Hope Protestant Reformed Church.

How would they again come to experience the fellowship of God, the protection of God, the blessing of their still covenant God? The answer is, as always it is, they must obey him. They must repent. That is the only way to enjoy these blessings of God. And repent, they did.<sup>19</sup>

It is by the exercise of faith that this covenant life of friendship and fellowship is experienced and enjoyed.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore Scripture and the Confessions also emphasize the necessity of the exercise of faith *in a holy life of obedience* to enjoy the intimacy of the Father's fellowship.<sup>21</sup>

This need for a holy life of obedience to enjoy the Father's fellowship does not stand independent of faith but must be

<sup>19</sup> David Overway, "Victory by a Mother in Israel," sermon preached on September 25, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> "Doctrinal Statement: RE: Experiencing Fellowship with the Father (November 21, 2017)," *Acts of Synod* 2018, 195.

<sup>21</sup> "Doctrinal Statement: RE: Experiencing Fellowship with the Father (November 21, 2017)," *Acts of Synod* 2018, 196. Emphasis is in the document.

seen as the exercise of faith. It is only by a living, sanctifying faith which exercises itself in obedience that we can experience and enjoy God's fellowship (Eph. 2:8; Acts 26:18).<sup>22</sup>

But Scripture and the Creeds refer to the second, i.e., preaching the commands of Scripture to call God's people to holiness as the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, the preaching of the commands of Scripture as the demand upon God's people to live and walk in holiness is the preaching of Christ crucified, and therefore is the power of God unto salvation.<sup>23</sup>

Reverend Langerak knows this, too, having served on the committee of pre-advice for Classis East in January of 2018 that was assigned to bring advice on this material. It was this classis, more than any other, that dealt with this theology of man, where the differences between the two theologies could not have been more starkly portrayed. Reverend Langerak, like so many other theologians in the PRC, never stopped believing this theology of salvation by faith and works, and he never stopped teaching it. The only thing that has changed since 2018 is that the lie has developed and taken more ground. Can you imagine the former pastor of Hope PRC ever daring to say, "Don't you see how it is impossible to be saved apart from works?"

The truth was taught to the PRC, clearly and gloriously.

We enter into the presence of God entirely in Jesus Christ alone or we enter not at all, our sanctified good works that are yet polluted with sin being wholly pushed aside as any reason we might enter into His holy presence, pushed aside by the gift of faith that clings to Jesus Christ alone for all our salvation. We enter His

presence by faith alone without any works, not even any genuinely good works done out of gratitude to God. Every last one of them is marred with sin. Any one of them would cast me far away from His fellowship into the darkness and death of hell forever were I not hid entirely in my Savior Jesus Christ, having been engrafted into Him by a true faith so that His perfect righteousness and holiness is mine.<sup>24</sup>

We find this instruction in Scripture concerning Christ as the way: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Pet. 3:18). "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:19–20). And now He in the flesh, as crucified, risen, and ascended and glorified flesh, continues to be our way, our advocate, and our intercessor in heaven, as Lord's Day 18, Q&A 49 also instructs: "we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that he, as the Head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members." Jesus Christ Himself—no more and no less—is the way, the truth, and the life. Not our obedience with all its pollution and corruption is part of that. His obedience is ours. In His obedience alone we approach the Father. In Him we are in heaven with the Father even now. For He is our Head and we are His body. There is no other way.<sup>25</sup>

The stumbling block for the PRC was that God had these truths taught to them by a man

<sup>22</sup> "Doctrinal Statement: RE: Experiencing Fellowship with the Father (November 21, 2017)," *Acts of Synod 2018*, 198.

<sup>23</sup> Hope consistory letter to Neil Meyer dated November 4, 2015, in which the consistory objected to Mr. Meyer's defense of the law-gospel distinction when Mr. Meyer wrote, "There are commands in Scripture and we preach them, but they are not the power to save."

<sup>24</sup> "Letter of Connie Meyer to Hope Consistory" (November 28, 2017), *Acts of Synod 2018*, 201.

<sup>25</sup> "Mr. Meyer's Protest to Hope's Consistory re the Sermon in Question" (July 7, 2015), *Acts of Synod 2016*, 84.

and woman who were not mighty in the eyes of the world and not mighty in the eyes of the church. So the PRC rejected them and what they taught, which was the theology of heaven. It rejected a clear understanding of the law-gospel distinction, and now the PRC has a monstrous idol of its own creation—one that blends the law and the gospel, that uses terms like faith, love, covenant, works, and salvation

in ways that are unrecognizable to the Reformed faith.

Two different words spoken, only days apart.

In only one of them was salvation found in Jesus Christ and him alone, who alone is the way.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

—DE

## THE ALCOVE

### Letter to Hope PRC (September 19, 2017)

To the Consistory of Hope PRC, Walker, MI  
Elder Joel Minderhoud, Clerk  
September 19, 2017

Dear Brothers in the Lord,  
I heartily thank you for your response to me dated March 22, 2017. The time and effort that this involved is not taken for granted. As I was unable to fully respond to those documents prior to the May 2017 meeting of Classis East in order to keep the matter before that meeting of Classis East, I now do so in brief. Also, given the significance of the decisions of Synod 2017 to our situation in that Synod 2017 removed the primary article in which you have rested your arguments to me in your March 22 response, I have also waited to see if you have changed your position on anything in that response. As I have not yet heard from you that you have retracted anything since Synod 2017 and it has now been three months, I will therefore proceed at this point as assuming your response is still on the table as is.

Many issues are at stake and I believe you deserve a response in all areas. Nevertheless, in the interest of brevity and clarity at this time, I will limit this letter to the main issues we face in our controversy. If you desire more than this letter, I will gladly provide that, the Lord willing.

The main issue indeed still remains before us as stated in my first document of protest to you concerning the doctrine taught by our pastor: “The main teaching of Rev. Overway that I object to is the concept that our obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience the fellowship of God. I consider this theology to be that of a conditional covenant” (protest dated August 3, 2016, page 1).

Your March 22, 2017 response to me answers that issue, and once more, I thank you for that answer. Sadly, your answer also clearly reveals that we are not in agreement on this issue.

I cite only two sections from your response. First, on page 5 of 39 you state: “Be assured we do not disagree with you that the blessings of salvation are ours by faith alone.” You also confess Belgic Confession, Art. 22, that faith is the only “instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness...an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits...”

I appreciate the fact that you state that you also confess this article of faith in Belgic Confession, Art. 22 as quoted above. I also appreciate that you state, “Be assured we do not disagree with you that the blessings of salvation are ours by faith alone. The only way we have any aspect of salvation is through faith—that pipe-line or bond we have with Jesus Christ, established



and maintained graciously with us by God alone” (page 5 of 39). How can it be, then, that we still do not agree? It is apparent that we do not mean the same things by these confessions. What follows on page 5 of 39 clearly shows that we do not confess the same thing when both of us take Belgic Confession, Art. 22 upon our lips:

What one must see is that our obedience flows from the faith we have in Christ Jesus. It is the fruit of our faith... Faith and our obedience are not to be understood as two unrelated and unconnected things. But rather, our obedience flows out of faith. Our faith and obedience are so tightly connected Prof. Hanko says “So much is a living faith like its works that James can use faith and works interchangeably for true faith is works, and works are true faith” (Hanko, *Faith Made Perfect*, RFPA, 2015, pg 133) and “faith works with works in such a way that faith is working when works are performed” (Hanko, *Faith Made Perfect*, RFPA 2015, pg 136).

I leave the author of these words you quote to explain them in the context of the book of James in which they are stated, but in the context of salvation, in the context of justification, the subject in which is found the words we confess in Belgic Confession, Art. 22, faith alone without any works at all must prevail. That is explicit in the article itself: “Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works.” Although the connection between faith and the works that flow out of faith is so close that these two are inseparable, even infallibly inseparable, a sharp distinction must be maintained between faith and works or the truth of justification by faith alone—including the experience of the blessing of justification by faith alone—becomes meaningless. Then justification and the experience of justification are

by faith and works. Using your explanation for how you are able to confess Belgic Confession, Art. 22, faith is not alone. Rather, this is to confess justification by faith and works.

The same author can be quoted on this subject in the context of justification as well from *Justified Unto Liberty*, page 209:

Faith is exactly the opposite of law. Faith does not operate on the principle of “doing” or “working.” Faith is exactly *not* a matter of working. There are those who claim that faith is a work of man, an activity of man’s own free will. In a subtle way they change the correct statement “Man is saved by faith alone” to mean “Man is saved by the *work* of believing.” This is an inexcusable corruption of biblical truth.

The proof that faith and works are mutually exclusive lies in the apostle’s well-known words in Ephesians 2:8–9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” The apostle sets faith and works over against each other; it is one or the other, never both. If we are saved by faith, works have nothing at all to do with our salvation. If we are saved by works, faith has nothing to do with our salvation. The man who tries to have it both ways straddles a fence, from which he will fall into the curse of the law.<sup>1</sup>

I also quote from *Gospel Truth of Justification* by Prof. Engelsma, page 211: “It is false doctrine, a denial of justification by faith alone, to teach that, whereas justification is by faith alone, assurance of justification, really justification’s assurance, is by faith and good works...”<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, let us hear Martin Luther speak from his commentary on Galatians. Though written some 500 years ago his words are no less pertinent to the issues we face still today:

<sup>1</sup> Hanko, *Justified Unto Liberty*, RFPA 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*, RFPA 2017.

It seems a small matter to mingle the Law and Gospel, faith and works, but it creates more mischief than man's brain can conceive. To mix Law and Gospel not only clouds the knowledge of grace, it cuts out Christ altogether.<sup>3</sup>

And:

...the papists. They admit that faith is the foundation of salvation. But they add a conditional clause that faith can save only when it is furnished with good works. This is wrong. The true gospel declares that good works are the embellishment of faith, but that faith itself is the gift and work of God in our hearts. Faith is able to justify, because it apprehends Christ, the Redeemer.<sup>4</sup>

I see your explanation of Belgic Confession, Art. 22 as an attempt to mingle faith and works, Law and Gospel, and to attach good works to faith in such a way as to make the confession that we are saved and justified by faith alone meaningless if not impossible. If we err on this point, we err in all. We learn this from Luther too:

On the question of justification we must remain adamant, or else we shall lose the truth of the Gospel. It is a matter of life and death.<sup>5</sup>

Thus I limit this letter to one main issue. If we differ on this point, we can be sure we shall differ on everything else. To bring home our difference on this key point of doctrine, therefore, I address only one more section of your 39-page response.

First, merely noting as context, to my most basic and essential question, "Is our experience of the covenant conditional or not?" you answer on page 2 of 39:

We believe that you wrongly identify, *as a condition of the covenant*, the pastor's teaching about obedience ("that obedience is necessary for the experience of fellowship with the Father"—Synod 2016), *which is the necessary way of the covenant life* we have in Christ Jesus alone.

Again, I note the above as context. The matter I plan to address is on page 9 of 39. On page 9 you explain your position concerning exactly what our good works accomplish in salvation. That has been the question all along. If our good works are more than the fruit of salvation, if our good works are necessary for salvation, if we must have good works in order to attain the experience of our salvation, exactly what are our good works doing to accomplish all of that? What exactly is their function? You have rested your case on a statement made by Synod 2016 as quoted above: "that obedience is necessary for the experience of fellowship with the Father." Nevertheless, we may still ask: exactly how is our obedience necessary for the experience of fellowship with the Father? You call this "the necessary way of the covenant life." But the question remains even then, how and why is obedience necessary for fellowship with God? Exactly what do you mean when you say obedience is the necessary way of the covenant life?

Aside from the fact that Synod 2017 has overturned the 2016 article on which you rest this response to me, and unless you plan to withdraw your response to me as erroneous, again, the matter before us is still on the table. In your response you have explained what you mean by those statements and I protest what you have explained. I do not accept your explanation and consider it to be an expression of gross false doctrine.

I refer to the following statement: "As we have stated, God is pleased to have the elect experience the blessings of salvation in the way

<sup>3</sup> Luther, trans. Theodore Graebner, D.D., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, Zondervan, 1962, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 49.



of obedience. God accomplishes this by the work of the Holy Spirit... God does not wait for us to obey or depend on us for Him to do some further work of saving us. But God actually works in us that obedience; and in the way of that obedience that He works in us, He wisely and sovereignly causes us to experience the blessings of salvation” (page 9 of 39).

What I find here on page 9 of 39 is the definitive explanation I was waiting for. It is not what I was hoping for, but it is what I was waiting for: “But God actually works in us that obedience; and in the way of that obedience that He works in us, He wisely and sovereignly causes us to experience the blessings of salvation.”

I have observed that the words “in the way of” have come to mean different things to different people. This can simply mean “a manner of working” or it can mean “means” or “instrument.” To speak of obedience being the “necessary way of the covenant” still tells me very little. Is this the way in which we are commanded to walk in thankful obedience for God’s great gift of salvation to us of making us to be His covenant friends? Is this the way in which we will walk by the grace of God because this is what God works in those whom He has made to be His covenant friends? If that is all that is meant by those words, I heartily agree with them. The way in which God’s chosen and redeemed covenant friends show their gratitude to God is by walking in His ways. Indeed, this is how God’s covenant friends must live. It is commanded. Walking in this way glorifies His name. The glory of His name is the grand and final purpose of salvation. And God gives grace to us so that we make progress in that godly walk. That progress glorifies His name.

But the explanation of these words that I find quoted on page 9 of 39 answers that the purpose of our obedience is more than God’s glory, more than a witness to others, more than an evidence and confirmation of our faith, which purposes all are scriptural and creedal. The specific purpose stated in your explanation is “in the way of that obedience that He works in

us, He wisely and sovereignly causes us to experience the blessings of salvation.” So God uses our obedience, which He works in us, to cause us to experience the blessings of salvation. If God is using something to cause something to happen, what He is using is an instrument. In this case, our obedience is the instrument that God uses to cause us to experience the blessings of salvation. This is what you mean by “in the way of,” therefore. You speak of instrument. So now you have made clear what you mean by “in the way of” and how you interpret the words “necessary way of the covenant.”

I belabor that point because on page 33 of 39 Rev. Overway denies ever saying in the sermon “Justified by Faith” that works or obedience are an “instrument.” It is true that he never used that word in that sermon. Nevertheless, that is clearly the meaning of what is being taught here. If we are talking about how God “causes us to experience the blessings of salvation,” we are talking about a means and an instrument to that end. That cannot be interpreted any other way. And to experience the blessing of justification is to experience the blessings of salvation.

One objection to what I am saying may yet arise because you also maintain that God works this obedience in us by His grace. The obedience that God uses as an instrument is itself a gift of grace, therefore. Is not this then how a gracious salvation works? I answer that whether it is said that we do these works of ourselves or as a result of God’s grace working in us by the Holy Spirit makes no difference at all. First of all, works are works no matter from whence they proceed, and faith is faith alone which allows no works of any sort to be identified with it. Faith clings to Christ alone without any works—even including the thankful works Christ Himself works in us by His Holy Spirit which proceed out of faith. Faith excludes works, period. Secondly, the good works that God works in us by His grace are all wholly polluted in this life by our sin and sinful natures that yet remain in us. Not one perfect work exists among them. In this controversy it has oft been stated that God

cannot have fellowship with those living willfully in sin. Indeed, I add that God cannot have fellowship with any sin at all. Not one speck of evil may enter His holy presence. And where does that leave us if we are ever to be in His fellowship as the damn-worthy sinners that we are? In Christ. That is the only hope that we have. His obedience is perfect. Ours is hopelessly marred. We hide in Him. We approach God in Him who is perfectly righteous or we approach God not at all. And to be in Christ is to be connected to Christ, and to be connected to Christ is faith. Faith is the only instrument, therefore, by which I may receive all the blessings of salvation, especially the blessing of experiencing the fellowship of God.

Brethren, what you are teaching concerning the fellowship of God and the blessings of salvation is not creedal. Perhaps the most succinct explanation of what is creedal in regards to this teaching is stated in the first question of Lord's Day 25 as that question summarizes the gospel even further, the true gospel of Jesus Christ already having been summarized in Lord's Days 23 and 24. The statement in that question is this: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only..." Faith is the way,

the only way, the only means, the only instrument, by which we partake of and experience the blessings of salvation. That is what this question teaches. That is not what you are teaching. You are teaching obedience is the way by which we experience the blessings of salvation. That is not "by faith only." This is not creedal. For your sake and the sake of the church of Jesus Christ everywhere I implore you as dear brethren in the Lord, this teaching must be repudiated and repudiated sharply and thoroughly. It is, indeed, a false gospel.

I conclude with quoting from John Calvin, a quote I also brought to you on page 2 of the August 3, 2016 protest. Calvin speaks of the enjoyment—and therefore the experience—of the blessings of salvation. In his commentary on Gal. 3:6 he states: "For this righteousness is not a quality which exists in men, but is the mere gift of God, and is enjoyed by faith only; and not even as a reward justly due to faith, but because we receive by faith what God freely gives."<sup>6</sup>

May God in His mercy richly bless you to see the truth of His Word, the truth that gives all glory to God and to God alone.

In Jesus Christ our Lord,

—Connie L. Meyer



<sup>6</sup> Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 21, Baker Book House, 1979, p. 85.

### Article XXXIX. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

**W**e found that the postdiluvian or Noahitic world differed from the first world in that the development of the human race was placed under definite control. A threefold restraint we mentioned. In the first place, the fear and dread of man is imposed upon the animal world, preventing the animal from revealing its wild nature over against man to the same extent as was, no doubt, the case before the flood. In the second place, the relation of man to his fellow-man is modified by the institution of government, giving to man authority over others from above. And in the third place the average age of man is considerably shortened and thus his rapid development also in sin and iniquity is checked.

A fourth, very important check upon the development of the race is introduced in the plain of Shinar, when at the occasion of the building of the tower of Babel a serious incision was made into the unity of humanity by what is generally known as the confusion of tongues.

This important event deserves separate consideration.

What took place in the valley of Shinar is of greatest significance for the entire future development of the human race. It determined the form of development of the fallen king and his kingdom in this world for centuries to come. It is of far-reaching influence upon the political and international life of the world even in our own time. It will have its influence even up to the time that the history of Shinar's plain shall in principle be repeated, the nations shall temporarily succeed in healing the wound received at the

building of Babel, and God shall again come down from heaven to frustrate the wicked attempt of an anti-christian confederacy. The scar of the operation performed upon the human race a century and a half after the flood is plainly visible all thru the history of that race, and that not only in the difference in language, but in the very separation into nations that separately strive for absolute world-power and in doing so antagonize and fight one another. And, therefore, it may safely be said, that what took place at the building of First Babylon can hardly be overestimated as to its importance. For a correct understanding of political history a true conception of the "confusion of tongues" is indispensable.

The restraint placed upon the development of mankind in this dispensation which is known as the confusion of tongues is different in character from any one of the first three forms of restraint we have discussed thus far. That this is true might already be surmised from the fact that it was introduced more than a century after the flood, while all the other changes were introduced immediately after the earth had dried up. The fear and dread of the animal over against man is revealed immediately. The sentence that the murderer shall pay with his life thru the agency of proper authority for his crime is expressed soon after Noah left the ark. The ages decrease in the very first generation after Noah. But the change of the confusion of tongues was not introduced until the second century after the deluge, for we read that in the days of Peleg the earth was divided, Gen. 10:25. And Peleg, the fifth after Noah, was born a hundred years after

the flood, Gen. 11:10–16. The confusion of tongues and the division caused by it presupposed a certain development of the race, waited for the proper time and occasion, and therefore, could not be arbitrarily imposed at the time of the deluge. And, therefore, this very fact alone would cause us to surmise that there is a difference in character between the restraint formerly imposed and the one that demands our attention at present.

This difference can readily be seen.

Neither the fear and dread that was laid upon the animal world in respect to man; nor the institution of government; nor even the shortening of the average age of man constituted an incision into the life of the human race. They left the life of mankind as it was. They were rather checks imposed upon the life of the race, not cuts into that life. The unity of the race was preserved. The normal and most natural development of the organic life of the race remained practically unchanged. If life had developed as it was immediately after the flood, and if the change caused by the confusion of tongues had never been introduced, the race would have developed into families, clans and tribes, and these would undoubtedly have revealed their own peculiar characteristics, but there would have been no separation and division into nations such as exists today. But this fourth restraint actually does result in such a separation of the race. Surely, the organic unity of mankind is preserved even in spite of this separation. And in spite of the split that finds its source in the plain of Shinar, the organic unity of mankind is also plainly evident. Even as the different languages are after all human languages, so all the different divisions of the race belong plainly to the human family. But, nevertheless, it should not be overlooked, that after Shinar the race does no more develop simply along the organic line of family and tribe, but is distinctly divided on account of an incision that is made into the race from without. Never must we adopt the interpretation that would reason away the divine and miraculous intervention of

the Almighty at the building of Babel's tower. The attempt has, indeed, been made to explain Gen. 11 in such a way that the separation into peoples of different languages was but the natural outcome of a normal development into families and tribes. Gradually, as the race developed, the different clans and tribes drifted into partial or complete isolation from one another. And the ultimate result was that also their language changed and in their speech they naturally became estranged from one another. And this is what Gen. 11 should mean to tell us. But this is in flat contradiction with Scripture. According to Scripture the course of events was just the reverse. Not the confusion of tongues and the difference in speech were the result of a natural separation into different tribes, but the separation of the race, "the division of the earth" followed upon a miraculous alteration in human speech. This, then, must be maintained and clearly understood. The confusion of speech was an act of divine intervention, suddenly interfering with the natural development of sinful humanity at that time.

In order to appreciate the significance of what happened in the valley of Shinar we must remember, as more than one commentator correctly points out, that language is the expression of men's conscious life. The change of speech presupposes, therefore, a change of man's conscious existence. The restraints imposed immediately after the flood left the life of the race as such undisturbed, did not change it. But with this fourth check it is different. Speech is the expression of man's intellect and will, of his conception, his imagination and emotional life. It is the expression of man's inmost soul. A change in language, especially such fundamental change as was introduced at Babel, is inconceivable without a corresponding change in the inmost soul of man. That this is true can be appreciated perhaps by no one better than by the immigrant into a strange country. The difference between him and the native born is far deeper than the mere external one of speech. He may acquire the language of the country in a comparatively short

time. But even a perfect knowledge of the foreign language, together with the acquired ability to speak it without any strange accent, does not imply that the immigrant has in every way become like the native born. And, therefore, it should be remembered that the sudden change of speech affected in Shinar's valley was more than the mere confusion of tongues. It was the introduction into the human race of a difference in conception, a difference in imagination and thought, a difference in the emotional life of the

various groups that were thus originated. What took place at the building of the tower of Babel determined that the human race should not simply develop along the natural line of the family and tribe, even though these may have been preserved in the division, but that a new separation should be accomplished and maintained, a separation imposed from without upon the race, by miraculous intervention from heaven.

—Holland, Mich.

