

Requested Action

Is Rev. Lanning guilty of the sin of public schism? That is a very serious question and must be answered through an orderly and just process that is above reproach. We need to hear the answer to this question from:

- Byron Center's FULL consistory upon completion of ALL the work.
- Byron Center's nearest neighboring church.
- A non-conflicted Classis / Synod.

I ask that Rev. Lanning's deposition case be sent back to Byron Center's consistory for more work and that the nearest neighboring consistory render a judgment if necessary. Understanding that it may not be possible or practical for this to happen, out of love for Rev. Lanning, the consistory of Byron Center, our broader assemblies, and the body of Christ, I ask that synod acknowledge these errors and work towards reconciliation with Rev. Lanning and the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church. May God grant us peace and unity in the Truth.

In Christ,
Kent Deemter

Protest of Mr. Nathan Doezema

April 14, 2021

Dear brethren in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I herein protest the decision of Synod 2020 in Article 51, C, 2, b, c, d on pages 80-82 in the 2020 Acts of Synod.

First of all, I contend that this decision is contrary to Scripture and the confessions because it gives good works a place and function they do not have in the reception of the blessings of salvation. When we are talking about the way in which mercy is received, the good works of believers must be entirely excluded. Faith is always the only way in which we receive all the blessings of salvation.

As I will presently demonstrate by many quotations, our Three Forms of Unity (the Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dordt, Belgic Confession) and Scripture as a whole do not teach that some activity of ours (repentance, good works in this case) is necessary before we enjoy particular blessings of salvation (including mercy). Rather, they teach that the only way in which we ever receive any of the blessings of salvation (both for the first time and throughout our entire life) is through faith in Christ, which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts by means of the gospel. When we are talking about receiving blessings (mercy), we must speak of faith and faith alone as the way in which we receive all blessings from God, and we must exclude all of our activities from this way. As its inevitable and immediate fruit, repentance will always accompany faith, but it may never be made part of that way in which we receive any of the blessings

of salvation. I will return to proving this contention from the Reformed confessions themselves shortly.

Secondly, I contend that this decision contradicts the decisions of Synod 2018 and 2019.

Synod 2018 gave us the proper understanding of “in the way of,” found in Acts of Synod 2018, pp. 72-73, Art. 62, B, 1, b, 1), c): “The Necessary Way of the Covenant explained:”...(4a): “Obedience is *the way of*, that is to say, *the way of grateful conduct* in the experience of covenant fellowship, because obedience is a necessary *fruit* of our faith in Christ through which faith we have fellowship with God”.... (5) In conclusion: (a) Obedience—the obedience God requires and the obedience we gratefully give in a life of good works according to the power of His Spirit working in us—is never a *prerequisite of, or a condition unto, or the basis for, or an instrument/means unto or the way unto*, but always a *fruit* in the covenant relationship, and as we walk in the way of obedience we experience covenant fellowship with God. (b) Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant of God. Though we may lose the experience of covenant fellowship by continuing in disobedience, we never gain it by our obedience, but it is restored by faith in Christ and in the way of repentance.” ... (d) Properly expressing the relationship between obedience as the necessary way of the covenant and the experience of covenant fellowship is: We experience fellowship with God through faith (instrument), on the basis of what Christ has done (ground), and in the way of our obedience (way of conduct or manner of living.)” **Synod 2019** clarified that the truth expressed by “we experience fellowship with God...in the way of our obedience” is that our obedience is “the necessary life of gratitude for one who is enjoying covenant fellowship with God by faith” (Acts of Synod 2019 Art. 85, B, 4, c, 1), p. 67).

Synod 2020 said: A proper use of “in the way of” is to express that particular activities are prior to the experience of particular blessings of salvation.

Art. 51, C, 2, b, 3), Acts of Synod 2020, p. 81: “Rev. Overway in the sermon explicitly distinguishes between what Christ has done as the basis for mercy, faith as the instrument for obtaining mercy, and repentance as the way in which mercy is received.”

Art. 51, C, 2, c, Acts of Synod 2020, p. 81: “Rev. Overway did not militate against Synod 2018 when he preached that there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God. 1) The fact that an activity of the believer may occur temporally *prior* to the *experience* of a

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blessing from God does not automatically make such activity a condition or prerequisite for earning, gaining, or meriting the blessing from God.”

Art. 51, C, 2, d, Acts of Synod 2020, p. 82: “Rev. Overway’s preaching that we repent and in the way of repentance experience the mercy of God is the teaching of Scripture and the confessions.”

These two decisions are mutually exclusive. Good works (activities) cannot be both fruits of experiencing all the blessings of salvation by faith AND prior to the experience of particular blessings of salvation.

The question throughout this controversy has been, “What is the relationship between our experience of the blessings of salvation and our good works (including repentance and prayer)?” Synod has now given two different answers to that question that are diametrically opposed to each other. One is the truth and one is the lie. The question before synod 2021, therefore, is “which is the truth?” Are good works fruits of faith and thus the way in which we live in the covenant as the expression of our thanksgiving for all the blessings of salvation we have and enjoy by faith? (Synod 2018 & 2019). Or, are good works activities that occur prior to the experience of particular blessings and thus the way in which particular blessings of salvation are received? (Synod 2020).

Since scripture as set forth in the Three Forms of Unity is our standard of truth, let us see what answer our confessions give to this question of which decision is indeed truth and which is the lie.

A. The confessions on the place and function of good works: (I have attached the pertinent quotations from the confessions listed below in Appendix A at the end of my protest for your reference.)

Positively:

1. Good works have their ultimate source in election:
- Canons 1.7, 8, 9, RE 1; 2.8; 5.RE1
2. Good works are benefits of our salvation—benefits of Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and sitting at God’s right hand:
- HC Q&A 43, 45, 49; Canons 5.RE1
3. Good works are the work of the Holy Spirit in us:
- BC Art. 14; HC Q&A 49, 70, 76, 86, 115, 127; Canons III/IV.11, 16; 5.7
4. Good works are the inevitable fruits of faith whereby we show our thankfulness for the blessings we have received by faith in Christ:
- BC Art. 24; HC Q&A 32, 64, 86, 91, 116, 126; Canons 1.13; III/IV.15; 5.7,12, 13, RE6, RE7
5. As fruits of faith, good works are the marks of a Christian:
- BC Art. 29; Canons III/IV.15
6. As fruits of faith, good works confirm that one’s faith is genuine:

- HC Q&A 86; Canons 5.10, RE5

7. Though our walk with God in a life of obedience brings much suffering and trouble from the world, yet we have the hope that the end of all our labors and sufferings will be the eternal reward God has laid up in store for us, namely, eternal life with Him in glory:

- BC Art. 24, 37; HC Q&A 63

8. When we sinfully stray from God and from the path of obedience and instead walk in unbelief and unrepentant sin, God in His grace chastens us, so that we experience the loving displeasure of God:

- Canons 5.5, 13

9. Refusal to turn from sin and to return to God and a walk with Him in loving, thankful obedience indicates unbelief and is ground for excommunication from the church of Christ:

- HC Q 82, 85, 87; Canons 1.13

Negatively:

1. Good works are *not* the ground of our salvation:

- BC Art. 16, 24; HC Q 62; Canons 2.7, RE4; III/IV.7, 10

2. Good works have *no* place in the receiving and obtaining of any blessing or aspect of our salvation:

- BC Art. 22, 23, 24; HC Q 86; Canons 1.RE1, 3, 4, 5, 9; 2.RE6; III/IV.5, 12, 14, RE6, 7, 9; 5. RE1

3. Good works are *not* the condition upon which the completion of one's salvation depends, and, thus, good works have *no* determinant role in any aspect of one's salvation:

- Canons 2.RE3; 5.8

B. The confessions on receiving the blessings of salvation:

1. We receive all the blessings of salvation by faith in Christ alone:

- BC Art. 22, 23, 24, 26, 35; HC Q&A 20, 21, 30, 32, 53, 55, 59, 60, 61, 62, 65, 76, 84; Canons 1.4, III/IV.6; 5.7, 9, 10

2. While good works always follow the reception of all the blessings of salvation by faith in Christ, when it comes to the actual receiving of these blessings, good works are excluded (except in that good works themselves are among the blessings we receive). This we have already demonstrated above.

3. Furthermore, while the confessions consistently give faith in Christ a place and function in the reception of all the blessings of salvation that Christ has obtained for us, they never give good works (including repentance and prayer) a place and function in the reception of these blessings—not even in HC LD 45 or Canons 5.5.

Regarding HC LD 45: It is striking that there is NO mention of receiving in the third section of the Heidelberg Catechism, including in LD 45, where the HC addresses the necessity of

prayer for Christians. Synod quotes HC Q/A 116 in support of its teaching that “there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God.” However, I contend that this Q/A does not indeed support this teaching. We must understand Q/A 116 in the same way we understand LD 32 Q/A 86, which asks, “why must we still do good works?” The catechism here is not setting forth qualifications for continuing to receive God’s grace and Holy Spirit so that we can continue to fight the battle of faith. Rather, LD 45 is setting forth the inevitable mark of God’s children to whom He has given His grace and Holy Spirit and the certainty they can have of continuing to receive them (Luke 11:13). Just as believers must do good works because they are renewed by the Spirit of Christ, so also believers in whom the Spirit dwells must pray. Just as the purpose of all our good works is to show our thankfulness and to praise God, so also the purpose of our prayer is to acknowledge God alone as the gracious giver of every gift on whom alone we depend for all things, to express our thankfulness for His gifts, and to glorify His name. Just as the believer walking in good works has the confidence of faith that he is and forever shall remain a member of Christ, so also the believer who prays to God has the confidence of faith that his faithful, covenant God and Father will certainly give him all that he needs, including His grace and Holy Spirit, for Jesus’ sake. Yet, just because asking for God’s grace and Holy Spirit and thanking God for these gifts in prayer is characteristic of all those and those only to whom God gives His grace and Holy Spirit, that does not mean that our praying for these gifts is an activity we must perform before we will continue to receive these gifts from God. Prayer is not the way in which we receive, but the way in which we express. In the words of the HC, prayer is the expression of our “childlike reverence for and confidence in God” (Answer 120) that He will “truly and certainly” (A 129) “grant” (A 122), “rule...preserve...destroy” (A 123), “grant” (A 124), “provide” (A 125), “not impute” (A 126), and “preserve and strengthen” us (A 127). And we are confident that God will do all of this “because Thou, being our King and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but Thy holy name, may be glorified forever” (A 128).

Regarding Canons V.5: Synod also quotes Canons V.5 in support of its teaching that “there is an activity of the believer that is prior to the experience of a particular blessing from God.” However,

I contend that this article does not support this teaching either. Canons V.5 does not teach that repentance is some necessary activity that we must perform before we will again experience God's fatherly countenance. Canons V.5: "By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God,...and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until, on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them." It is important to notice that the Canons speak of "serious repentance." We must understand that "serious repentance" is a repentance that proceeds from faith, and therefore follows after experiencing God's favor by faith rather than being an activity that is required before our experience. HC LD 7 and 25; Canons I.2-6; Canons III/IV.6; and BC Art. 22, 23, explain that faith is worked in our hearts by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel. This faith includes the experience of God's fatherly countenance. Nowhere in these confessions are we taught that repentance is necessary before this experience of faith is worked in our hearts. The preaching of the gospel alone is the means.

C. The confessions on the way in which we believe and receive all the blessings of salvation by faith:

1. Faith is worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of the gospel:
 - BC Art. 24; HC Q&A 21, 65; Canons 1.3, 6, 7; III/IV.6, 17; 5.14
2. Nowhere do the confessions teach that repentance is necessary before we can believe and receive all the blessings of salvation by faith in Christ. Nowhere do the confessions teach that repentance is the way in which we receive mercy by faith or the activity man performs prior to receiving the gift of faith or any particular blessings that are received by faith. While the confessions *do not teach* that we need to repent before we can hear the gospel and believe in Christ, the confessions *do teach* that those who hear the gospel and believe in Christ also repent.

Conclusion

It seems clear to me that the judgment of Scripture and the confessions is that the teaching of Synod 2018 and 2019 (that good works are fruits of faith and thus the way in which we live in the covenant as the expression of our thanksgiving for all the blessings of salvation we have received and enjoy by faith) is truth and that the teaching of Synod 2020 (that our good works are activities that occur prior to the experience of particular blessings and thus are the way in which particular blessings of

salvation are received) is the lie. Therefore, I ask that synod declare the decisions of Synod 2020 in Art. 51, C, 2, b, c, d to be in error, because they give good works a place and function contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Furthermore, I ask that synod reverse its decision and uphold Mr. C. Doezema's contention that the former Rev. Overway was schismatic to the decisions of Synod 2018 in again giving to good works these functions which are out of harmony with Scripture and the confessions.

In Christ,
Nathan Doezema

Appendix - Quotes from the 3 Forms of Unity

A. The confessions on the place and function of good works:

Positively:

1. Good works have their ultimate source in election:

- Canons I.7 This elect number...God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and...to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification.

- Canons I.8 ...according to which [decree of election] He hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation and the way of salvation, which He hath ordained that we should walk therein.

- Canons I.9 ...but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc., therefore election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to that of the apostle: *He hath chosen us (not because we were) but that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love* (Eph. 1:4).

- Canons II.8 ...it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross...should effectually redeem...all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith,...should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.

- Canons I.RE1 ...He has also from eternity chosen certain particular persons to whom above others He in time will grant both faith in Christ and perseverance; as it written: *I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world* (John 17:6). *And as many as were ordained to eternal life*

believed (Acts 13:48). And: Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

- Canons V.RE1 The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those: 1. Who teach: That the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill through his free will. For the Holy Scripture testifies that this [perseverance] follows out of election, and is given the elect in virtue of the death, the resurrection, and intercession of Christ:

2. Good works are benefits of our salvation—benefits of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and sitting at God's right hand:

- HC Q&A 43 What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

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

- HC Q&A 45 What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?

A. ...secondly, we are also by His power raised up to a new life; and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.

- HC Q&A 49 Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

A. ... thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we *seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth.*

- Canons V.RE1 ...For the Holy Scripture testifies that this [perseverance] follows out of election, and is given the elect in virtue of the death, the resurrection, and intercession of Christ....

3. Good works are the work of the Holy Spirit in us:

- BC Art. 14 For there is no will nor understanding conformable to the divine will and understanding but what Christ hath wrought in man; which He teaches us, when He saith, Without me ye can do nothing.

- HC Q&A 49 ...that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we *seek the things which are above....*

- HC Q&A 70 What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

A. ...and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to

be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin and lead holy and unblamable lives.

- HC Q&A 76 What is it then to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ?

A....and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.

- HC Q&A 86 Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ...also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image....

- HC Q&A 115 Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. ...that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God....

- HC Q&A 127 Which is the sixth petition?

A. ...do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes....

- Canons III/IV.11 But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, He... causes...powerfully illumines...pervades...opens...softens...circumcises...infuses new qualities...quickens...renders...actuates and strengthens it [will], that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.

- Canons III/IV.16 ...this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks...but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that...a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; ...Wherefore unless the admirable author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will....

- Canons V.7 ...in these falls he... again, by his Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance....

4. Good works are the inevitable fruits of faith whereby we show our thankfulness for the blessings we have received by faith in Christ:

- BC Art. 24 ...without it [faith] they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.

Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which

is called in Scripture a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works, which God has commanded in His Word. These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith....

- HC Q&A 32 But why art thou called a Christian?

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures.

- HC Q&A 64 But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

A. By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

- HC Q&A 86 Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof....

- HC Q&A 91 But what are good works?

A. Only those which proceed from a true faith....

- HC Q&A 116 Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

A. Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us....

- HC Q&A 126 ...even as we feel this evidence of Thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.

- Canons I.13 The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him, who first manifested so great love towards them....

- Canons III/IV.15 ...He therefore who becomes the subject of this grace, owes eternal gratitude to God, and gives Him thanks forever.

- Canons V.7 ...that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood

of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore his mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

- Canons V.12 This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure, that, on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering, and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God: so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture, and the examples of the saints.

- Canons V.13 Neither does renewed confidence or persevering produce licentiousness or a disregard to piety in those who are recovering from backsliding; but it renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord....

- Canons V.RE6 ...For these show that they do not know the power of divine grace and the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And they contradict the Apostle John, who teaches the opposite with express words in his first epistle: *Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall belike him, for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure* (I John 3:2, 3).

- Canons 5.RE7 ...For Christ himself, in Matthew 13:20, Luke 8:13, and in other places, evidently notes, besides this duration, a threefold difference between those who believe only for a time and true believers, when He declares that...the former are without fruit, but that the latter bring forth their fruit in various measure with constancy and steadfastness.

5. As fruits of faith, good works are the marks of a Christian:

- BC Art. 29 ...With respect to those, who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians: namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood, as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit, all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in him."

- Canons III/IV.15 With respect to those who make an external profession of faith, and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner....

6. As fruits of faith, good works confirm that one's faith is genuine:

- HC Q&A 86 Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. ...also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof....

- Canons V.10 This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God; but springs from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit, that we are children and heirs of God, Romans 8:16; and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience, and to perform good works....

-Canons V.RE5 ...while the Holy Scriptures constantly deduce this assurance [of continued perseverance], not from a special and extraordinary revelation, but from the marks proper to the children of God and from the constant promises of God. So especially the apostle Paul: "No creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 8:39. And John declares: "And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us," I John 3:24.

7. Though our walk with God in a life of obedience brings much suffering and trouble from the world, yet we have the hope that the end of all our labors and sufferings will be the eternal reward God has laid up in store for us, namely, eternal life with Him in glory:

- BC Art. 24 ... we do not deny that God rewards our good works, but it is through his grace that he crowns his gifts....

- BC Art. 37 ...the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God will confess their names before God His Father, and His elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates, as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God. And for a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory, as

never entered into the heart of man to conceive. Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN.

- HC Q&A 63 What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?

A. This reward is not of merit, but of grace.

8. When we sinfully stray from God and from the path of obedience and instead walk in unrepentant sin, God in His grace chastens us, so that we experience the loving displeasure of God:

- Canons V.5 By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor, for a time....

- Canons V.13 ...lest by abusing His fatherly kindness, God should turn away His gracious countenance from them, to behold which is to the godly dearer than life: the withdrawing thereof is more bitter than death, and they in consequence hereof should fall into more grievous torments of conscience.

9. Refusal to turn from sin and to return to God and a walk with Him in loving, thankful obedience indicates unbelief and is ground for excommunication from the church of Christ:

- HC Q 82 Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

- HC Q&A 85 How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those who under the name of Christians maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ....

- HC Q&A 87 Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?

A. By no means; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolator, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

- Canons I.13 ...The consideration of this doctrine of election

is so far from encouraging remissness in the observance of the divine commands, or from sinking men in carnal security, that these, in the just judgment of God, are the usual effects of rash presumption, or of idle and wanton trifling with the grace of election, in those who refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.

Negatively:

1. Good works are not the ground of our salvation:

- BC Art. 16 ...God...hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works....
- BC Art. 24 ...Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable....
- HC Q 62 But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?
- Canons II.7 But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own.
- Canons II.RE4 Who teach: That the new covenant of grace, which God the Father through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, in as much as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace. For these contradict the Scriptures: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," Romans 3:24, 25. And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church.
- Canons III/IV.7 ...The cause of this dispensation is not to be ascribed to the superior worth of one nation above another, nor to their making a better use of the light of nature, but results wholly from the sovereign good pleasure and unmerited love of God....
- Canons III/IV.10 But that others who are called by the gospel, obey the call, and are converted, is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others, equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversions, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from

eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him, who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord according to the testimony of the apostles in various places.

2. Good works have no place in the receiving and obtaining of any blessing or aspect of our salvation:

- BC Art. 22 ...Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone; or by faith without works....

- BC Art. 23 ...as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works....

- BC Art. 24 ...they [good works]are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good, before the tree itself is good. Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them, (for what can they merit?) nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is He that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure....

- HC Q 86 Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

- Canons IRE1, 3, 4, 5, 9 In all of these, the Synod of Dordt rejects all attempts to give man some determinant role in his salvation by his faith and holiness.

- Canons ILRE6 The synod rejects the errors of those: ...Who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace. For these, while they feign that they present this distinction, in a sound sense, seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors.

- Canons III/IV.5 ...yet as it neither points out a remedy, nor

imparts strength to extricate him from misery, and thus being weak through the flesh, leaves the transgressor under the curse, man cannot by this law obtain saving grace.

- Canons III/IV.12, 14, RE6, 7, 9, Canons V. RE1—In all of these articles, the Synod of Dordt condemns all teachings that faith and holiness are acts of man's own free will, which then are the ground of his being saved and being chosen for decisive justification and election.

3. Good works are not the condition upon which the completion of one's salvation depends, and, thus, good works have no determinant role in one's salvation:

- Canons ILRE3 Who teach: That Christ by His satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that He merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as He might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions. For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error.

- Canons V.8 Thus, it is not in consequence of their own merits, or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated.

B. The confessions on receiving the blessings of salvation:

1. We receive all the blessings of salvation by faith in Christ alone:

- BC Art. 22 We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. 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. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us, and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

- BC Art. 23 ...acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in Him....

- BC Art. 24 ...For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works....

- BC Art. 26 ...Neither must we plead here our unworthiness [to pray to God]; for the meaning is not that we should offer our prayers to God on the ground of our own worthiness but only on the ground of the excellency and worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is become ours by faith....

- BC Art. 35 ...But for the support of the spiritual and heavenly life, which believers have, He hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers, when they eat Him, that is to say, when they apply and receive Him by faith in the spirit...as certainly as we receive and hold this sacrament in our hands, and eat and drink the same with our mouths, by which our life is afterwards nourished, we also do as certainly receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life...though Christ always sits at the right hand of His Father in the heavens, yet doth He not therefore cease to make us partakers of Himself by faith. This feast is a spiritual table, at which Christ communicates Himself with all His benefits to us, and gives us there to enjoy both Himself, and the merits of His suffering and death, nourishing, strengthening and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of His flesh, quickening

and refreshing them by the drinking of His blood....

- HC Q&A 20 Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

A. No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.

- HC Q&A 21 What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

- HC Q&A 30 Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.

- HC Q&A 32 But why art thou called a Christian?

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing....

- HC Q&A 53 What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

A. ...secondly, that He is also given me, to make me, by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me for ever.

- HC Q&A 55 What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?

A. First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts....

- HC Q&A 59 But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?

A. That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.

- HC Q&A 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.

- HC Q&A 61 Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?

A. Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.

- HC Q&A 65 Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?

A. From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.

- HC Q&A 76 What is it then to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ?

A. It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal...

- HC Q&A 84 How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits...

- Canons I.4 ...But such as receive it, and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith, are by Him delivered from the wrath of God, and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them.

- Canons III/IV.6 What therefore neither the light of nature, nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation: which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof, it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old, as under the New Testament.

- Canons V.7 ...and again, by his Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission

in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

- Canons V.9 Of this preservation of the elect to salvation, and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers for themselves may and ought to obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion, that they ever will continue true and living members of the church; and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life.

- Canons V.10 This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God; but springs from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit, that we are children and heirs of God, Romans 8:16; and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience, and to perform good works.

2. **While good works always follow the reception of all the blessings of salvation by faith in Christ, when it comes to the actual receiving of these blessings, good works are excluded (except in that good works themselves are among the blessings we receive). This we have already demonstrated above. Furthermore, while the confessions consistently give faith in Christ a place and function in the reception of all the blessings of salvation that Christ has obtained for us, the confessions never give our good works (including repentance and prayer) a place and function in the reception of these blessings—not even in HCLD 45 or Canons V.5.**

C. The confessions on the way in which we believe and receive all the blessings of salvation by faith:

1. **Faith is worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of the gospel:**

-BC Art. 24 We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God, and the operation of the Holy Ghost...

- HC Q&A 21 What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge...but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart....

- HC Q&A 65 Since then we are made partakers of Christ and

all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?

A. From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.

- Canons I.3 And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings, to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. Romans 10:14, 15: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?"

- Canons I.6 That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world," Acts 15:18. "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," Ephesians 1:11. According to which decree, He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe....

- Canons I.7 This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than the others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification....

- Canons III/IV.6 What therefore neither the light of nature, nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation: which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof, it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old, as under the New Testament.

- Canons III/IV.17 As the almighty operation of God, whereby he prolongs and supports this our natural life, does not exclude, but requires the use of means, by which God of His infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert his influence, so also the before mentioned supernatural operation of God, by which we are regenerated, in no wise excludes, or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration, and food of the soul....

- Canons V.14 And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word,

by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments.

2. Nowhere do the confessions teach that repentance is necessary before we can believe and receive all the blessings of salvation by faith in Christ. Nowhere do the confessions teach that repentance is the way in which we receive mercy by faith or the activity man performs prior to receiving the gift of faith or any particular blessings that are received by faith. While the confessions do not teach that we need to repent before we can hear the gospel and believe in Christ, the confessions do teach that those who hear the gospel and believe in Christ also repent.

Protest of Mr. Todd Ferguson

Dear Brethren,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I write to protest against two decisions of Synod 2020.

1. I protest 2020 Synod's decision to not sustain Mr. C. Doezema's appeal in his contention that Mr. Overway militated against the decisions of Synod 2018 when he said, "We do little. God rewards greatly. And yet there is a correlation so that we understand the less of a good work, or the less good that a good work is, the less or smaller the reward. The less the number of works, the less of a reward one receives. So too with regard to the more. The more that one walks in good works, the more of a reward is received..." (*Acts of Synod 2020*, p. 87-88, Art. 52, 2, A).

a. Synod is mistaken when it claims, "Rev. Overway's statement does not constitute militating against the decisions of synod" (p. 88). Mr. Overway clearly makes our good works (or obedience) merit or gain us something in the covenant of God. This makes him stand squarely in opposition with the conclusion of Synod 2018, p. 73, Art. 62, 5 (b), which states, "Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant of God." Synod 2018 makes the statement that "our obedience never gains us or obtains anything," not only concerning justification but rather applies this truth broadly to "anything in the covenant of God." To say our good works merit, gain, or obtain anything in the covenant of God is to literally militate against Synod 2018's decision.

Documentation:

Acts of Synod 2020, Art. 52, 2, A, p. 87-88

Synod returns to the recommendations regarding sermon 3 in number 5 of Mr. C. Doezema's appeal (alleged militancy against Synod 2018 in three sermons).