

In love for you, the good of Christ's church, the truth's sake, and the glory of God's name we fervently pray that God may bless our labors (and the labors of the Classical committee that has faithfully assisted us) and bring much good fruit upon it – particularly the peace in our beloved Hope church.

Sincerely in Christ,
For the Consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church
Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Doctrinal Statement: RE:

Experiencing Fellowship with the Father (November 21, 2017)

I. DOCTRINAL STATEMENT RE EXPERIENCING FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER

A. What is fellowship with the Father?

1. Fellowship with the Father is the work of God's grace to make the elect partakers of all the blessings of salvation earned by Christ on the cross and bestowed upon Him at His exaltation.

a. The Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A 55 describes this fellowship with the Father as "everyone who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and all His riches and gifts."

b. These riches and gifts of salvation include both justification and sanctification.

1) In justification God graciously imputes to the elect the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ so that they are righteous before Him and heirs of eternal life.

2) In sanctification God graciously delivers the elect from the defilement and dominion of sin, renews them according to the image of Christ, and enables them to live a new life of obedience to God in all good works.

2. The gifts of justification and sanctification bring the elect into the enjoyment of an intimate life of friendship and fellowship with God.

a. The Bible uses different phrases to describe this life of fellowship.

1) It is to walk with God (Gen. 5:22; 6:9).

2) It is to see God, i.e., to be received into His presence (Matt. 58; Heb. 12:14).

3) It is for God to make His abode in us (John 14:23).

4) It is for God to dwell with us—tabernacle with us (Rev. 21:3).

5) It is to be called the friend of God (James 2:23).

b. These phrases speak of a close, intimate life of friendship and fellowship with God that is possible only by the gifts of justification and sanctification, and that is enjoyed by both God and the elect to God's glory.

1) Justification gives the elect the legal right to such a life of fellowship with God (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 59).

2) Sanctification gives the elect the spiritual ability to engage in such a life of fellowship. Only those that are renewed according to the image of Christ and empowered to live a life of loving obedience are capable of experiencing a life of friendship and fellowship with God.

a) "Scripture teaches very emphatically that the child of God is sanctified in principle, that God also continually sanctifies him, and that he is called to strive after sanctification with all that is in him" (Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, p. 124).

b) Since the work of sanctification is only begun and not finished, intimate life of fellowship is enjoyed in this life only imperfectly. It will be perfected in eternity.

3) This life of friendship and fellowship that God enjoys with His justified, sanctified people in Jesus Christ is the life of the covenant.

B. It is by the exercise of faith that this covenant life of friendship and fellowship is experienced and enjoyed.

1. Faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8) that joins the elect to Christ so that they receive and enjoy all the blessings of God's gracious salvation (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 20).

2. The elect believer comes to experience and enjoy covenant fellowship with the Father as he exercises his faith.

a. Faith is an intimate knowledge of God, a knowledge of love (Gal. 5:6), worked in the elect by the power of the word and Spirit (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 65) and that arises out of a regenerated heart (Rom. 10:10).

1) In this knowledge the believer comes to know and experience God's love and is assured of God's purpose to save him to the uttermost in Christ Jesus so that He might live with him as His sovereign friend for time and eternity.

- 2) This knowledge of faith also leads the believer into a deep knowledge of sin that brings him to daily repentance, godly sorrow, and a desire for God's forgiveness.
- b. Faith is also confidence. On the basis of the knowledge of faith the believer also trusts God and confides in Him.
 - 1) Driven by godly sorrow he confesses his sins and seeks forgiveness and reconciliation only in the blood of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16).
 - 2) Receiving that forgiveness (justification) freely he leads a prayer-filled life of gratitude to God in the power of the cross. Daily he lays before God all his needs, thanks God for His blessings, and shares with God his innermost thoughts as he consciously serves his God in obedience (sanctification).
 - 3) H. Hoeksema in his *Reformed Dogmatics* describes this confidence of faith. "The confidence of God's children is an act of friendship whereby they draw near unto God without fear, make known to him the secrets of their hearts, flee to him for refuge in all their miseries, cast themselves upon him, and lay hold upon his promises, assured of his good will toward them and of his power to save them to the uttermost" (vol. 2, p. 77).
- c. It is by the exercise of this faith that the believer experiences fellowship with the Father.
- C. 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.
 1. Scripture and the confessions emphasize the need for holiness to enjoy God's fellowship.
 - a. John 14:23: "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."
 - b. Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."
 - c. Hebrews 12:14: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."
 - d. Psalm 15:1, 2: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart."
 - e. I John 1:5-7: "This then is the message which we have

heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

f. HC, Q&A 116: “because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him and are thankful for them.”

g. Canons V, A, 5: “until on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them.”

2. In turn the Scriptures and confessions also speak of sin disrupting fellowship with God.

a. Canons V, A, 5: “lose the sense of God’s favor for a time.”

b. Canons V, A, 13: “God turns away His gracious countenance, to behold which is dearer than life, the withdrawing whereof is more bitter than death, and they in consequence hereof should fall into more grievous torments of conscience.”

c. Psalm 51:11, 12: “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

3. It is important to establish why a holy life of obedience is necessary to experience fellowship with God.

a. Negatively, this holy life of obedience is not necessary to complete God’s work of salvation.

1) A holy life of obedience is not the basis for such fellowship. Christ’s obedience alone is the basis for our fellowship with God (Belgic Confession, Art. 24).

2) A holy life of obedience is not a condition by which the elect sinner is brought into the relationship of fellowship with God. Christ’s obedience accomplished all that is necessary to bring the elect into fellowship with the Father.

3) A holy life of obedience does not make us worthy of God’s fellowship. If we did all that God requires of us, we would still be unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).

b. Positively, a sanctified life of obedience unto good works is necessary to experience God’s fellowship because of the holy character of God.

- 1) The holy God can and will live in intimate covenant fellowship only with those that are holy as He is holy. For this reason the holy God in the establishment and maintenance of His covenant not only justifies His elect people in Jesus Christ but also sanctifies them unto a life of good works.
- 2) In keeping with all this the Baptism Form identifies a new and holy life of obedience as our part in God's covenant with us: "Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life."
- 3) Because the work of sanctification is not complete in this life, God calls His people to holy living in order to live with them in covenant fellowship (Lev. 11:44, 45: "For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.")
4. This need for a holy life of obedience to enjoy the Father's fellowship does not stand independent of faith but must be 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).
 - a. When the believer exercises faith in a life of obedience (avoiding sin, loving righteousness, loving the true God and the neighbor, and crucifying the flesh), he experiences fellowship with the Father.
 - b. When the believer does not exercise faith in a life of obedience, he loses the sense of the Father's favor (Canons V, A, 5) as God turns His gracious countenance from him (Canons V, A, 13).
 - 1) This however does not mean that the believer has fallen out of fellowship with God. No matter how far

the believer wanders into sin, God does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from him (Canons V, A, 6) and still preserves in him the incorruptible seed of regeneration (Canons V, A, 7).

2) Because God preserves His people in their backsliding, He will, by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renew 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 (Canons V, A, 7). This beautifully describes the work of God's grace to bring the backsliding believer to the exercise of his faith in a life of good works (repentance, godly sorrow, seeking remission in the blood of the Mediator) in order once again to experience fellowship with the Father.

c. When the Scriptures, therefore, emphasize the need for a holy life of obedience to experience the fellowship of God, it does so to emphasize the necessity of a living, sanctifying faith for such fellowship. One can have fellowship with the holy God only through a sanctifying faith.

7. Letter of Connie Meyer to Hope Consistory

November 28, 2017

To the Consistory of Hope PRC
Walker, MI

Dear Brethren in the Lord,

I heartily thank you for the doctrinal statement that was delivered to me dated November 21, 2017, a document which constitutes your response to my most recent correspondence with you along with being a response to my protest and related material dating back to August 3, 2016. As stated in your cover letter, I understand this document to be the result of both your efforts and the efforts of the Classical Committee working together and that as a consistory you have officially adopted this doctrinal statement. I thank you for all that work and I accept this adopted document as your official response to me.

Although my gratitude to you for this doctrinal statement is sincere, I do not accept this document as a statement that expresses what I believe. Upon hearing of the plan to make a doctrinal statement of this sort with the purpose of bringing reconciliation to the controversy in which we find ourselves, my first reaction was positive as I imagined such a document to be nothing but orthodox and distinctively Reformed. Upon receiving