

1/4/2021

Dear Rev. Slopsema,

Thank you for your letter dated 12/12/2020 and for receiving me to your study on 11/24/2020 to discuss my concerns with your meditation in the October 15, 2020 issue of *The Standard Bearer*, titled, "Treasure in the house of the righteous."

Although I wish it could be otherwise, your response does not answer my concerns.

I see the theology in your meditation as being exactly the same as that taught by (then) Rev. Overway, and supported by Hope PRCs consistory and as that taught in the Doctrinal Statement of which you were an author.

I agree that what Synod 2018 taught was "definitive," but I disagree that your statement below agrees with the statement of Synod you quoted.

"In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God's law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they prosper in the great blessings of the covenant...Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship."

In the statement quoted by Synod, *faith* is the instrument that causes us to enjoy fellowship, and by extension, to prosper more and more in that fellowship. In your explanation of what causes us to prosper in fellowship, faith is noticeably absent, but what takes its place, as that which causes us to prosper in covenant fellowship, is faithfulness to God's law.

Don't you see how this robs Christ of his glory and work? You seem to teach that we are given perhaps the right to fellowship, but to prosper in that fellowship we must be more and more faithful to the law. What misery! How can my working, my obedience, my faithfulness to the law gain more fellowship with God? If Christ's work alone is not sufficient to allow me to prosper, how can anything I do even begin to fill that void? The answer is it cannot. I find your view to be abhorrent because it would cause the child of God to despair.

Where you have God's law, you should have had faith in Jesus Christ. How do I prosper more and more in covenant fellowship? Cling ever tighter to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by a true and living faith! Faith! Faith alone! To paraphrase Synod 2018, if we receive all of the blessings of the covenant by faith in Jesus Christ, how could our works help us to prosper more and more than we would than by looking to Christ alone (69)?

Your statement is fundamentally no different than the statements below condemned by Synod 2018:

"In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God's law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they prosper in the great blessings of the covenant. They prosper in their marriages, in the family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship."

"The answer really is very simple. Very simple. If we but meet these requirements (obedience-DE) a little bit, by the grace of God, of course, and by God's grace working them in us—if we meet these requirements but a little, then we will enjoy a little of God's fellowship. That's the truth. If we meet these requirements a lot, then we will enjoy much of God's fellowship" (2018 Acts of Synod, 65).

You state that because you are speaking of a "righteous believer" that this helps us to understand the relationship between working and prospering in God's covenant blessings. Synod 2018 spoke to that as well, however, when it wrote, "It does not matter if the one obeying is an elect, regenerated, justified child of God;

obedience is never an instrument for the obtaining of covenant blessings even for those who are in the covenant" (78).

The response to your lamentable situations in the church where families and marriages are torn asunder because of sin and sinful living is this—we do not enjoy the covenant blessings of God as we walk in sin, or as Synod 2018 put it, as we "continue in disobedience" (72). But to say we enjoy the blessings of God's covenant because of a turning from sin, or obedient living, is to make our working the instrument whereby we enjoy these gifts of God. Wicked living causes unrest and disrupts the experience of fellowship, but obedient living does not gain that back, or cause us to prosper—Christ alone does, and those blessings we experience through faith in Him.

You write, "He blesses their obedience of gratitude with his fellowship." I believe that statement contradicts the decision of Synod 2018, but worse, displaces Jesus Christ. You see God giving us the blessing of fellowship because of our obedience. I believe God blesses us with fellowship because of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone. "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" (Belgic Confession, 22).


You appeal to the Canons 3/4, Article 17 which you believe teaches "greater blessings in the way of obedience." I reject this understanding of the article for two reasons: First, if this were the case, then this article would directly contradict Belgic Confession article 22 written above. But second, this article is teaching that God is pleased to use means to regenerate his people and to make them alive. What the article teaches is that the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent does this blessing of God work in us. What is that duty? To attend to the "use of the gospel" which the "most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul." Attend to the gospel! What is the gospel message? Christ! Christ alone, by faith alone, to the glory of God alone!

I believe that your statement which directly ties our obedience to the law to our enjoying greater fellowship with God is in direct opposition to Synod 2018. More troubling however, I believe that your statement displaces the perfect work of Christ and compromises the gospel of grace.

Rev. Slopsema, I urge you to repent of this erroneous view of salvation which replaces Christ Jesus with our works in our enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant. This repentance would include an acknowledgment of your error and a public repudiation of the error. This is not only for the good of the people in the PRC, but for your own good, that you do not displace the perfect work of Christ but find him sufficient for all the blessings of salvation.

I would be happy to meet with you again or continue to correspond with you on this topic. However, I believe, based on our meeting in your study and your response, that we are at an impasse. If you agree, I will address a letter to your consistory and ask them to adjudicate. This is as you suggested at the close of our meeting at your home.

Sincerely in Christ,

  
Dewey A. Engelsma