

July 14, 2021

Dear Rod,

This is my response Wingham consistory's misrepresentation of my Standard Bearer statements in its *History of The Controversy* found in its separation document.

In a September 15, 2020 mediation I wrote, "*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 their family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship.*" The Wingham consistory sees this as the false doctrine of Overway's teaching dealt with by Synod, viz., "*our obedience, however, imperfect, merits us a reward with God. Man's activity secures God's blessings of salvation – the conditional formula.*"

In response I point out that on p. 74 (d) of the printed Act Synod 2018 succinctly set forth its position *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.* The Wingham consistory improperly places my statement in the realm of the basis for our securing God's blessings of salvation so that they accuse me of teaching that ground or basis for our salvation is somehow our works rather than Christ alone. My statement is rather an explanation of the way of obedience (way of conduct or manner of living) in which we enjoy God's fellowship. We enjoy the blessings of the covenant in the way of faithfulness to God's law. In that connection I would point out two things.

First, the law itself promises God's blessings to those that keep it. The second commandment promises mercy unto those that love God and keep his commandments. The fifth commandment promises long life and prosperity in the promised land (ultimately heaven) for those that honor God ordained authority.

Secondly, these promised blessings are God's reward for keeping his covenant law. They are, however, not the reward of merit, as the Wingham consistory reads into my statement. They are the reward of grace, i.e., a reward earned by Christ but graciously bestowed as an undeserved favor on God's covenant people for their faithful. This reward is identified in Lord's Day 24 of the Heidelberg Catechism. In that light we understand that the blessings of the covenant are merited by Jesus Christ but enjoyed by us in the way of our obedience.

The Wingham consistory also sees error in my February 1, 2021 meditation on Psalm 90:12, which reads, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." I explained that a better translation for applying our hearts to wisdom is to obtain or gain a heart of wisdom. Wingham claims that in my meditation I make *escaping God's wrath and enjoying the riches of his covenant fellowship dependent upon our own wisdom and not God's own grace.* The Wingham consistory also reads into my meditation *that man must first number his days and see God's wrath on sin, and then act accordingly to gain wisdom in order to receive on the basis of this wisdom, the riches of covenant fellowship. Man's wisdom and working gain the riches of covenant fellowship.*

I think that my response in a recent Standard Bearer issue to an objection to the same meditation by a deacon of Wingham's council answers the charge of Wingham here. I wrote:

You are correct when you write that true wisdom is given of the Lord.... We may add that true wisdom is graciously given to the redeemed of God in the work of regeneration. However, because the work of grace is only begun in us, this gift of wisdom does not always control our hearts. Proverbs 22:15 teaches that foolishness is bound in the heart of a covenant child, requiring the rod of correction to drive it far from him. Psalm 90 was written to the nation of Israel in the wilderness. That sad history shows that foolishness was bound not just in the hearts of Israel's youth but in the hearts of the vast majority of the nation. This brought the Lord's rod of correction upon the entire nation through 40 miserable years of wilderness wanderings.

The plain and simple teaching of Psalm 90:12 is that in the way of counting their days in the wilderness under the rod of correction the people of God would obtain a heart of wisdom. To put it differently, God would use their recollection of his chastening to drive the folly of unbelief from the hearts and to fill it with his wisdom. And so the prayer, So teach us to number our days, that we may obtain (gain) a heart of wisdom.

I see nothing here that even remotely suggests that *escaping God's wrath and enjoying the riches of his covenant fellowship is dependent upon our own wisdom and not God's own grace.* Nor is there a hint that we receive the riches of covenant fellowship on the basis of our wisdom or that *man's wisdom and working gain the riches of covenant fellowship.* The Wingham consistory is reading into Moses and my meditation of the inspired prayer of Moses something that is not there.

Finally, I find it disturbing that the Wingham consistory would make these public charges against my meditation statements without first bringing their objections to me or to my consistory. This contrary to Scripture and the Church Order as Classis East and Synod pointed out in connection with the deposition of Andy Lanning.

In Christ,

Rev. J. Slopsema