

Crete Protestant Reformed Church

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April 15, 2021

Dear Congregation,

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

The consistory, at its meeting in December of 2020, passed a motion to setup a committee to carry out the mandate to give instruction to the congregation on what occurred in our churches leading up to Synod 2018 and what occurred at Synod 2018. Also, to give instruction on what truths were corrupted because of this doctrinal error. We based this decision on Isaiah 62:6-7 where the Elders are instructed to be watchmen on the walls of Zion; 1 Chronicles 12:32 where the Elders are called to be men who understand the times and on the fact that because of the seriousness of this error, for Christ's perfect work was displaced, it demands further explanation and understanding for the love and unity of our congregation. Furthermore, this springs from the fall lecture that was put on by our Evangelism committee in which Professor Brian Huizinga emphasized to us that the perfect work of Christ was displaced and encouraged us to read, read, read.

The consistory believes the best way to fulfill this mandate of instruction is to create a document that summarizes the issues along with instructional commentary because the controversy took place over many years with many large documents spread throughout many different Acts of Synod.

What follows is a summary made up of quotes taken from the Acts of Synod 2016, 2017, and 2018 and the supplements. Throughout the document you will also find sections that are bracketed and highlighted. These sections are comments and instruction from the consistory in connection with what is quoted from the Acts of Synod.

Our prayer is that the Lord will bless these labors by increasing our understanding of this doctrinal error so that we learn and increase in our knowledge of the blessed truths related to this error and be better equipped to detect this error should it arise amongst us again.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.” **Romans 11:33-36**

In Christ,

Consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church



Kevin Brummel, Clerk of Consistory

Explanation of the Doctrinal Controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches
“Our obedience as a condition to experience fellowship with God.”
“The perfect work of Christ was displaced.”

I. Brief History of the Main Elements of the Controversy.

A. Mr. Meyer, an elder at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI, submits a protest on July 7, 2015 of a sermon preached by Rev. Overway on February 1, 2015 titled “The Way to the Father,” on the text John 14:6.

1. After submitting the protest, Mr. Meyer was charged with the heresy of antinomianism on July 13, 2015.
2. Mr. Meyer’s protest of the sermon and his protest of his charge of antinomianism came to Synod 2016.
3. Synod did not uphold his protest of the sermon.
4. Synod did uphold his protest of the charge of antinomianism.

B. August 3, 2016 Mrs. Meyer submitted a protest of 12 sermons as evidence that “Rev. Overway teaches that obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience fellowship with God.”

1. On October 31, 2016 Mrs. Meyer added 4 sermons to her protest.
2. On February 1, 2017 Mrs. Meyer added 1 more sermon to her protest.
3. She reiterated in her interactions with Hope that “the main teaching of Rev. Overway...is the concept that our obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience the fellowship of God.”

C. Protests of Synod 2016 decisions were received at Synod 2017.

1. Protests concerning the sermon on John 14:6 were upheld and the sermon was judged to teach false doctrine.
2. A protest concerning the charge of antinomianism was not upheld, but Synod did judge some of Mr. Meyer’s statements to be antinomian at face value.

D. Mrs. Meyer’s protest along with other protests of Synod 2017’s decisions charging some statements by Mr. Meyer as being antinomian come to Synod 2018.

1. Synod 2018 sustained Mrs. Meyer’s protest and concluded that the sermons taught false doctrine.
2. Synod 2018 sustained the protests against Synod 2017 decisions to declare Mr. Meyer’s statements antinomian and rescinded those decisions.

E. Three main elements of the controversy

1. A protest against a sermon on John 14:6 titled “The Way to the Father.” The sermon taught that the way to the Father includes the believer’s obedience.
2. A protest of multiple sermons by Rev. Overway to prove the theology of the minister that obedience was the way to the Father was pervasively taught.
3. The charge of antinomianism against Mr. Meyer.

II. Decisions of Synod 2016

A. On February 1, 2015 Rev. Overway, minister at Hope PRC, Walker, Michigan, preached a sermon on John 14:6 entitled “The Way to the Father.”

1. Mr. Neil Meyer, an elder at Hope, protested the sermon on July 7, 2015.
2. Mr. Meyer pointed to three statements from the sermon.

- a. “The way unto the Father includes obedience.”
 - b. The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father.”
 - c. “...He is the way, your way unto me, through the truth which he works in your hearts, through a godly life....”
3. The exchange between Mr. Meyer and Hope’s consistory took place from July through November of 2015.
 - a. Mr. Meyer maintained that such preaching is essentially the preaching of a conditional covenant. So he wrote, “Christ’s gracious and meritorious work of salvation for us including his obedience and holiness is the only way of salvation and covenant communion with God...so much so that nothing more, no conditions of our obedience or our holiness as our activity need to be fulfilled, that God depends on, in order for the elect to be in or remain in God’s covenant.” [The point here is that the text in John 14:6 is speaking of access to God and the way of John 14:6 is speaking of the ground and foundation of our salvation and our fellowship with God. This is Christ. To include our obedience by grace and the Holy Spirit in this way is to make ourselves part of the way to the Father.]
 - b. Hope’s consistory maintained that the sermon on John 14:6 was “fully in harmony with the orthodox Reformed faith as defined by the Three Forms of Unity, and as distinctively maintained by the PRCA, and therefore in no way the preaching of a conditional theology or that of a conditional covenant.” They responded that, “the protest fails to prove its assertion that Rev. Overway either maintains or teaches a conditional theology, a conditional covenant, works righteousness, or any other form of the doctrine of Arminianism.”
- B. Mr. Meyer appealed Hope’s judgment to Classis East January 13, 2016.
 1. Classis did not sustain Mr. Meyer’s appeal by arguing that Mr. Meyer lifted the statements from their context.
 2. Classis attempted to put the statements in a right context, “the statements... teach that man’s obedience is the way to experience fellowship with the Father,” and that “Rev. Overway was speaking of “the way” as the way of experiencing God’s fellowship and not the way of obtaining or meriting that fellowship.”
- C. Mr. Meyer appealed Classis East January 13, 2016’s judgment to Synod 2016.
 1. Synod 2016 did not uphold Mr. Meyer’s appeal.
 2. Synod 2016 said that the protested statements “were not stated to set forth conditions unto salvation,” by Rev. Overway.
 - a. [The issue here is not what Rev. Overway intended by the statement.]
 - b. [Rather, the issue is whether the statements literally in fact set forth the condition of covenantal obedience to have fellowship with the Father alongside the perfect work of Christ.]
 3. Synod 2016 merely said that the sermon “contains statements concerning the way to the Father that are confusing and apparently contradictory.”

a. [The issue here is that the statements were not confusing or apparently contradictory, but clearly made obedience part of the way to the Father in John 14:6.]

b. [On the one hand Rev. Overway denied that the way to the Father is “impossible for us fallen sinners in our own strength to make our own way to the Father...our own works cannot lead us unto the Father. Nor can our own will.” When he denies that the works of the sinner and the will of the sinner are the way to the Father he is speaking only of fallen sinners in our own strength. He is not excluding any and all works and any and all willing, also the works and willing of the regenerated believer, as part of the way to the Father. The fact is that the regenerated believer retains his totally depraved flesh. He defiles with that flesh all his works. He cannot produce one good work that can stand as the reason for his approach to God, he is beholden to God for all his works, and he does not found his salvation on them. Works are not the way to the Father.]

c. [By making the issue that a fallen sinner cannot will or work anything in his own strength versus the regenerated sinner in whom Christ works is how he can say later on in the sermon that Christ is the way to the Father through the holy life that he works in you.]

d. [Further, the statement that the obedience that Christ works in the believer is the way to the Father is not unclear. It clearly states that the regenerated believer’s obedience is part of the way to the Father along with Christ and that corrupts the gospel of the text.]

4. Synod 2016 said that “the sermon left open the possibility of misunderstanding by defining our obedience, alongside the work of Christ, as the way to the Father.”

a. [Synods 2017 and 2018 will make clear that the sermon did not merely leave open the possibility of misunderstanding.]

b. [Synods 2017 and 2018 will make clear that the sermon stated and declared as the gospel of the text that Christ and the obedience that Christ works in us are the way to the Father.]

III. The Decisions of Synod 2017.

A. The decision of Synod 2016, the exoneration of the sermon, was protested to Synod 2017.

1. Mr. Chuck Doezema protested the statement, “obedience is necessary for the experience of fellowship with the Father.”

2. Prof. D. Engelsma protested that, “adding our good works to Jesus Christ as the way to the Father, as John 14:6 speaks of that way, falsifies the text and perverts the gospel of Jesus Christ alone and grace alone,” and that, “the gospel of grace is defended by emphasizing from John 14:6 that Jesus is the only way, to the exclusion of the saved sinner and his good works.”

3. Mr. Neil Meyer protested that, “the specific statements [in the sermon on John 14:6] set forth our obedience as the effective way unto the Father.”

4. Rev. C. Spronk protested that the decision of synod “exonerates the sermon of false doctrine,” He adds, that synod’s grounds are simply assertions without proof that the “sermon and the three statements in question do not teach a conditional covenant.” He adds that Mr. Meyer’s protest demonstrates the sermon teaches false doctrine by “giving to the works of the believer a place in salvation that is not in harmony with the teaching of Scripture and the Reformed creeds.”
 5. Hope PRC consistory protested that Synod 2016 erred in saying Hope erred in its wholesale defense of the sermon.
- B. Synod sustained the protests of Prof. Engelsma, Mr. Meyer, and Rev. Spronk.
1. The three original statements that were protested on the John 14:6 sermon were:
 - a. “The way unto the Father includes obedience.”
 - b. “The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father.”
 - c. “...He is the way, your way unto me, through the truth which he works in your hearts, through a godly life.”
 2. Synod decided:
 - a. “These three statements make the believer’s good works part of the way of salvation, which way John 14:6 declares to be Christ alone.” Synod added that “adding our good works to Jesus Christ as the way to the Father contradicts the plain teaching of the text that Christ alone is the way.”
 - b. This is the creedal Reformed teaching of Belgic Confession Article 26 which says, “We believe that we have no access to God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous...What more can be required, since Christ himself saith, “I am the way and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me?” (John 14:6).”
 - c. Synod 2017 declares that Synod 2016 erred in its position that the three statements were confusing but still could be justified in a sermon on John 14:6.

IV. The Decisions of Synod 2018.

A. The history of the case:

1. Mrs. Meyer protested 17 sermons of Rev. David Overway to the consistory of Hope PRC.
 - a. August 3, 2016 Mrs. Meyer submitted a protest of 12 sermons as evidence that “Rev. Overway teaches that obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience fellowship with God.”
 - b. On October 31, 2016 Mrs. Meyer added 4 sermons to her protest.
 - c. On February 1, 2017 Mrs. Meyer added 1 more sermon to her protest.
 - d. She reiterated in her interactions with Hope that “the main teaching of Rev. Overway...is the concept that our obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience the fellowship of God.”
2. On March 22, 2017 Hope Consistory rejected Mrs. Meyer’s protest in which she maintained that “the main teaching of Rev. Overway...is the concept that our

obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience the fellowship of God.”

a. Hope’s main defense was that Rev. Overway does not speak of conditions, but rather what he is teaching is the “necessary way of the covenant.”

b. Mrs. Meyer’s main contention was that Rev. Overway’s preaching made “obedience conditional to fellowship with God and thus also a part of our justification.”

3. After much interaction Hope Consistory and the protestant agreed that they were at an impasse and the matter should be brought to the January 10, 2018 Classis East.

a. Classis East rejected the appeal of Mrs. Meyer in which she contended that Hope and its pastor held a “doctrinal position...[that] represents a denial of the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace and therefore a denial of justification by faith alone...[namely] the concept that our obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience the fellowship of God.”

b. Classis East said that Mrs. Meyer does not prove her accusation that the teaching of Hope PRC and Rev. Overway is a conditional covenant and justification by faith and works.

c. Classis East said that Mrs. Meyer arbitrarily imposes a heretical meaning on statements.

d. Classis East said that Mrs. Meyer errs in her conclusion that the phrase, “in the way of obedience” means “obedience as an instrument by which we experience blessings” and that obedience then is a condition and another instrument of salvation along with faith.

e. Classis East stated that Mrs. Meyer errs in her understanding of what constitutes a condition in the covenant.

f. Classis East maintained that Mrs. Meyer ignores the important implication that the statements in question all refer to an elect, regenerated, justified, child of God who is already a member of the covenant and enjoying its blessings.

g. Classis East said that Mrs. Meyer errs in her inference that since we are justified by faith alone without works, then the activity and fruits of faith and sanctification are excluded from the experience and enjoyment of fellowship with God.

4. Mrs. Meyer appealed to Synod 2018.

a. Mrs. Meyer states the two different positions. She maintains that one can have fellowship with God only through a justifying faith without works.

b. She maintains that Hope’s Consistory teaches that one can have fellowship with God only through a sanctifying faith with works and that this position makes works an instrument with faith for fellowship with

God with the result that works are a condition unto the experience of fellowship with God.

B. Synod 2018 decision.

1. To sustain Mrs. Meyer in her appeal: “Classis East failed to deal with the doctrinal error contained in sermons Mrs. Meyer protested to Hope’s consistory. The doctrinal error is that the believer’s good works are given a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed confessions.”
2. Synod highlighted statements from a sermon on LD 32 proving the error.
 - a. It was preached: “We do good works so that we can have our prayers answered. That’s true. Walk unrepentantly in sin and then pray to God, and expect your prayer to be answered? It will not. That is not the way God works. We walk in good works and we pray while we walk in good works, and then we can be assured God hears our prayer and his ears are open to our cry and the doors and windows of heaven are not slammed shut. And he answers.”
 - b. The same sermon taught: “We do good works so that we can receive God’s grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness. So that we can consciously and with awareness receive the grace and Holy Spirit of God.”
 - c. The sermon said: “We do good works also negatively, so that we are not destroyed in our generations...walk in good works then, that your generations may thrive and flourish in God’s land... We do good works that we might remain in God’s church with his people and with our God.”
 - d. [These statements are simply the corruption of the teaching of Lord’s Day 32, but also of the teaching of LD 45 where we learn that though “we are unworthy of it, [God] will for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayers, as He has promised in his word.”]
 - e. [We do not do good works to receive grace. Because we have his grace and Holy Spirit, we live in good works to testify our gratitude for God’s blessings.]
 - f. [We remain in God’s church and land by grace not because we do good works.]
3. Synod pointed to statements in a sermon on LD 45.
 - a. It was preached, “When the Catechism mentions requisites or requirements, it’s talking about obedience. I must obey. Its required of God. God requires it of me. God requires certain obedience from me. Obedience is required here, obedience that I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God...There’s requisites to fellowship, as we said, for the child of God, to the one who’s justified in Jesus Christ, the one for whom Jesus has died and atoned and satisfied for his sins. There are requirements for him to fellowship, to approaching unto God, coming to the Father.” From the same sermon it was declared, “Godliness, on the other hand, is required according to Scripture for our prayers to be heard by God.”

- b. The sermon went on to say, “We truly ask and are heard, and God receives our prayer and gives us—because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”
- c. The same sermon said, “What do the creeds say about the relationship between obedience and fellowship? That there are requirements. That there is obedience required in order that we may have that fellowship, prayerful fellowship with God...The Catechism says, Come to God that way, meeting those requirements, meeting those demands of God for a proper prayer, and you can be assured you will enjoy the fellowship of God.”
- d. The sermon taught, “Well, how much, how little ought I meet these requirements?...The answer really is very simple. Very simple. If we meet these requirements 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...And if we had perfect godliness, and we came to God perfectly meeting the requisites of prayer, then we would have perfect fellowship with God...Approach unto the Father, come to the Father meeting the requirements that he set out for you. Come to him in that way to receive of his grace and his Holy Spirit.”
- e. [It is *not* true that when the Catechism mentions requisites or requirements that it is talking about obedience or godliness. The Catechism is explaining what prayer in true faith resting on the perfect satisfaction of Jesus Christ alone means. We pray from the regenerated heart to the one true God. We pray rightly and thoroughly knowing our need and misery so that we deeply humble ourselves in the presence of the divine majesty. We pray fully persuaded (faith) that though we are unworthy of it, God will for Christ’s sake certainly hear our prayers. We pray resting by faith on the promise of God in Jesus Christ to be our God. The Belgic Confession says in Article 26, “We believe that we have access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous...What more can be required, since Christ himself saith, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me?””]
- f. [It is erroneous to teach that the way to the enjoyment of fellowship with God, the way of approach unto God, and way to the Father is a way of requirements that God sets out for us and that the believer must meet by his obedience or godliness. Giving to our obedience the place that these statements do strongly suggests that our obedience is a condition for covenant fellowship.]
- g. [The way of approach unto God is not our obedience, but Christ alone, by faith alone. Belgic Confession, Article 23, teaches that we rely and rest,

“upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in him. This is sufficient to cover our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God.”]

h. [Nowhere does LD 45 teach or even suggest that we gain richer and richer measures of fellowship with God according to our meeting of requirements (defined in the sermon as obedience).]

i. [Another thought not included in the analysis of synod, but a legitimate conclusion from the preaching on that text is that Lord’s Day 45 calls repentance and faith requirements and that sermon makes these our work and act because of which we are received of God, which is the conditional theology of DeWolf, “our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter the kingdom.”]

4. Synod pointed to a sermon preached on LD 23 in connection with James 2.
 - a. It was said, “What place does works have in all this (justification)? Scripture speaks of works—speaks highly of good works. Good works are not to be despised by any means. The Catechism speaks of works as well. It speaks of works highly, but puts them in their proper place.”
 - b. [The Catechism in Lord’s Day 23 repudiates works as having anything at all to do with justification! Lord’s Day 24 continues that evaluation of works. Works have nothing at all to do with justification.]
 - c. [Faith is not my work on account of which I am justified. My works as fruits of faith are no part of my justification before God. The doctrine of the Lord’s Day 23 is *not by works*.]
5. In that same sermon on Lord’s Day 23 about justification, Rev. Overway brings in James 2.
 - a. The sermon said, “James, James says that works also justify us... There is a sense in which works justify us... Don’t be confused in this point this morning... But we have to hear the word of God and receive the word of God as the Lord puts it before us [James 2:21]. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?... What is James speaking of? He’s certainly, beloved, is not speaking of that objective, legal justification. [Rev. Overway is going to go on to make a distinction between an objective, legal justification and a subjective justification in the conscience.] If we don’t have that distinction clear in our mind, we can easily be led astray by passages such as this... The Apostle [James] is not speaking of that legal justification in God’s courtroom. What would our works profit there?... How can I be justified in God’s holy, pristine courtroom by my works?... Abraham was not justified in God’s courtroom by his works. But there is, of course, that other courtroom, isn’t there. We talked about it earlier when we talked about the subjective side of justification. There’s that courtroom that exists within our hearts, within our, within our mind. And that’s what James is speaking of. Abraham was justified, that is, in his heart. He became more

aware, he became more conscious of the justifying work of God's declaring him righteous. He became more aware of it in his heart—how? By looking at his works and giving a proper evaluation of those works... We look at our works in the same way. Never of any value to make me be declared righteous before God, but always of help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone.”

b. [James 2 teaches that Abraham demonstrated his faith by his works. It does not teach that Abraham looks at his works to become more aware of and more conscious of God's justification of him in the courtroom of his heart. The teaching of the sermon is the corruption of the truth of justification by faith alone and thus of salvation, fellowship with God, assurance and confidence by faith alone. The sermon speaks of justification in the conscience. Justification in the believer's conscience is the main sense in which Scripture and the Confessions speaks of justification, for instance, in Romans 3 and 4, Galatians 2, Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Days 23, 24, and 51, and Belgic Confession Article 23.]

c. [The sermon makes justification in the conscience depend on works. This is justification by faith and by works, faith and faithfulness, or justification by an obedient faith.]

d. [If we are truly justified by faith in Christ alone, then true faith cannot look to its works to help find or maintain assurance that is found in Christ alone. The experience and assurance of justification in one's conscience is justification, and justification is by faith alone in Christ alone and without works.]

6. Regarding the sermons in general synod said:

a. The orthodox statements in the broad context of these sermons cannot be used to justify the erroneous statements, but rather the orthodox statements are compromised by the erroneous statements.

b. The doctrinal error of the sermons compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, then the perfect work of Christ is displaced.

c. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised.

7. Additionally, synod noted, about the sermons in general that even the truth of the strict demands of God's law is compromised.

a. A sermon on John 15:10-11 taught, “How then can we know his love? How can we continue to see his love displayed? How can we continue to enjoy that love and be assured of that love for us? It's by keeping his commandments... If you keep my commandments, then you will know my unbreakable love for you. We ought to be encouraged here. The Lord does not mean that we must keep those commandments perfectly... He simply means that we ought to desire, we must desire to keep those

commandments. We must aim towards the keeping of the commandments.”

b. Synod said, “Our inability to keep the law perfectly notwithstanding, the Lord does require that we keep his commandments perfectly. One reason we do not look to obtain anything by our obedience is that our obedience is always imperfect before the law of God.”

V. The Rejected Doctrinal Statement

A. The history of the document.

1. The document is found in Acts of Synod 2018, pg. 194-199.
2. The document was drawn up by a classical committee of Classis East that had been appointed to help Hope’s consistory.
3. The document was adopted by Hope Consistory in its exchange with Mrs. Meyer. Hope said they adopted it because, “the sermons you cited in your protests lack clarity at points regarding this doctrinal controversy and since our March 22, 2017 document could have been clearer at points, we ask that you now interact with us regarding this doctrinal statement.”
4. The reason that the doctrinal statement was deemed necessary was an attempt to move the discussion away from the sermons themselves, “where the doctrinal issues at stake have not been so clearly stated.” [The doctrinal statement was thus intended to bring clarity to the doctrinal issue in dispute. The problem was that it drew the discussion away from the specific doctrinal statements in question and from interaction on whether those statements were erroneous. It also contained the same doctrinal error of the sermons.]

B. Mrs. Meyer’s response is very much to the point about the serious errors in the doctrinal statement.

1. “I see this doctrinal statement as being in essence nothing more than a reiteration of the teaching of a pastor and consistory which I continue to protest.”
2. “I also see it as that which opposes the decision of Synod 2017 regarding the teaching of our pastor found in the sermon entitled, “The Way to the Father.” I contend that the teaching that Synod 2017 opposed in that sermon is in essence the same teaching found in the doctrinal statement before us now.”
3. “The same basic teaching is behind them all [sermon protested on John 14:6, all the sermons that Mrs. Meyer protested, and the doctrinal statement adopted by Hope], a teaching which I maintain is in essence the heretical teaching of a conditional covenant as well as the heretical teaching of justification by faith and works.”
4. “I protest, particularly the language which speaks of our obedience being necessary “in order to” experience fellowship with God, which teaching I continue to maintain necessarily sets forth our obedience as being a condition to our experience of the covenant. Such teaching is therefore a conditional covenant.

C. A sample of statements from the Doctrinal Statement show that it taught the same false doctrine as Rev. Overway’s sermons.

1. Doctrinal Statement reads, “God calls his people to holy living in order to live with them in covenant fellowship...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.” The sermon on LD 45 said, “Obedience is required here, obedience that I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God.” [Obedience and a holy life are taught in both to be the way to the Father.]

2. The Doctrinal Statement says, “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.” Mrs. Meyer states, “It is true that a holy God can and will live in intimate covenant fellowship only with those that are holy as he is holy. It is also true that for this reason the holy God in the establishment and maintenance of his covenant justifies his elect people in Jesus Christ. I agree as well that God also sanctifies his elect people unto a life of good works. But I deny that this life of good works that God sanctifies his people unto is of any account toward their fellowship with God.”

3. [The whole response of Mrs. Meyer is worth reading. It is found on p. 199-205 of the Acts of Synod 2018.]

D. Synod 2018 rejected the statement as containing the same errors as Rev. Overway’s preaching.

VI. The False Charge of Antinomianism in the Controversy.

A. Mr. Meyer filed his protest on July 7, 2015.

1. By July 13, 2015 the consistory of Hope decided he maintained antinomianism.

2. On July 26, 2015 the consistory decided to proceed with his suspension.

3. On August 11, 2015 he was suspended in a combined consistory meeting with Grandville PRC.

4. On August 16, 2015 Mr. Meyer’s suspension was announced to the Hope congregation.

5. On September 20, 2015 the congregation was informed that Mr. Meyer had been deposed from office.

B. The grounds for the charge of antinomianism were three statements from Mr. Meyer’s protest against Rev. Overway’s preaching on John 14:6.

1. “There are commands in scripture, and we preach them, but they are not the power to save.”

2. “There is not power of the gospel to save in the preaching of the law, for the way is the way of mere grace, which preaches what God had done in Christ for us and in us, fulfilling the law.”

3. “That leaves the commands to be a guide of thankfulness to us. But thankfulness is no small, leftover grace. Our father in 1953 emphasized the power of this grace and amply proved it.”

4. [It must be remembered that Mr. Meyer made these statements over against false teaching in a sermon on John 14:6 which deals with the way to the Father, access to God, and thus to the ground and foundation of our salvation and of the establishment, maintenance, and perfection of the covenant of grace. The works of the believer have nothing to do with that way.]

C. Hope's consistory maintained that he taught antinomianism by those statements.

1. Hope said that Mr. Meyer is willing, "for the sake of grace to abandon every obligation that the child of God has to obedience and holiness and denies that there is any value in the preaching of the admonitions of Scripture."

2. Hope maintained that Mr. Meyer believed that "the commands are of some limited value in suggesting some things we could do, but God does not by any means require thankful obedience. This is a profoundly twisted view of the new life that is ours in Christ, and is completely antinomian in its demolition of our ability to actually walk with God in thankful obedience and communion."

3. And Hope said that, "the fact that you have a problem with Rev. Overway's preaching is reason in itself to suspect that you have antinomian leanings." [It is necessary to remember that the protest of Mr. Meyer was against a sermon on John 14:6 and the false doctrine of the sermon that the way to the Father includes our obedience. It was judged by Hope church as antinomian to object to the inclusion of obedience as part of the way to the Father.]

4. Part of Hope's charge against Mr. Meyer involved the issue of the proper interpretation of Acts 16:30-31 and Acts 2:37-38. Hope writes, "In [Mr. Meyer's protest 1.8] in support of the assertion that salvation is pure grace, p. 168 of the Voice of our Father is partially quoted, and then elder Meyer makes the following statement: "Obedience is included here, but not as our activity—what we do, but as the perfect obedience and holiness of Christ in justification and sanctification." This is a false statement and contradicts the creeds and scripture. The Philippian Jailor asked the Apostle Paul, "What must I do to be saved." The Apostle Paul answered him concretely with these words, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house" (Acts 16:30-31). The multitude present for Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, responded to Peter's preaching in this way, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" and the Apostle responded, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:37-38). Now, neither of the Apostles was teaching that salvation or the gift of the Holy Ghost were conditioned or based in any way on what the people did, however, they were teaching that repenting and believing were in fact the personal activity and obedience of God's people, worked in them through the preaching of the commands to repent and believe. Canons 3/4.12 teaches explicitly that our wills do in fact become active and man is himself rightly said to believe and repent."

5. Mr. Meyer responded to the above assertion: “This point [the quote of the consistory above] objects to this statement: “Obedience is included here, but not as our activity—what we do, but as the perfect obedience and holiness of Christ in justification and sanctification.” To prove this objection, texts are cited such as Acts 16:30-31, where the Philippian jailor asks, “What must I do to be saved.” I [Mr. Meyer] quote some excerpts from the sermon of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, “The Calling of the Philippian Jailor.” [Herman Hoeksema preached the sermon in Doon, IA, July 1953]: “Listen: we must believe? Oh, that’s true. But, is that the gospel? Is that the gospel: WE must believe? We MUST believe? If that were the gospel, beloved, that gospel could never be realized. I say once more, to be sure, we MUST believe. But there is no hope in that statement, and there is no salvation in that statement. Because if you only say we must believe, which means of course, that nobody has the right not to believe and nobody has the right to be an unbeliever, that we are bound before God to believe. Yes, yes, yes; there’s no hope in that. That’s not the gospel...But when Christ says that, beloved, Christ, not I, but Christ—as he did here. As he did here through Paul and through the apostle, when Christ says that, then indeed, you do not answer, “Oh, I must believe.” But then the fruit, the inevitable fruit, the sure fruit is that you say, “I believe.”

6. [It may not be forgotten in this exchange over Hope’s charge of antinomianism against Mr. Meyer that the issue was a sermon on John 14:6 that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father. Obedience is not included in that way, nor is any spiritual activity of faith or repentance to be included in that way as our obedience or work. We come to God through Jesus Christ, by faith only, without our works. It is not because faith is my obedience and spiritual activity that it brings me to God. It is not because I repented as my obedience and spiritual activity that I might come to God. It is only because of Christ, Christ alone, through faith alone, that I have the right and do come to God. Obedience, therefore, is not included in the way to the Father except as it is the perfect obedience of Christ. Simply put: when speaking of coming to the Father we check our works at the door.]

D. Mr. Meyer appealed the charge of antinomianism to Classis East January 13, 2016.

1. Mr. Meyer reiterates his position on the three statements in the John 14:6 sermon: “My judgment on these statements is that because they made the way of salvation and covenant communion with God include our obedience, and our holy life and godly life, that we then no longer need to rely on Jesus Christ and his obedience alone as the way of salvation and communion with God and that this therefore teaches conditional covenant theology.”

2. Classis East did not sustain Mr. Meyer in his appeal against the charge of Hope that he “maintains and teaches antinomianism.”

E. Mr. Meyer appealed to Synod 2016. The matter later came to Synod 2017 and Synod 2018.

1. Synod 2016 ruled:

- a. “Mr. Meyer does not fit classical and Reformed descriptions of an antinomian...He is not against the necessity of preaching the law and its demands...He is not against the need for obedience to the law in the life of the child of God...He is not against the law in either of its uses as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, namely, to show us our misery and to direct us in thankful obedience.”
 - b. “Hope’s consistory misrepresents Mr. Meyer’s position on the commandments as a guide to thankfulness...Hope’s consistory overstates Mr. Meyer’s position regarding the law...Hope’s consistory prejudices itself against Mr. Meyer simply because he disagrees with their pastor’s preaching.”
 - c. “Classis East...asserts that Mr. Meyer is antinomian without interacting with the material...in order to demonstrate this charge.”
 - d. “When Mr. Meyer rejects the law in connection with salvation, he is not rejecting the preaching of the law altogether. Instead, he is rejecting the preaching of obedience to the law as part of the “way to God in John 14:6, that is, as part of the basis for our salvation.”
2. Prof. Cammenga protested this decision to Synod 2017:
- a. “I believe that Synod 2016 erred in not condemning certain statements made by Mr. Meyer in his protest, statements that at the very least are not in harmony with our Reformed confessions, and statements at worst that betray the antinomian error.”
 - b. He seeks to establish that antinomianism is not always of the “extreme variety” of those “who maintained that the believer was completely free from all obligations to the Law, and who held that any concession to legal duty was an infringement of free grace.”
 - c. He quotes favorably from conditional covenant theologian Mark Jones who said that more moderate antinomians, “blur the distinction between imputation (Christ’s work for us) and application (Christ’s work in us), and so make Christ totally responsible, not only for our imputed righteousness, but also for our imparted righteousness. On the surface, such a view appears to honor Christ. But on closer inspection, this view obliterates human responsibility to the point that antinomianism ends up becoming a form of hyper-Calvinism.”
 - d. Prof. Cammenga rejects as antinomian Mr. Meyer’s statement, “There are commands in Scripture and we preach them, but they are not the power to save. There is no power of the gospel to save in the preaching of the law, for the way is the way of mere grace, which preaches what God has done in Christ for us and in us, fulfilling the law.” [This statement of Mr. Meyer was made in defense of the gospel of John 14:6 that Christ is the only way to the Father and that we have Christ by faith alone and thus have the Father and fellowship with the Father by faith alone and not by faith and the works of faith, or by faith and the obedience of faith, or by an

obedient faith.] Prof. Cammenga's position states that, "It has ever been the teaching of the Reformed that the law serves as an instrument of grace."

e. Prof. Cammenga rejects as antinomian Mr. Meyer's statement, "I maintain that God does require thankful obedience, and provides it..." Prof. Cammenga says, "To say that God provides our thankful obedience goes beyond the teaching of Scripture and our Reformed Creeds." [Belgic Confession Article 14 says, "In short, who dare suggest any thought, since he knows that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God? And therefore what the apostle saith ought justly to be held sure and firm, that God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 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." Belgic Confession Article 24 teaches, "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."]

f. Prof. Cammenga rejects other statements of Mr. Meyer as concerning and leaning toward antinomianism.

3. Synod 2017 ruled:

a. That Synod acknowledges that, "some of Mr. Meyer's statement, taken at face value, are contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions."

b. Over against Mr. Meyer's statement, "There are commands in Scripture, and we preach them, but they are not the power to save..." Synod said, "But properly done, the preaching of the law is the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation."

c. Over against Mr. Meyer's statement, "I maintain that God does require thankful obedience, and provides it..." Synod said, "God does not provide our obedience; rather, he regenerates our hearts and sanctifies us so that we bring forth the good works which he has before ordained that we should bring forth."

d. Over against Mr. Meyer's statement, "To say that...after Adam and Eve fell 'the way is barred' for them as fallen sinners is to make the covenant conditioned on obedience," Synod said, "Not only is it a historical fact that they were barred from the tree of life, but Isaiah 59:2 teaches that sins in which God's covenant people persist do separate us from God so that he will not hear our prayers..."

e. Synod 2017, however, did not sustain the protest of Prof. Cammenga because he did not "prove conclusively that Mr. Meyer maintains and teaches antinomianism...[the statements of Mr. Meyer objected to] do not conclusively confirm the charge of maintaining and teaching antinomianism...Maintaining and teaching antinomianism implies that

Mr. Meyer embraces some coherent and consistent form of the heresy...Although Prof. Cammenga challenges a few unrelated and unorthodox statements of Mr. Meyer, this challenge does not attain the level of certainty required to classify him as an antinomian..."

4. Protests of Rev. Andrew Lanning to Synod 2018 against the decision of Synod 2017.

a. Rev. Andrew Lanning objects to the decision of Synod 2017 that "But properly done, the preaching of the law is the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation."

1.) He argues that this statement contradicts the biblical and confessional distinction between the law and the gospel and that synod's "identifying the law with the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, synod's declaration brings the law into our salvation at exactly that point that Scripture and the confessions exclude the law."

2.) This statement contradicts, Canons III/IV. Articles 5 and 6. The Law cannot be the gospel because its message does not include Christ. Further, the Law cannot give man the power to obey it, but the Law is weak through flesh. The gospel on the other hand is "the glad tidings concerning the Messiah...The Canons explicitly state that this salvation from sin could not be accomplished by the law, and that this salvation from sin God accomplishes only through the gospel."

3.) This statement of Synod contradicts the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 19, 21, 59, 65, 67, 83, and 84. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that "the law's role is not to save us, but to teach us our misery (Q&A 3, 115) and to be the rule, guide, and standard of our thankful obedience (Q&A 86, 91, 114, 115)."

b. Rev. Lanning objects to the statement of Synod "God does not provide our obedience; rather, he regenerates our heart and sanctifies us so that we bring forth..."

1.) This contradicts Canons III/IV, 16 where it says, "Wherefore, unless the admirable Author of every good work in us..." So he says, "The good works that man truly performs out of his regenerated heart are furnished, given, granted, bestowed, imparted to him—that is, provided—by God."

2.) Speaking of God providing is confessed in HC LD 9 "that I have no doubt but that he will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body" of which our good works are a part.

3.) The Scripture passages cited by synod to support its claim all in fact teach "that God is the Author of our obedience by his regeneration of us...by his eternal counsel...by his sanctification of us."

5. Mr. Meyer protests to Synod 2018 against Synod 2017's condemnation of his statements:
- a. He writes, "I contend that those statements are conclusive evidence that the author of those statements holds to and confesses that the covenant of God with his people in absolute terms is unconditional."
 - b. He continues that thus to condemn the statements, "these decisions have made binding on all those in the PRC, that, to hold to and confess the truth of the unconditional covenant in absolute terms is antinomian heresy."
 - c. He maintains that, "Such a false charge of antinomianism, when dealing with the doctrines of salvation, will necessarily involve whether the covenant of God is unconditional or not."
 - d. Prof. Cammenga in his protest quotes favorably from the book *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* by Mark Jones. As a basic premise Mark Jones holds to a conditional covenant and salvation, and connects the denial of conditions with antinomianism: "They [the antinomians] were so concerned to maintain the graciousness of salvation that they not only denied that there are conditions for salvation...but also suggested that in the application of salvation man does not 'act'...Faith is an antecedent condition to receive the blessings of justification, adoption, and sanctification...That is to say, Christ's death would be meaningless apart from a covenantal agreement between the Father and Son...the covenant of grace may be unconditional in its origin, but ultimately it requires that conditions be met on man's part...If faith is an antecedent condition required of sinners in order to receive pardon of sins...then as Reformed theologians insisted, good works...are consequent conditions for salvation."
 - e. Mr. Meyer insists, "As Protestant Reformed theology distinctively witnesses to the truth of the unconditional covenant, by his teaching Mark Jones must condemn Protestant Reformed theology as antinomian. By quoting favorably from this book Prof. Cammenga also demonstrates his condemnation of the unconditional covenant as antinomian. By synod's acknowledgment of three key points made in Prof. Cammenga's protest, synod also demonstrates condemnation of the unconditional covenant as antinomian."
 - f. Keeping the issue in line with the original protest on John 14:6 Mr. Meyer notes that Synod 2017 overturned Synod 2016's decision and sustained Mr. Meyer's objection to obedience being made part of the way to the Father in John 14:6, and notes that Synod 2017's statements against Mr. Meyer's confession of the unconditional covenant in those three statements deemed antinomian that "the condemnation of the protestants statements...puts good works back into the way of John 14:6."

g. Specifically with regard to his statement “there are commands in Scripture, and we preach them, but they are not the power to save...,” that this is “in plain harmony with Canon III/IV.5” And he continues that Synod 2017 condemnation of this and its teaching that “properly done the preaching of the law is the preaching of the gospel” is “to mix law and gospel to the destruction of the gospel as gospel and is to receive the doctrine of the conditional covenant into the midst of the PRC.”

h. Regarding the statement, “I maintain that God does require thankful obedience, and provides it...,” which Synod 2017 condemned as antinomian and said “God does not provide our obedience; rather, he regenerates our heart and sanctifies us so that we bring forth the good works which he before ordained...,” Mr. Meyer maintains that this means that “man...is active in providing obedience.” He quotes *The Declaration of Principles*, “the sure promises of God...makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness,” and the *Battle for Sovereign Grace*, “the child’s faith and obedience, therefore, are not conditions upon which the covenant depends, to the overthrow of divine sovereignty, but fruits of thankfulness.” So to say “Other than God provides [our obedience] is to uphold the covenant as conditional.” That God provides our obedience is also in harmony with Belgic Confession Article 24, “Nay, we are beholden to God for our good works and not he to us,” about which Mr. Meyer says, “We are beholden to God for our good works and not he to us because he has provided those good works. This article of faith quotes Philippians 2:13 here to say that if man provides his own good works, then that provision would be meritorious and would make God beholden to us.” Mr. Meyer concludes, “to say other than God provides our thankful obedience is to make the believer’s good works part of the way of salvation, which way John 14:6 declares to be Christ alone...to say other than God provides [our obedience] is to uphold the covenant as conditional.”

i. In defense of his statement “to say that...after Adam and Eve fell the way is barred for them as fallen sinners is to make the covenant conditioned on obedience,” Mr. Meyer notes “I wrote in my protest [to Synod 2016] concerning this statement... “to teach in all this that Adam was barred from fellowship with the Father is, again, completely omitting the truth of election. Adam and Eve did not stand as fallen sinners...but were elect, redeemed sinners...raised to higher, heavenly life in Christ [the head of the covenant of grace]. Prof. Cammenga characterizes my arguments as “typical antinomian reasoning.” Decisive election and unconditional covenant are inseparable. For Prof. Cammenga to oppose my reasoning, which reasoning flows from the truth that election governs the covenant, is to establish that the covenant is conditional.” Mr. Meyer continues that by his statement he is not denying “that Adam and Eve

were put out of the Garden of Eden. I do deny that they were put out of the Father's fellowship thereby." He points to Article 26 of the Belgic Confession and writes, "Articles 26 speaks of access to the divine majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us, talking about what happened in the garden as a result of Adam's sin. The truth is that our head Adam would, indeed, otherwise be barred, and we in him. But thanks be to God that the second head, Jesus Christ, is Adam's head and our head and that God has revealed this truth to us to believe and confess [that] ...we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ, the righteous....If our access to God is not in Jesus Christ alone....our access would be in our works. Works are the condition, therefore, to having fellowship with God if we are indeed, otherwise barred from that access...Adam was put out of the garden...in reality he was clothed in a higher, saving fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, no more to return to the typical pictures in the Garden of Eden."

6. Mr. Matthew Overway objected to Synod 2017's condemnation of Mr. Meyer's statements similarly as objected to above and for similar reasons.

7. Synod 2018 decided:

- a. Regarding the statement of Synod 2017 "properly done, the preaching of the law is the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation," Synod sustained the protests of Rev. Lanning and M. Overway...and rescind the statement." [Synod later concludes that it erred by entering into the statement of Mr. Meyer while at the same time not sustaining Prof. Cammenga's protest at Synod 2017.]
- b. Regarding the statement of Synod 2017, "God does not provide our obedience, etc.," Synod decided to "sustain the protest of Rev. Lanning, N. Meyer, and M. Overway...and rescind," that statement.
- c. Synod 2018 went on to "rebuke Mr. Meyer for including in his protest charges of heresy against Prof. R. Cammenga."

VII. Hope's Defense of Rev. Overway's theology. Acts of Synod 2018 p. 151ff.

A. [The quotations from Hope's consistory in this section are taken from their March 22, 2017 response to Mrs. Meyer's protest of 17 sermons of Rev. Overway. In her protest she alleges that Rev. Overway's preaching makes the believer's obedience a condition to fellowship with God in the covenant. Over against Mrs. Meyer's charge, Hope defended Rev. Overway's statements as merely teaching the necessary way of the covenant. The phrase "in the way of," was used by Herman Hoeksema to teach that in God's dealings with man in the covenant he always treats man as a rational, moral, responsible creature before him. Hope wrongly pressed that phrase in defense of Rev. Overway's false statements. As is shown above in this document, the Synods declared Hope's defense of Rev. Overway's theology to be in error, by condemning Rev. Overway's theology. Hope has also acknowledged their errors and apologized for them.]

B. Hope maintained that Rev. Overway teaches the necessary way of the covenant.

1. God does not treat us as stocks and blocks. “Rather, God is pleased to make us conscious and active in our salvation...By doing so, he is pleased to have us experience the blessings of salvation...in the way of our faith (our believing) and the obedience of faith.” Hope cited Canons 3/4.12, 13, 16; *The Declaration of Principles* III, B, 2 in support of this assertion. [The problem is that none of the resources cited say that God is pleased to have us experience the blessings of salvation in the way of faith and the obedience of faith. That is simply an imposition on the text of the resources. For instance, *The Declaration of Principles* III.B.2 says “We maintain: 1. That God surely and infallibly fulfills his promise to the elect. 2. The sure promise of God which he realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer. All those who are not thus disposed, who do not repent but walk in sin, are the objects of his just wrath and excluded from the kingdom of heaven. That the preaching comes to all; and that God seriously commands to faith and repentance; and that to all who come and believe he promises life and peace.” *The Declaration of Principles* cites Canons 3/4. 12, 16 and 17 as one of the proofs of this doctrine. Nowhere in any of these resources, then, is the idea taught that we experience the blessings of salvation in the way of faith and the obedience of faith.]

2. Hope’s consistory writes: “The blessings of salvation are ours by faith alone.” But Hope goes on to say, “Faith and our obedience are not to be understood as two unrelated and unconnected things...Our faith and obedience are so tightly connected, Prof. Hanks says, “So much is a living faith like its works that James as much as identifies the two...Thus James can use faith and works interchangeably for true faith is works, and works are true faith...and faith works with works in such a way that faith is working when works are performed.” [Hope’s consistory in its explanation of faith and the works of faith intertwines faith and works so as to make them one and thus also twin instruments in obtaining the experience of salvation. By its statements, Hope has at this point explained salvation by an obedient faith (by faith and its obedience). For them the faith that saves does not save without its works, and the faith that gives the experience of salvation does not give the experience of salvation without its works. The truth is that faith alone saves without its works. Faith is one thing. The fruits of faith (works) are another thing. That faith and obedience are tightly connected is not to be denied, but faith and works are not to be identified as one. If that is so then when Paul says that I am justified by faith, then I may substitute that I am justified by works, or I am justified by a working, obedient faith.]

3. Hope writes, “Even though all of God’s people have the blessings of salvation in principle, the richness of their experience of those blessings is found in the way of obedience. As Scripture, the confessions, and Reformed men of the past have taught, God is pleased that we should experience the blessings of salvation in the way of obedience (Heb 12:14; HC Q&A 116; Declaration of Principles III, B, 2;

Synod 2016, Art. 36, B, 2, c). [Again, none of these passages, save the reference to Synod 2016 which was later overturned, say what Hope says, namely that “all God’s people have salvation in principle, but the richness of their experience of those blessings is found in the way of obedience and that the experience of the blessing of salvation is in the way of obedience.” Further, the distinction that Hope makes between the “blessings of salvation in principle” that all of God’s people have, and “the richness of their experience of those blessings” that is found only “in the way of obedience” in effect divides God’s people into two classes, and makes the richness of the experience of salvation dependent on obedience. The truth is that while it may be said that all God’s people have salvation in principle because we are not yet made perfect in heaven, yet salvation and its experience comes to all of God’s people by faith alone in Jesus Christ.”]

4. Hope writes, “God in his wisdom has chosen to connect our obedience (a gift of God) to our experience of blessings. Part of the reason for this is that he does not save us as stocks and blocks (Canons 3/4.16). Secondly, the reason that he has ordained that we experience the blessings of the covenant in the way of obedience is because of the work of the Holy Spirit... *This idea that God works in the elect as rational, moral creatures...and connects our obedience (which he works in us) to our experience of the blessings of salvation is essential to this issue* (emphasis added). Hope quotes Homer Hoeksema from the *Voice of our Fathers*, 553, 555, Hoeksema and Hanko, *Corrupting the Word of God*, p. 231, *Ready to Give an Answer*, p 193-194, and Canons of Dordt Head 5, Article 13. [The use to which Hope puts all these references is to prove that God connects our obedience and the experience of the blessings of salvation. At the very least those passages are all emphasizing faith in Jesus Christ, but Hope emphasizes obedience. The logic that because God works in the elect as rational, moral creatures by his Holy Spirit, and thus that God connects the experience of the blessings of salvation with their obedience is faulty logic. First, the sure realization of God’s promise in his elect by his Holy Spirit has the fruit that they are active, repent, believe, and live holy lives. This is their salvation and the fruit of their salvation by God’s grace. Second, Hope connects the experience of salvation solely with obedience. This must necessarily mean that justification is also experienced only in the way of obedience, or justification by an obedient faith, which is erroneous.]

5. Hope accuses Mrs. Meyer of wrongly identifying our part in the covenant with conditionality. [What Hope does not do is recognize that our part in the covenant is the fruit, strictly the fruit, of the infallible realization of God’s covenant promise in us according to *The Declaration of Principles III.B.1, 2.*]

6. Hope says regarding Mrs. Meyer, “Therefore, we believe that you have incorrectly identified the necessary way of salvation (i.e., obedience/activity) in which we experience the blessings of salvation/covenant AS condition or prerequisite of salvation/covenant” [When Hope speaks of “the necessary way of salvation” it has now redefined the phrase “in the way of” used in connection with the covenant. When Hope speaks of the necessary way of salvation, they are

referring to the way of salvation as John 14:6 teaches the way of salvation. Not only is Christ not mentioned, but also that way of salvation is simply defined as obedience/activity. If the obedience of the believer is included in that way, or if that way is defined in any sense as obedience by the believer, then obedience as a condition to fellowship and friendship with God is being taught. In contrast, the truth is that the way of salvation is Jesus Christ alone. But in Hope's statement, Christ and all his perfect work have been displaced and in its place the obedience and activity of the believer is substituted.]

7. Hope defends its theology as simply teaching the necessary way of the covenant. "That a condition is different than the necessary way of the covenant is clear from the fact that those who experience blessings of the covenant in the way of obedience are already the elect, regenerated, justified, covenant children of God in whom the Holy Spirit is working this obedience. As we stated, God is pleased to have the elect experience the blessings of salvation in the way of obedience...God actually works in us 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." [Hope's idea is that once one is in the covenant, then the way of experiencing blessings is the way of obedience, which is to deny that Christ always and only, is the way of salvation, and that obedience is only ever fruit of faith in Christ.]

8. [Of note is that this response to Mrs. Meyer is also considered their defense of Rev. Overway's explanation of John 14:6, where he said that Christ is the way to the Father through the obedience that he works in us. The way to the Father according to Hope is Christ and the obedience that Christ works in us. This is fundamentally conditional theology, specifically conditional covenant experience.]

VIII. Summary.

A. [The statements identified in the sermons of Rev. Overway from 2015-2017 are false doctrine as they stand.]

1. This is true regardless of whether he intended to teach what he taught, or whether he believes or does not believe what he taught.
2. The statements teach justification by faith and works, justification by an obedient faith, conditional fellowship with God, and displaces the perfect work of Jesus Christ our Savior as the only way to God.

B. Antinomianism, although it took up a large portion of the material, was a misleading subject introduced into the doctrinal controversy.

1. Mr. Meyer was accused of and deposed for antinomianism falsely. Another protestant was accused of making the believer a stock and block, denying the necessity of good works, denying the phrase "in the way of," and denigrating commands and admonitions. The controversy was made to be about whether good works are necessary, whether the believer is a stock and block, and whether the regenerated perform spiritual activities. None of these things were true and were distractions from the doctrinal issue. By introducing antinomianism in this

controversy the pure gospel of justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant was charged with being antinomian and was corrupted.

2. The issue at the heart of the doctrinal controversy was justification by faith alone and not by works, the unconditionality of the covenant, especially in relationship to the believer's fellowship with his God, and the perfect work of Christ as the only ground and foundation of salvation and the believer's life with God. The works of the believer must be put away entirely in this context. Whether we are talking about elect, regenerated believers, or not, makes no difference as to the truth of the gospel that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, that we are saved by grace alone, without works, that we are justified by faith alone without works, and that Jesus Christ's perfect work is the only ground of our salvation, our approach to God, and our life with God as our God. It is not and cannot be antinomian to teach these things. This is the gospel of our salvation.

C. The phrase "in the way of."

1. We must be warned that this phrase cannot be used without explanation. Just because our Reformed fathers used this phrase, its use does not automatically guarantee it to be orthodox.

2. We must be warned that this phrase cannot be injected with new meaning and substituted for "the way of the salvation" or the "way of the covenant" as though these are synonymous. The way of salvation is Jesus Christ alone. "In the way of" maintains that God is absolutely sovereign in salvation and that he deals with men as rational, moral creatures. In the covenant God unconditionally and infallibly realizes his sure promise in all his elect. God confronts man with his obligation. The reprobate are guilty for their failure to repent and believe. That the elect do repent and believe is the fruit of God's realization of his promise in them and his work of grace in them.

3. In this controversy the phrase was twisted and used in support of false theology that made obedience a condition to covenant fellowship with God, compromised justification by faith alone, and displaced Christ's work. As a result, the phrase needs careful explanation if it is used.

D. Justification by faith alone.

1. Our salvation consists in justification. Justification is God's act of declaring the elect sinner righteous before him. In this act God forgives the sinner his sins, and imputes to him the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ as the only ground of his salvation.

2. By that act of justification God declares the elect sinner worthy of eternal life and fellowship with God, and gives to him peace with God and the assurance of his salvation. This is not only a one-time act of God, but is the ongoing experience of the elect sinner all his life long. Romans 5:1

3. Justification is by faith alone and absolutely apart from works. The faith that justifies produces fruit of good works. It is impossible that justifying faith not produce fruits of thankfulness. But those good works are of no account whatsoever toward our justification and we cannot base our salvation on any

blessing of salvation on them. Faith does not justify because it is a work or an activity of the believer, instead faith does nothing for salvation and rests and relies upon the work of Jesus Christ alone. Faith itself; as bond with Jesus Christ, as willing to believe, and as activity of believing, is wholly the gift of God to us, and as a consequence we are rightly said to believe.

E. The good works of the believer are fruits and only fruits of faith. (HC Q&A 64, 86, Canons 3-4.11, 5.Error 7, BC 24)

1. The works of the believer are fruits of faith. They are fruits and cannot be the cause of any blessing of salvation or of the experience of salvation.

2. The works of the believer are God's gift to him. We are beholden to God for all our works. We do not produce works of ourselves, but as we are engrafted into Jesus Christ by faith and as his Spirit and grace operates continually in us, works are inevitable. Without Christ we can do nothing.

3. "In the meantime, we do not deny that God rewards our good works, but it is through His grace that He crowns His gifts. Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior." BC 24]