

March 30, 2021

Dear brethren of the consistory of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church,

We write to you out of love for Jesus Christ and love for the church of Jesus Christ. We are protesting to you the sermon on Lord's Day 7 entitled "Saving Faith as Assurance," which was preached by Professor Cammenga on March 14, 2021. We have not discussed this sermon with Professor Cammenga, but we write our protest to you elders because you have oversight over the flock and the preaching at Hudsonville PR Church. We ask you to judge this sermon in light of the Holy Scriptures and Lord's Day 7 and respond to us in writing your judgment regarding the orthodoxy of this sermon.

Regarding true faith as assurance, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches:

Q. 21. What is true faith?

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

We write to you these points of protest because the following statements by Professor Cammenga are contrary to what is written in Lord's Days 7, 23, and 24, and in articles 23 and 24 of the Belgic Confession and are a corruption of the gospel of grace.

In addition, statements in the sermon are explicitly contrary to the decision of Synod 2018 regarding justification by faith alone.

The theology of the sermon is the error that synod condemned when it stated regarding justification by faith alone,

If we are truly justified by faith alone in Christ alone, then *true faith cannot look to its works* to help or maintain the assurance that is found in Christ alone. (*Acts of Synod 2018*, 69; emphasis added)

First, Professor Cammenga said, "Scripture and the Reformed confessions teach that though faith assures of salvation that faith is confirmed by a life of good works."

1. Our concern with this statement is that it teaches the inclusion of good works in the personal assurance of justification.
2. Nowhere does Lord's Day 7 mention good works or even talk of the godly life of the child of God.
3. Lord's Day 7 is included in the second section of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Our Deliverance." And Lord's Day 7 teaches specifically concerning assurance of *justification*. This is proved in answer 21 when it says that the believer has "an assured confidence" of "remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation." This is justification.
4. The "assured confidence" of justification in the blood of Jesus Christ is worked in the believer's heart *by the Holy Ghost*. This is made very plain in answer 21: "True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to

us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart.”

5. Lord’s Day 23 teaches the following concerning justification and assurance:

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants, and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

6. Herman Hoeksema in his *Triple Knowledge* says regarding true faith: “It is the element of confidence [assurance] that distinguishes true faith from all other kinds. And this confidence of saving faith it is wrought by the Spirit of Christ, and through the gospel, as a special work of grace.”

7. Article 24 of the Belgic Confession teaches: “Howbeit they [good works] are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works.”

8. Professor Engelsma writes in his book *Gospel Truth of Justification*: “Faith is the means by which God grants, and the sinner receives, the righteousness of Christ by imputation in the sinner’s own consciousness, so that the sinner is himself aware and assured of his forgiveness and righteousness.”

9. In his book *Justified unto Liberty*, Professor Hanko writes the following concerning Paul’s ministry to the Galatians: “He preached the doctrine of justification by faith: in doing so he did not ‘frustrate the grace of God’ by adding to the gospel he preached the need for the works of the law in order to be justified before God. “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

10. Where, we ask, in Lord’s Day 7 are good works spoken of? Lord’s Day 7 speaks to our justification, the glory of Christ, *and the Holy Spirit who works assurance*. But Professor Cammenga pointed us to our lives of godliness and good works to assure us of our justification.

Second, Professor Cammenga stated in the sermon, “If these fruits and evidences of election and faith are present in your life, be assured, confirmed in your assurance that you are an elect child of God.” Other similar statements: “Are you living with the fruits of the Spirit manifest in your life—observable by others around you?” “Ask yourself, are the fruits of preserving grace evident in my life?”

1. By these statements, we are told to look to these evidences for our assurance.
2. Lord’s Day 7 tells us otherwise. It tells us that because we have true faith, we already possess this assurance.

3. The Lord's Day is clear when it teaches that our salvation and all the blessings of the gospel of grace are worked in the believer's heart *by the Holy Ghost*. The Lord's Day is clear when it also teaches that the blessings of the gospel are freely given by God, merely of grace, for the sake of Christ's merits.
4. When we should be brought exclusively to Christ and to the work of the Holy Ghost, we were pointed away from Christ and the Holy Spirit to look at our works and godly lives.
5. So, either the Holy Ghost fails to assure us and keep us in assurance, or our faith fails, which means God fails because he works faith in us.
6. Pointing us to our lives and our works as evidences diminishes the powerful work of the Holy Ghost in our hearts.
7. In his book *Gospel Truth of Justification*, the author, David J. Engelsma, says, "Forgiveness is justification and justification is—even for the most wretched, lowly sinner and not only for a few aristocratic Puritans trusting in their mystical experiences rather than Christ crucified—assurance of a right standing with God and therefore of salvation."
8. We find Professor Cammenga's second statement to oppose what he said earlier in the sermon: "faith is assurance." If this is true, which we believe it is, and this is what the Lord's Day confesses when it says that true faith is "an assured confidence that the Holy Ghost works in my heart," then the second statement directly opposes the Lord's Day.
9. Should not the minister point us to the perfect work of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection and ascension into heaven if we are enduring doubts or fears regarding our justification? We should be pointed to the *work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts for assurance*. Otherwise, the minister takes away the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, for assurance is worked in our hearts *by the Holy Ghost*.
10. Romans 8:15–16 teaches: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."
11. Titus 3:5 teaches: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."
12. Lord's Day 21 also touches on *the work of the Holy Ghost regarding faith* when in question 54 it asks, "What believest thou concerning the 'holy catholic church' of Christ?" The answer: "That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof." Now isn't that the beautiful, comforting gospel of Jesus Christ?

Third, Professor Cammenga's statement is this: "Although God works the assurance of faith under the preaching of his word, we are active in this whole matter of the assurance of faith. God does not drop assurance out of the sky on us and now we have it forever and it can never be taken away from us and we have nothing to worry about as regards this matter of

assurance of our faith. But God's people are active, busy in this whole matter of the assurance of their faith."

1. The statements in the paragraph above are a clear corrupting of this Lord's Day's teaching on true faith and what is included in that true faith.
2. Romans 5:1: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Very clear understanding that we *are* assured (peace).
3. Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."
4. Ephesians 3:12: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."
5. John 10: 27–28: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."
6. Canons 1.4: "The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not the gospel. But such as receive it, and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith, are by Him delivered from the wrath of God and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them."
7. Homer Hoeksema said in his sermon on Lord's Day 21 that the minister's calling is to proclaim to the people of God the word of assurance. Admonish the people to rejoice always in the Lord. The scripture says to rejoice in assurance of your hope and faith.
8. The state of the child of God when true faith is worked in his heart *by the Holy Ghost* is one of confidence and assurance. So *when the Holy Ghost* (no, assurance does not drop from the sky) *works this faith* (assurance) in the heart of the child of God, he will have it forever.
9. In his book titled *Gospel Truth of Justification*, Professor Engelsma says, "This justification consists of personal assurance of justification: me also."
10. Article 23 of the Belgic Confession, "Of Justification," says this: "Therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all glory to God, humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in anything in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and give us CONFIDENCE in approaching to God."
11. Rev. Cornelius Hanks said in his sermon on Lord's Day 7 that faith is "that I believe the promises of the gospel. I believe in God, and because I believe in God, I believe in all his promises and that they can never fail."
12. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."
13. Herman Hoeksema in his sermon on Lord's Day 7 said, "The activity of this faith is that we draw all things out of Christ." He also said, "Complete salvation is drawn out of Christ. This means that God unites us to Christ, and we draw all things out of

- Christ.” He also said, “When you have this faith, you say, ‘I believe that the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, is for my personal salvation.’”
14. Herman Hoeksema in his book *Righteous by Faith Alone* describes the “activity” of faith this way: “The activity of Abraham’s faith was such that he believed God, he took hold of the word of God. His faith was reckoned for righteousness.” Hoeksema continues to explain this “activity” as being an *undoubting certainty*, also an “activity” of the soul whereby *the soul is sure* of the impossible, and then, finally, that this saving faith is sure of the impossible because it is the word of God.
 15. Herman Hoeksema in *Triple Knowledge* says that the answer the Catechism gives to question 20: “Are all men, then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?” uses terminology that *leaves the sinner entirely passive in the hand of God*: “No, but only those that are ingrafted into him and receive all the benefits, by a true faith.” The engrafting into Christ is the act of God, never of man.
 16. Homer Hoeksema in his sermon on Lord’s Day 21 says, “Faith is not a work. It is a gift and a power, a God-given power, that through the living word of Christ, I lay hold of that and say, ‘I forever shall remain.’”
 17. Romans 8:35–39 says that nothing can separate us from the love of God. “For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ.”

There are many more statements that we could lay before you to show that Professor Cammenga in his sermon preached what was condemned by Synod 2018. The following is a statement that was condemned by our Synod 2018:

We look at our good 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.

We preach the Heidelberg Catechism each Sunday because we believe that this creed beautifully sets forth the instruction of the Holy Scriptures. This from Zacharias Ursinus in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism: “We have then in the Heidelberg Catechism the three heads common to all Christian catechisms, but conceived and arranged in a manner that demonstrates the genius of the reformed theology.” If Lord’s Day 7 was intended to have works preached for assurance, we can be assured that this would be brought out in Lord’s Day 7. The Lord’s Day instructs us that *when the Holy Ghost works this true faith* in the believer’s heart, he is assured that this salvation is for him, that God’s grace is for him. Zacharias Ursinus writes the following concerning Lord’s Day 7:

Justifying faith is properly that which is defined in the catechism; according to which definition, the general nature of saving faith consists in knowledge and an assured confidence; for there can be no faith in a doctrine that is wholly unknown. It is proper for us, therefore, to obtain a knowledge of that in which we are to believe, before we exercise faith; from which we may see the absurdity of the implicit faith of the Papists. The difference, or formal character of saving faith, is the confidence and application which every one makes to

himself, of the free remission of sins by and for the sake of Christ. The property, or peculiar character of this faith, is trust and delight in God, on account of this great benefit. The efficient cause of justifying faith is the Holy Spirit. The instrumental cause is the gospel, in which the use of the sacraments is also comprehended. The subject of this faith is the will and heart of man. Justifying or saving faith differs, therefore, from the other kinds of faith, because it alone is that assured confidence by which we apply unto ourselves the merit of Christ, which is done when we firmly believe that the righteousness of Christ is granted and imputed unto us, so that we are accounted just in the sight of God. Confidence is an exercise or motion of the will and heart, following something good—resting and rejoicing in it.

We believe that good works have a proper place and function in the Christian life. As elect children of God, we are called to lives of good works out of gratitude to God for his gift. Lord's Day 32 under the third part of the Catechism, "Of Thankfulness," beautifully explains the must of good works in the life of the child of God. We do not deny that our lives of gratitude are active, for because we have faith, we cannot help but produce good works.

All of John 15 speaks of Christ being the vine and we are the branches engrafted into Christ, and every branch that abides in him brings forth much fruit, for without him we can do nothing. "Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10).

Article 24 of the Belgic Confession declares,

Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such faith, which is called in the scripture, a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works.

Our faith is a living faith because we are engrafted into Christ who makes us alive in him.

We end with a quote from Synod 2018 on page 69 of the *Acts of Synod*, which says this: "Good works have a proper place and function in the Christian life *but they do not function as helps for finding and maintaining assurance of our justification*" (emphasis added).

In Christ's service,
Jim and Sara Geerlings