

April 12, 2021

Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches to convene May 12, 2021

Dear Brethren of Classis East,

Standing before my glorious Head, my Lord Jesus Christ Who God sent to fulfill His covenant promise, I write to protest the decision Article 41 D taken at Classis East of January 13, 2021.

Article 41 D Decision:

“That Classis not sustain the allegation of “Ground 2” of the Courtney’s appeal (p. 36), namely that Rev. Van Overloop and Grace’s consistory are persistent in the error.

Ground: The error was a case of misspeaking, and both Rev. Van Overloop and Grace’s consistory have acknowledged the error and have not persisted in it.

1. Grace’s consistory informed classis that “Rev. Van Overloop has admitted that the statement was incorrect as spoken and has apologized for saying it, which apology was given to Faith’s and Grace’s consistories” (Agenda p. 50)
2. Grace’s consistory proves that Rev. Van Overloop is not persistent by noting that “in the past year and a half since the sermon was preached at Faith, Rev. Van Overloop has not maintained nor defended the statement, nor has he preached any doctrine promoting a conditional covenant.” (Agenda p. 38)
3. Grace’s consistory has corrected and clarified its position regarding conditions, declaring: “We deny that there are any conditions. We believe there is nothing in the covenant which can be called a condition.” (Agenda p. 34, 50)”

I am aggrieved by this decision and find it to be in error with the following ground:

Rev. Van Overloop preached a sermon on June 14, 2020 at Peace PRC titled “Jericho’s Walls Fell Down Flat” in which he preached doctrine promoting a conditional covenant and which maintained the error of our fulfilling our responsibility in the covenant.

The sermon which is attached teaches that God promises the victory of Jericho, but man must in obedience fulfill his responsibility to receive the promise. The sermon teaches that the Israelites as well as we must have faith in the promise and faith in the command that we must obey to receive the promise. It teaches the necessity of having an obedient faith for obtaining the promise instead of the teaching of scripture and the creeds that teach faith in Christ’s obedience/merits alone. It teaches our obedience as part of our faith instead of the teaching of the scripture and the confessions that obedience/works are only fruits of faith. This teaches a condition within the covenant of God to obtain the promise.

The sermon states the following:

*“But while God assures them of victory, it is that assurance, that promise, that God gives that encourages and animates Joshua and the true children of God and the nation of Israel to proceed, to do what God commands.*

*“I have given.”*

*Now notice that God says in verse 2, “They are yours.”*

*And then in verses 3 and following, he says, “Now, this is what you have to do! You march, etc.”*

*“If we look at these marching orders a little bit more carefully, we notice, first of all, this: God’s accomplishment, “I have given them to you,” does not remove responsibility. God’s commandments determine human responsibilities. P 5*

*Long ago, I learned this simple little expression: Human responsibility is determined not by God’s plan, by God’s eternal counsel, by what God has determined. Human responsibility is not determined by God’s control, his control over all things. So, not by his counsel, not by his control, rather by his commandments. When God tells me, “Love me with everything you have”, that’s what makes us responsible.*

*When God tells them, “You are to march, and this is how you are to march, “ that’s what brings human responsibility.*

*So God says, “I have given, and now do this.”*

*So God’s promise does not remove responsibilities nor create inactivity, but his promise encourages and actuates – I love that word of the Canons – it actuates us.”*

*“The first day nothing happened. No, don’t ever say that. Don’t ever say that! What happened was obedience. God’s gift of obedience: so there they went all the way around, and they went back to the camp. And we would say...No, they obeyed. They were given the God-given gift of obedience. **Willing to do what God commanded, they fulfilled the responsibility by God’s grace.** So the apparent lack of success was met with continued obedience, continued performance of duties and patient trust.” P6*

*“God did it, but God’s miraculous activity harmonizes - no conflict, never conflict. It may seem to conflict in our heads, but we may not let that seeming conflict arise. God’s activity of destroying those walls harmonizes with the exercise of the faith of Joshua and the host of Israel. Their God-given faith was put in the commandments, just as we put our faith in God’s promises. Remember, the first exercise of faith is – it is the bond that unites us to Christ, but the first exercise is – we hold for truth everything that God has revealed in his word.*

*God says it, it’s true. God gives a promise, it’s going to happen. God gives the command, it’s to be obeyed. Their faith said, **“If we do what God says, the walls will fall.”** They believed it. They believed God was with them.” P7*

*“God’s judgment of mercy. He judged the nation, but he judged his elect with the same attitude that he had when he elected them. And he gave to them their faith: God-given faith of God’s people. That’s the victory.*

*Not swords. Not violence. But 1 John 5:7 (should be 4); faith is the victory that overcomes the world. True, living faith that proceeds from a true heart of regeneration, the life of regeneration, is that according to which God's people walk as children of the light in the midst of the world of darkness. Their ability to receive God's word, his promises, and his commandments, their willingness to love him with everything they have, to confess their sins, to come to the table humbly – those activities of faith, not in the sense that faith merits, not in the sense that faith is a power, is the source of it, but rather this: in the sense that victory is achieved solely in the way of faith, as the manner in which God grants that to us.”*  
P8,9

*“Why should I be saved? Why should I be one of the elect? Why should you?*

*Because of God's mercy. Take his promises, take his commandments. Faith in them. God-given faith in them, is the strength with which we live our lives.”*

This teaching is contrary to the scriptures and the creeds.

As the sermon points out, all men are responsible before God.

Heidelberg Catechism LD 2

Q.3. Whence knowest thou thy misery?

A. Out of the law of God.

Q.4. What doth the law of God require of us?

A. Christ teaches us that briefly, Matt 22:37-40, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment; and the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Q. 5 Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?

A. In no wise, for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.

Heidelberg Catechism LD 5

Q. 13 Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?

A. By no means; but, on the contrary we daily increase our debt.

Lords Day 6

Q. 18 Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God and a real righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Q.19 Whence knowest thou this?

A. From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.

The inheritance of Caanan given to Israel and that typified of our eternal life/inheritance was given by promise alone. This covenant promise is eternal in God's counsel and was given to Christ and is fulfilled in Christ, our Head, and Mediator.

Galatians 3:16-18 "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise."

God made it plain in Deuteronomy 9 that it was only for the sake of His covenant faithfulness to His promise in Christ that He gave them the land: "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people."

Lords Day 7 denounces any of our confidence in our fulfilling the commands along with the promise when it states: "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."

To say that their faith said "If we do what God says, the walls will fall down." contradicts God's very own word that is always true in Joshua 6:2, thus making God a liar "And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour."

As Belgic Confession Article 22 states, "We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior.

Therefore, we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins."

Our victory as typified in the passage preached is in God's promise alone. His promise is the Lord Jesus Christ who came in our flesh, as our eternal Head. This was shown to the Israelites as they were commanded to be circumcised and to eat the Passover. Their only way to the Promised land was through the blood of the promised Lamb. The promised victory in Him was their only confidence. With their faith in that promise, they put down all confidence in themselves.

This is shown beautifully to us in Lord's Day 25

"Q. 65 Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?"

A. From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.

Q. 66 What are the sacraments?"

A. The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, namely, that He grants us freely the remission of sin and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.

Q 67. Are both Word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?"

A. Yes, indeed; for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross."

As referenced in the sermon, 1 John 5 displays the beauty of this victorious faith. It is not in the way of our doing of faith that we have this victory. It is being so united with our Head, being raised up with Him, being born of God - he that believes on Him - that one has eternal life - for he hath the Son.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth... And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." 1 John 5:4-6, 11-13

With love for our churches and for Rev. Van Overloop, and ruled by our Lord Jesus Christ, I ask that you rescind this decision as in error, and revisit Ground 2 of the Courtney appeal with Rev. Van Overloop and his consistory regarding conditions in the covenant.

Sincerely in Christ,  
Stephanie Medema