

April 19, 2021

Dear Brethren of the Consistory of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church,

It is with grief and astonishment that we as fellow believers with you in the church of Jesus Christ must bring the following protest to you. We bring this protest in love for our brother in Christ, Professor Cammenga, our fellow saints at Southwest church, the Protestant Reformed denomination, and for the children of God's covenant who receive catechism instruction under the tutelage of Professor Cammenga at Southwest church.

On March 14, 2021, Prof. Ronald Cammenga, Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological School preached a sermon in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism. A transcription of this sermon is attached to our protest. With this protest we charge the sermon as objectionable concerning its orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law.

We bring this protest to the elders of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church as those who hold the ministerial credentials of Professor Cammenga.

According to the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, it is your

duty particularly have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the church; and that no strange doctrine be taught, according to that which we read Acts 20, where the apostle exhorteth to watch diligently against the wolves which might come into the sheepfold of Christ.

Therefore the elders must judge the following regarding Professor Cammenga's sermon:

1. Whether the doctrine of Lord's Day 7 was faithfully preached according to scripture and the Reformed creeds without doctrinal deviation.
2. Whether Professor Cammenga was faithful to his Formula of Subscription vow—*that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches...do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing.*
3. Whether his sermon was in harmony with the settled and binding doctrinal decisions of Synod 2018 concerning the place and function of good works as taught in the scriptures and our Reformed creeds.

Dear brothers in Christ and officebearers of Southwest PR Church, called and ordained of God to be watchmen on the walls of Zion, we pray for you and with you that God will grant you wisdom to discern this protest according to his word and the Reformed creeds. "The elders that rule well shall be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).

In Christian love,

Timothy and Brenda Bomers

Information

The protested sermon was preached on Lord's Day 7 with the focus especially on Q&A 21–22. Lord's Day 7 reads as follows:

Q. 20 Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

A. No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive *all* His benefits, by a true faith.

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 Spirit 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, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Q. 22 What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?

A. All things promised us in the gospel, which the article of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us. What follows is the Apostles Creed.

Introduction

The Heidelberg Catechism begins its instruction in Lord's Day 1 with the teaching that our only comfort is that we belong unto our faithful Savior Jesus Christ and continues with the three things that the elect must know to live and die happily. In Lord's Days 2–4 the Heidelberg Catechism's consideration is the first of these three, the misery of man.

The law of God requires *perfect* obedience.

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 and great 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. (Matt. 22:37–40)

The Catechism continues its instruction concerning our depraved nature that renders us *incapable* of keeping the law perfectly as God requires, for by this very same nature we are prone to hate God and our neighbor. God is not unjust by requiring what man cannot perform, and that our sin must be punished with extreme and everlasting punishment of body and soul.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. (Rom. 5:12)

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. (Ps. 5:5)

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken into the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee. (Deut. 28:15)

God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. And His justice requires (as He hath revealed Himself in His Word) that our sins committed against His infinite majesty should be punished, not only with temporal, but with eternal punishment, both in body and soul; which we cannot escape unless satisfaction be made to the justice of God (Canons, Head 2, Art. 1)

Who then can stand before such a righteous and holy God, whose demand is absolute perfection, total conformity to his holy law, and who will have his justice satisfied? We elect of God stand totally exposed

before him in all our sin and misery. We are led to see through this knowledge in the Heidelberg Catechism that our great need is deliverance from the curse of the law and deliverance from sin and sin's guilt, or we will perish everlastingly according to God's just judgements.

The Catechism continues its instruction in Lord's Day 5–31 concerning man's deliverance. As we walk through this section of the Catechism, we learn that *of ourselves* we are *incapable* of meeting God's requirement of perfect obedience to his law and of making satisfaction for our sins, for daily we increase our debt. Here the Catechism teaches us concerning our mediator and deliverer that he must be very man, perfectly righteous, and very God. The holy gospel reveals to us that our only mediator is the Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (A. 18; see 1 Cor. 1:30).

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. (1 Pet. 3:18)

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: (Col. 1:14)

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (Rom. 5:8, 9)

Lord's Day 7 continues the Catechism's instruction concerning **how** guilty sinners receive the "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," which our Lord Jesus Christ merited for us by his lifelong active obedience as well as by his blood sacrifice on the cross. This satisfaction, we remember, was necessary to meet God's strict demand of perfect obedience and conformity to his law. Elect sinners receive all Christ's "benefits by a true faith." Since we receive all Christ's merits by faith only, the doctrine of Lord's Day 7 concerns the true faith whereby believers are justified before God and the assurance of that justification.

Faith is the engrafting (union) of believers into Jesus Christ, so that we become one plant with him and by the spiritual power that is faith draw from Jesus Christ all that salvation he has merited for us. Our head Jesus Christ is in now in heaven and by his Holy Spirit, that is given us, makes us by a true faith partaker of Christ and all his benefits, comforts us, and abides with us forever. (John 14:16) The Holy Spirit is the author and finisher of our faith and **keeps** us in union with Jesus Christ and applies unto us all the benefits of salvation that Jesus Christ merited for us. Through the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit works in the heart of the individual child of God the certain knowledge "whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed...in His Word" and the assured confidence that remission of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are mine "only for the sake of Christ's merits." And believing Jesus Christ is mine, a believer confesses every Lord's day in the Apostles Creed, "I **believe** in the forgiveness of sins."

Lord's Day 7 emphasizes complete, gracious, everlasting, freely given salvation to the elect on the basis of Christ's merits only. This true faith which *justifies* the guilty sinner is a faith that knows (certain knowledge) the gospel of gracious salvation in Jesus Christ alone, and the Holy Spirit works this knowledge in my heart so that I am assured with confidence that I am delivered from all my sins and guilt and am righteous before God.

To preach Lord's Day 7, then, is to bring the gospel of our salvation to the believer **personally**, so that he *knows and is assured* that even though his conscience accuses him that he has grossly transgressed all the commandments of God and kept none of them and still is inclined to all evil, that by a *true faith* without any merits of his, God imputes to him the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. (1 Cor. 2:12)

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1, 2)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Rom. 3:24–26)

Protest

Herein we charge the sermon entitled “Saving Faith as Assurance” preached by Professor Cammenga in Hudsonville PR Church on Sunday morning, March 14, 2021, to deviate from the doctrine of the true faith that justifies.

Quotations and Objections to the Sermon

Prof. Cammenga preached, “Scripture and the Reformed confessions teach that though faith assures of salvation that faith is confirmed by a life of good works.”

To bring good works into a Lord’s Day that is teaching man’s deliverance and how that deliverance is appropriated by him—by a true faith alone, freely, only for the sake of Christ’s merits—is a denial of salvation by faith alone, especially at the point of faith’s assurance. Professor Cammenga presented faith as a weak thing that needs works to assure itself. This implies that faith is not by itself alone assurance at all. By this he contradicted the Catechism that faith **is** assurance, assurance of everlasting righteousness, eternal life, and salvation, assurance that keeps, comforts, and enlivens the believer. To preach that good works confirm faith is to rob the believer of the assurance of his justification and thus of the comfort of his justification before God and to vex the believer’s conscience by taking him away from the sure foundation of Christ and casting him on the uncertainty of his works.

Professor Cammenga preached, “But in his goodness God stoops to the weakness of our faith, and God himself uses the fruits and evidences of faith and of election in order to confirm our assurance.”

God does not stoop to the weakness of our faith by using our imperfect works to confirm the assurance that is of the essence of true faith. Faith **is** assurance altogether apart from faith’s works. If the minister preaches that works confirm faith’s assurance, then in light of God’s demands for perfect obedience and conformity to his law the believer will never have assurance, but his poor conscience will be vexed. That is why the believer is saved by faith alone and assured by faith alone.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:14)

That he would **grant** you, according to the riches of his glory, to be **strengthened with might by his Spirit** in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being **rooted and grounded** in love, May be **able to comprehend** with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; **And to know** the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that **ye might be filled** with all the fulness of God. (Eph. 3:16—19 with emphasis added))

Professor Cammenga preached, “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.”

When Professor Cammenga described the activity of the believer, he described works and acts of love. Surely faith is activity, but it is the activity of resting and relying on Christ crucified alone. Faith receives Christ and all his merits. We are saved by grace through faith, so that the salvation we receive is an alien righteousness—righteousness outside of ourselves and a salvation that rests solely on Christ’s merits apart from man’s willing and working. If a preacher is going to speak of the activity of faith, then as Belgic Confession article 22 teaches true *faith seeks nothing besides Christ*. And as Professor Engelsma wrote regarding faith in its activity, *true faith knows Christ only and relies on Christ only* (see full quotation below). Belgic Confession article 23 (see full quotation below), confesses this: “Therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merits 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 to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig leaves. And, verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed. And therefore every one must pray with David: *O Lord, enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.*”

Professor Cammenga preached, “What he [Peter] is describing is the Christian life—the living of the Christian life. What he is describing is a life lived out of love for God and love for the neighbor. What he is describing is a life lived in obedience to God’s ten commandments. God uses that in order to confirm in us the assurance of our election and salvation.”

Professor Cammenga was explaining 2 Peter 1:10, but his explanation contradicted the creeds, which he may not do. This idea that God uses works of love to confirm faith (which *is* assurance) is found nowhere in Lord’s Day 7. There is not one word of works in the Lord’s Day, except the work of Christ, and therefore Professor Cammenga by his teaching displaced, in the matter of assurance, the perfect work of Christ. To preach that assurance is confirmed by a life lived out of love for God and love for the neighbor and a life lived in obedience to the ten commandments is to preach that it is obedience and love that confirm assurance, thus bringing the law into true faith. By faith alone without the works of the law we are justified, righteous, and receive salvation! To preach works into faith is to bring works into our justification, righteousness, and

salvation itself. Faith does not look to its works for assurance, but true faith looks to Christ and rests only on his full and completed work.

Q. But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?

A. Because that the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin. (Lord's Day 24 Q& A 62)

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we merit?) nay, 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 do of his good pleasure*. Let us therefore attend to what is written: *When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do*. (Belgic Confession, article 24)

There is no hope in your work and mine. Let your own work become void. Let it become void in your mind. It can be no basis for righteousness. It stands between you and your justification. Away with it! *But now* the righteous shall live by faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel always emphasizes this. Believe! Believers, believe! Believing, live and be saved, justified by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone*)

Where is Boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. (Rom. 3:27)

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Rom. 10:4)

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

By preaching that God does not drop assurance out of the sky, but God's people are active, busy in this whole matter of assurance and describing that busyness as a life lived out of love for God and love for the neighbor, a life lived in obedience to God's commandments, Professor Cammenga preached works of love *as the means* for the full assurance of salvation and in reality taught that faith is *not* assurance and does not assure without its works. This implies that faith is not by itself alone assurance at all. In addition, it is the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts that assures us that the salvation our Savior earned for us is really and surely ours, never to be taken away. Thus the statement, "God does not drop assurance out of the sky on us and now we have it forever," is an offense to the Holy Spirit, who works assurance in our hearts. "By His Holy Spirit, He assures me of eternal life" (LD 1). "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22).

We now quote from our Reformed fathers, the Reformed creeds, and holy scripture with emphasis added to prove our objections to the sermon.

Martin Luther, Lectures on Galatians, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 26

We do make a distinction here; and we say that we are not disputing now whether good works ought to be done. Nor are we inquiring whether the Law is good, holy, and righteous, or whether it ought to be observed; for that is another topic. But our argument and question concerns justification and *whether the Law justifies*. Our opponents do not listen to this. They do not answer this question, not do they distinguish as we do. All they do is to scream that good works ought to be done and that Law ought to be observed. All right. We know that. But

because these are distinct topics, we will not permit them to be confused. In due time we shall discuss the teaching that the Law and good works ought to be done. But since we are now dealing with the *subject of justification, we reject works*, on which our opponents insist so tenaciously that *they ascribe justification to them, which is to take Christ's glory away from him and assign it to works instead.* (145)

Herman Hoeksema, *Wonder of Grace*

The wonder of justification is that at the moment God declares us righteous, we are real sinners, worthy of damnation in ourselves, and we are deeply conscious of this. The believer who receives the grace of justification is a justified sinner: *"to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"* (Rom. 4:5). This is the great marvel of justification. (60)

It is very important to understand this. The justified sinner was not formerly an ungodly person, the object of God's condemnation, who has been reformed, has converted himself and become godly, pious, religious, and then appears in the judgment of God with new piety and good works and is declared righteous on the basis of them. The contrary is true. The justified sinner is a real sinner in himself, and as such appears in the moment of justification before the tribunal of God. He is an enemy of God. His nature is corrupt; there is no good in him. He is wholly inclined to all evil. He has transgressed all the commandments of God and kept none of them. Even worse, at the moment he stands before the judgment seat of God, he sins and violates God's precepts. He knows this. He carries the testimony in his conscience that he is a sinner worthy of damnation; that he is inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good; that he trampled God's holy law underfoot; and that as he stands before God's holy judgment seat, he continues to transgress...All he can do, and even that he cannot and will not do of himself, is to cry out, *"God be merciful to me a sinner"* (Luke 18: 13). *The marvel of justification is that this sinner, who has nothing to bring before God but corruption and rebellion, is declared righteous before God.* The sinner hears the verdict that he has no sin, that all his sins are blotted out and forgiven, and that he is clothed with a righteousness that makes him worthy of eternal life and glory. He is justified by grace. (60–61)

By faith we lay hold of the verdict of justification, so that we know that even though all things testify against us in this world of sin and death, we are righteous before God and heirs of eternal life. (63)

But be careful not to make faith a good work and a ground of justification. Faith is not a ground of justification. We are not justified because we believe. Nor are we justified by faith because through faith we become holy and capable of doing good works. Christ crucified and raised is the only ground of our righteousness. Faith is the only means whereby we are united with Christ, and it is the spiritual power whereby we lay hold on his righteousness, *so that we wholly rely on God who justifies the ungodly.* (64–65)

David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*

It is false doctrine, a denial of the biblical truth of justification, to teach that Christ justifies many through faith in himself who nevertheless remain in doubt whether they are justified and therefore remain in doubt whether they are saved. It is false doctrine, a denial of the biblical truth of justification, to teach that assurance of justification comes much later in time than justification itself and that this assurance is the possession only of a few, usually old, believers in this life. *It is false doctrine, a denial of the biblical truth of justification, to teach, whereas*

*justification is a gift of God to his people, assurance of justification is something that only a few believers obtain by their strenuous spiritual work, usually over a long period of time. It is false doctrine, a denial of justification by faith, to teach that, whereas justification is a gift to the elect, obtaining assurance is a matter of the believer's quest for it over many years and by dint of arduous struggle. **It is false doctrine, a denial of justification by faith alone, to teach that, whereas justification is by faith alone, assurance of justification, really justification's assurance, is by faith and by good works or by faith and by a mystical experience.** (210–11)*

The effect of this **false doctrine** is to cast many confessing Christians into doubt of their salvation for many years, some as long as they live. An aspect of the erroneous doctrine is that it **casts believers upon...their own works, for assurance of justification and salvation.** (211)

It (justification) is the divine declaration in the soul of the believer, so that he *knows* his justification. It is justification by *faith*. It is justification *experienced*. It is justification that gives the justified sinner **“peace with God” (Rom. 5:1)**...To teach that God justifies sinners but that most of them remain unsure whether they are justified is as foolish as to suppose that a man would hear the judge pronounce him innocent in the courtroom and go from the jail cell and the courtroom acquitted and free, but still doubt whether the judge had really declared him not guilty. (215)

In the act of justification, God the judge **declares in the soul, in the consciousness, of the believing sinner**, “I cancel the debt of the guilt of your sins and sinfulness! I reckon to your account the obedience of my Son, Jesus Christ.” **This judge has a loud, clear voice in the gospel...He also speaks it in the believer's heart, where faith resides.** The justified sinner *knows* his righteousness and salvation...**There is no justification, regarding particularly its assurance, except on the basis of the obedience of Christ in the forgiven sinner's stead, and the obedience of Christ only. Any intrusion here of the sinner's own works makes justification impossible, with respect particularly to assurance.** (216)

Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone*

In the gospel God declares, “I justify you.” This takes place through faith. More particularly, it takes place through faith of Jesus Christ. This is faith of which Christ is the object. Faith *of* Christ is the same as faith *in* Christ. In general, **it is that adhesive power by which the heart, mind, and soul cleave to Christ. Faith is a spiritual adhesive power.** It is a spiritual drawing power. This faith the natural man has not. It is a gift that God gives to the soul.

By faith the soul knows itself to be absorbed in Jesus. So absorbed is the believing soul in Jesus that if God drops the plumb line of His justice along one, He must drop it along Jesus. I, the believer, am so one with Jesus that I feel sure God cannot judge me without judging Jesus. I am so *one* with Jesus that God cannot say anything about me without saying it about Jesus. If He calls me a sinner, He must call Jesus a sinner. This is faith. For this very reason the apostle says that it is a righteousness unto them and upon all them that believe. It is *unto* them because God eternally destined them to believe. It is a righteousness *upon* them because they are under the verdict of God's sentence. This is not because faith is a work. It is not because faith is righteousness. Nor is it because faith is the meritorious ground. **But the explanation is that faith is the means by which the believer is incorporated into Christ**, even as he has been incorporated into Him from eternity. There is an eternal corporation of which Christ is the head. Throughout history, believers are incorporated into Christ by faith.

There is no hope in your work and mine. Let your own work become void. Let it become void in your mind. It can be no basis for righteousness. It stands between you and your justification.

Away with it! *But now* the righteous shall live by faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel always emphasizes this. Believe! Believers, believe! Believing, live and be saved, justified by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord (124–25).

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 11 Q&A 30

Q. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, *or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary for their salvation.*

It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made **peace** through the blood of the cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. (Col. 1:19)

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 20 Q&A 53

Q. What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

A. First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me, *by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits*, that He may *comfort me and abide with me forever.*

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever (John 14:16).

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 23 Q&A 60

Q. 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: as if I had fully satisfied all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefits with a believing heart.

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 23 Q&A 61

Q. Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?

A. Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself *any other way than by faith only.*

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified *by faith without the deeds of the law* (Rom. 3:28).

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 24 Q&A 62

Q. But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?

A. Because that the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

Belgic Confession Article 22—Faith in Jesus Christ

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 to 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 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 for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

David Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary*, vol. 2

Faith as Activity—This bond with Christ necessarily becomes vigorous activity...The activity of true faith is not only knowledge. It is also reliance upon, or trust in, Jesus Christ. Article 22 of the Confession expresses this aspect of faith when it states that true faith “seeks nothing more besides him.”...In its activity, true faith knows Christ only and relies on Christ only. (10–12)

The argument may be explained this way: true faith, by having Christ alone as object, acknowledges that all things pertaining to salvation are in him, so that by faith alone in him the believer has complete salvation...We are in need of a complete salvation. It is precisely that warning of Paul in Galatians 5:2–4 that “*to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required beside him*” is Christ-denying heresy...

The apostle does not here condemn a pagan substitution of some human deed in the place of Christ’s work. **But he condemns an error to which Christian churches and theologians are prone:** the addition of a human work to the work of Christ as necessary for salvation...Christ is become of no saving effect whatever to one who looks to and trusts in something else in addition to Christ for salvation. (13–14)

The reasons for introducing justification in an article on true faith undoubtedly are, first, that scripture emphasizes that *the outstanding blessing of salvation that comes to the believer through his faith in Christ is justification.* This emphasis is due to justification being the fundamental blessing of salvation *in the consciousness* of the elect, but guilty sinner. (15)

Article 22 defines justification as Christ’s imputation of his righteousness to the believer. (17)

Imputation is a forensic, judicial, or legal act of God in Jesus Christ as the judge of humans. Imputation sets the penitent sinner in the heavenly courtroom before the divine judge. In the act of imputation this judge pronounces a verdict upon the penitent, believing, but guilty sinner. Imputation is God’s act as judge of reckoning the sinner, who is in and of himself guilty, as perfectly righteous...The manner of this imputation is a declaration of God *in the sinner’s consciousness*...

The *means*, or instrument, of the imputation *is the sinner’s faith in Jesus Christ. It is faith alone.* (17)

Belgic Confession Article 23—Justification

We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied; as David and Paul teach us, *declaring this to be the happiness of man*, that God imputes righteousness to him without works. And the same apostle saith that we are justified freely by His grace, through redemption which is in Jesus Christ.

And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing 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 *to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig leaves. And, verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed.* And therefore every one must pray with David: O Lord, enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.

David Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary*, vol. 2

Another important aspect of justification that article 23 brings to the foreground is its experiential nature. **Justification is an act of God in the believer's consciousness.** *In justification, the sinner experiences, and is assured of, his righteousness with God* (39).

*It is this experienced justification, this justification of which the sinner is conscious, that is by faith alone. Works do not enter into it...*When the apostle [Paul] excludes works from justification, **he is excluding works from the experience and certainty of righteousness with God.**

The apostle says as much in Romans 5:1: inasmuch as we are justified by faith—in our consciousness, or experience—we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Justification by faith is the experience of righteousness with God, so that the justified sinner enjoys peace with God. *This consciousness of righteousness does not come through good works, but through our Lord Jesus Christ, through his work for us and outside us.* (40)

Therefore to teach that in the end the experience and assurance of righteousness with God are realized by the sinner's good works, or are somehow dependent upon the good works of the sinner, is the denial of justification by faith alone. In that case, faith would need the help of the sinner's works to give the blessing of justification. Union with Christ and his work would not be enough...

For the certainty of his justification with God, the believing sinner looks away from himself and his own works, whether bad or good, to Jesus Christ crucified and his work. (43)

Belgic Confession Article 24—Man's Sanctification and Good Works

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. 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 a faith which is called in Scripture a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word.

These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are sanctified by his grace; *howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.*

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them, (for what can we merit?)—nay, 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 do of His good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written: When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. 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 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 would be continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior.

David Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary*, vol. 2

The Reformed faith does not fear, deny, or disparage good works. It opposes only the wicked and foolish attempts to earn salvation by them, or to make them part of our righteousness with God. (55)

Article 24 of the Belgic Confession is of the greatest importance on behalf of Reformed, indeed, Christian, doctrine in that it sets forth clearly the relationship of justification and sanctification. (56)

Justification gives peace—the peace of a good conscience before God. Sanctification gives purity—the purity of a life of devotion to God...It is “impossible that this holy [justifying] faith can be unfruitful in man.” (57)

An important, and lengthy, section of article 24 is the defense of the Reformed faith against the charge that its doctrine of justification by faith alone, without works, implies unconcern for good works and leads to licentiousness. The Confession obviously faces this charge by the enemies of gracious justification: “Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life.” (62–63)

The final charge against every form of the doctrine of good works that has the salvation of the sinner dependent upon them is practical and pastoral. **This doctrine robs those who believe the false doctrine of the assurance of salvation...**A salvation that must be earned by the sinner’s own works, or that is conditioned upon the sinner’s own works, is in the sinner’s experience highly uncertain. “Thus, then, we should always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually vexed.” ...

Only the gospel of grace, *specifically the doctrine that denies that the salvation of believers is founded upon good works, gives assurance of salvation.* The consciences of Reformed believers are always confident, stable with certainty, and continually at peace. (74)

Canons of Dordrecht, Second Head, Article 8

For this was the *sovereign* counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and, having faithfully *preserved* them to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated how the sermon contradicts the scriptures and Reformed creeds.

We believe that Professor Cammenga in his sermon on Lord's Day 7 violated his vow of subscription "diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing."

We believe that the quotations from scripture, the Reformed confessions, and our church fathers prove that Professor Cammenga's sermon violated the settled and binding doctrinal decisions of Synod 2018 concerning the place and function of good works in salvation. When Professor Cammenga preached on Lord's Day 7 concerning true faith that God uses a life lived in obedience to the ten commandments *to confirm in us the assurance of our election and salvation*, he gave works a place and function in salvation that is out of harmony with scripture and the Reformed confessions.

Synod 2018 adopted the following recommendations:

B.1. The doctrinal error is that the believer's good works are given a place and function out of harmony with the confessions. (*Acts of Synod 2018*, 61)

3.

a. In explanation of the doctrine of L.D. 23—justification by faith alone...L.D. 23 says nothing about good works. It only speaks of the accusation of our conscience, "that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil." ...L.D. 23 taught the denunciation of all good works with respect to justification. The doctrine of L.D. 23 is: not by works! *It is detrimental to the congregation that anywhere in a sermon on forensic justification, a preacher would teach that Scripture speaks highly of works.* [Lord's Day 7 concerns forensic justification when it refers to "remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation."]

b.....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*...L.D. 23 teaches that by a justifying faith the believer is persuaded that it is "as if I never had had, not committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me." How could works help add to that assurance? The experience and assurance of justification in one's consciousness is justification, *and justification is by faith alone in Christ alone*...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. (69; emphasis added)

4

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

b. The doctrinal error of the sermons then compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised by this error.

c. Additionally, even the truth of the strict demands of God's law is compromised...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.* (69–70; emphasis added)