

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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False Shepherd

The Neolegalism of Norman Shepherd

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In November 2000, P&R Publishing, formerly the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, issued Norman Shepherd's book, *The Call of Grace*. Hailed by such Reformed teachers as Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., of Westminster Seminary; Roger Greenway, formerly of Westminster Seminary; Joel Nederhood, famous radio preacher; and R. J. Gore of Erskine Seminary, *The Call of Grace*, if we are to believe them, exemplifies "clarity of thought and precision of expression" and is "lucid and highly readable." Actually *The Call of Grace* is a very deceptive work, full of smooth words designed to lead people away from the Christian faith. Its endorsement by some leading Reformed theologians is one indication how far many nominally Reformed teachers and churches have departed from the Christian faith.

In this era of ecumenical good feelings, "Christian communitarianism," and warm, faith-based fuzzies, the warnings of Scripture about false christs, false witnesses, false prophets, false teachers, false shepherds, false brethren, and false doctrine grate harshly on the ears of stuporous churchgoers. They complain about "negativism," whine about a "lack of love," and demand "positive thinking." They do not have ears to hear.

The many warnings in Scripture are necessary because falsehood always appears as truth, and it may even contain some truth in order to augment its power of deception. Not everything the subtle Serpent said in the Garden was false, for Adam and Eve did indeed "become like one of Us, to know good and evil" (*Genesis* 3:22). The Serpent, "more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" (*Genesis* 3:1), mixed truth and falsehood together to make the most attractive and lethal poison for the human race. His followers have aped him ever since. Falsehood is parasitic, and it has power to deceive only because it appears to be true.

The importance of understanding and accepting truth is indicated not only by hundreds of verses praising truth, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, but also by hundreds of verses condemning ignorance, lies, deception, deceit, vanity, futility, and foolishness. Christ himself gave many warnings about false teachers and false doctrine while he was on Earth:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves [*Matthew* 7:15].

Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many.... Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.... Then if anyone says to you, "Look! Here is the Christ!" or, "There!" Do not believe. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you, "Look! He is in the desert!" do not go out; or "Look! In the inner rooms!" do not believe [*Matthew* 24:4-5, 11, 24-26; *Mark* 13].

Christ, also speaking through the Apostle Paul, pointed out the

false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works [*2 Corinthians* 11:13-15].

Paul reported that he had been "in perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils of countrymen, perils of the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren..." (*2 Corinthians* 11:26). He mentioned false brethren in *Galatians* as well (2:4):

But because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you.

Not only was Paul non-submissive to the errorists, he reserved his most emphatic condemnation for them:

But even if we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.... If anyone preaches any other Gospel to

you than what you have received, let him be accursed [Galatians 1:8-9].

Christ, also speaking through the Apostle Peter, warned us:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed [2 Peter 2:1-2].

Christ, also speaking through the Apostle John, warned us again: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

If one were to quote all the verses that warn against deceit, deception, vain words, vain philosophy, human traditions, smooth words, persuasive words, lies, and so forth, scores of pages would be filled with the warnings of Scripture. Nearly every book of the Bible contains some such warning. Even from the few I have quoted we can see that this deception (1) is religious in nature; (2) usually arises within the visible churches; and (3) is usually presented by preachers and teachers who seem to be ministers of light and righteousness.

Enter Norman Shepherd

One of these ministers of light is Norman Shepherd, who taught theology at Westminster Seminary from 1963 to 1981, when he was finally and belatedly dismissed for his errors regarding justification by faith. As Mark Karlberg explained in the March-April *Trinity Review*, *The Changing of the Guard*, Shepherd was removed from the Seminary faculty, but his false doctrine remained, and the Seminary has continued to teach it with impunity from that day to the present.

In *The Call of Grace*, Shepherd has combined two presentations, one delivered at Erskine Theological Seminary in 1999, and the other at Geneva College in 1975 at a conference sponsored by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Neither Geneva nor Erskine is noted for its fidelity to or its clear and accurate presentation of the Christian faith, and one of their leading lights, John White, signed *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* when it first appeared in 1994. President White removed his name only under pressure, and then only after making it clear that he had not changed his views and was not withdrawing his endorsement of ECT.

But to return to our story of the False Shepherd. Hints of trouble appear in his Preface, where Shepherd sets aside the Synod of Dordt and its condemnation of Arminianism as "not do[ing] full justice to the uniqueness of Calvinism as a system of doctrine and as a world and life view." Shepherd knows, of course, that setting forth a complete system was not the purpose of Dordt, so his criticism is somewhat gratuitous. But his criticism does suggest that all those Calvinist doctrines — total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and preservation of the saints — tend to get in the way of the Neolegalism that Shepherd is advocating. Rather than the doctrines of grace, Shepherd proposes "covenant and kingdom as the leading and distinguishing characteristics of the Reformed faith." The subtitle of his book, "How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism," is another signal that he is substituting a novel doctrine of covenant for the doctrines of grace.

The introduction begins with a half-truth: Shepherd suggests that *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* and the controversy over justification by faith alone indicate "some unresolved questions that are really the legacy of the Protestant

Reformation." Now the Reformers did not leave the question of salvation unresolved. It is the doctrine to which they paid most attention. By glancing at the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the most detailed and well thought out of all the Reformed creeds, one notices that the longest single chapter is Chapter 1: Of the Holy Scriptures. But the doctrine of salvation requires at least three chapters: 8: Of Christ the Mediator; 11: Of Justification; and 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation. What Shepherd means by "unresolved" is not that the Reformers did not treat the doctrine of salvation thoroughly, but that he (along with many others) does not accept their conclusions, and he intends to promote a different doctrine of salvation, which he hopes will resolve the differences between Romanism and Protestantism. Shepherd fancies himself the theologian of the contemporary neo-evangelical ecumenical movement, about which we will say more later.

Early in the book Shepherd attacks "antinomianism," which he defines as, "Your eternal destiny has nothing to do with how you live your life, because you are not saved by works. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, that is all that matters as far as salvation is concerned." Now Shepherd is the master of ambiguity, not lucidity, as his fans proclaim. What does the phrase "nothing to do with" mean? If it means that your works are not the ground or condition of your salvation, then the statement is indeed true, contrary to what Shepherd says. This is clearly taught in Scripture. Read these excerpts drawn merely from *Romans 4*:

But now the righteousness of God *apart from the law* is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe...*

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore, we conclude that *a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law...*

But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom *God imputes righteousness apart from works*: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." ...Therefore, *having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, *having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.* [Italics added.]

Did you notice how and how often Paul uses the word "apart"? "Apart from the law," "apart from the deeds of the law," "apart from works." Then there are the equivalent phrases: "to him who does not work, but believes," "having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Salvation is indeed, according to Scripture, "apart from works." It has "nothing to do with" our works. There is an antithesis, a complete disjunction, an Either-Or. The same antithesis appears in *Galatians 3*: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith or by the works of the law?" Faith and works are mutually exclusive; that is, they cannot be combined. They are also jointly exhaustive; that is, there is no third possibility. Paul's language here as well as in many other passages makes it clear that he means all works — moral as well as ceremonial, works done after conversion as well as before conversion, meritorious works, non-meritorious works, and so on.

For the children not yet being born, *nor having done any good or evil*, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, *not of works but of him who calls....* I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then it is *not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy...* [Romans 9, italics added].

Salvation is a completely free gift to "him who does not work, but believes." And it is this Gospel of Jesus Christ that Norman Shepherd rejects as "antinomian."

If this is antinomianism as Shepherd alleges, then the Scriptures are antinomian. In fact, the charge of antinomianism was an accusation made against the Gospel by the first enemies of Gospel, and Paul refutes it in *Romans* 6.

But Shepherd's ambiguous phrase "nothing to do with" may have other meanings, which may or may not be true when used in this context. Scripture clearly teaches that good works are evidence of an already possessed salvation. Scripture clearly teaches that Christians are required to obey God's commands. So in that sense, good works do have "something to do with" saving faith. What Shepherd is counting on is our understanding the phrase in this sense, so that he can tell us later what the relationship between salvation and works is. When he does, he will deny that good works are the evidence of salvation already possessed, assign a different role to them, and by that means substitute his Antichristian message for the Gospel.

The writers of Scripture repeatedly exhort believers to lead holy lives: Their argument is, You are already Christians; you have already passed from death to everlasting life; you are already saved; therefore, act like Christians. A typical example of such exhortations is

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.... And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.... See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil... [Ephesians 5:8, 15-16].

There are dozens of such exhortations. But our acting like Christians does not save us, for we are already saved. The indicative — salvation — precedes the imperative: Behave as the saved people you are. Our obedience is not the condition or ground of our salvation; our salvation is the condition or ground of our obedience. Shepherd, however, makes our obedience, our good works, a condition of salvation, and in so doing he has adopted in principle the soteriology of Roman Catholicism. Shepherd's habit of invoking the name of Jesus Christ does not make his theology Christian, but it does fool many people, and it makes Shepherd himself more guilty before God.

Shepherd's apostasy may be illustrated by the fact that Shepherd left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which professes the *Westminster Confession*, and joined the Christian Reformed Church, which tolerates, even promotes, doctrinal error. Perhaps the language of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was too clear for Shepherd's liking:

Those whom God effectually calls he also *freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them*, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: *not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them....* [Italics added.]

Note that God does not justify by infusing righteousness, nor does he justify on the basis or condition of anything wrought in sinners by God or done by sinners, nor even by imputing their faith itself or any other evangelical obedience to them. We are saved on the basis or ground of Christ's righteousness alone, because Christ alone met the condition of our salvation. That is what makes Christ our Saviour. In his commentary on the *Westminster Confession, What Do Presbyterians Believe?* Gordon Clark wrote:

The Romish view, the infusion of righteousness, is essentially the notion that God graciously gives us ability to do good works.... Now the Romanists admit and insist (we have no desire to misrepresent them) that meritorious works are possible only through God's grace; but at the same time forgiveness of sin is *conditioned on our doing these works*. This view is diametrically opposed to the whole New Testament.... [Italics added.]

The *Westminster Confession* continues:

Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace.... [Italics added.]

Notice that Christ *fully* discharged the debt of those for whom he died, making a *full* satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. As the hymn-writer said, "Jesus paid it all." The salvation of the elect is accomplished by Christ alone, and "not for anything in them." And the debt was paid in full. Jesus met all the conditions for the salvation of his people.

Shepherd, of course, is no original thinker, and similar ideas have cropped up throughout church history. They have reached their fullest expression in the soteriology of the Roman Church-State. That is why some of his readers, grasping the logic of his view of the covenant better than others, have proceeded to full communion with Rome. Others, out of cowardice, dishonesty, lack of intelligence, or some worse motive, have remained within nominally Protestant organizations.

George Hendry, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in the middle of the 20th century, wrote a book called *The Westminster Confession for Today*. He had trouble with the idea that Christ met the conditions for salvation required by God's justice, believing that such a system is both crass and incompatible with the sovereign freedom of God. He asserted that "If God's grace is contingent on a 'proper, real, and full satisfaction' of his justice, grace is not sovereign, and justification cannot be *only* of free grace" (137). Hendry, and many others for that matter, thought and still think that God's sovereignty somehow precludes the concepts of justice, merit, and debt, which is the same position taken by those who deny the covenant of works, who deny the role of Adam's demerit in plunging the human race into sin, and who deny the exclusive role of Christ's merit in obtaining our salvation. Gordon Clark's comments on Hendry's errors are also pertinent to Shepherd errors:

The Apostle Paul in *Romans* 3:26 says that Christ died in order to declare God's righteousness, and in particular in order that God might be both just himself as well as the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.... *Acts* 20:28 reads: "feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood." This verse is often used to show that Jesus, who shed his blood, was himself God, the Second Person of the

Trinity. But for the present purpose let us note that his blood *purchased* the church. Liberals will complain at the base notion of a commercial transaction, but Paul, whose words they are, was never troubled on this score. The church had to be purchased and Jesus bought it: "You are bought with a price" (1 *Corinthians* 6:20 and 7:23); and 2 *Peter* warns against false prophets and false teachers who deny "the Lord that bought them." If, as Dr. Hendry claims, Christ did not have to fulfill any condition in order to save us, why did he have to be crucified? Why indeed did he have to come to Earth at all?... If there were no conditions to fulfill, there was no need of his doing anything. But there was a condition, and this leads to the second reason for labeling Dr. Hendry's thesis nonsense. Christ had to pay the penalty for sin and satisfy divine justice. But it is ridiculous to say that this is inconsistent with free grace. It was sovereign grace that brought our Lord to Earth; it was sovereign grace that induced him voluntarily to pay the penalty for our sins; and it is sovereign grace that effectually calls the elect. How in the world can anyone be so confused as to think that the active and passive obedience of Christ is inconsistent with sovereign grace? It *is* sovereign grace [127-129].

To continue with the *Westminster Confession*:

God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although *they can never fall from the state of justification*, yet they may by their sins fall under God's fatherly displeasure.... [Italics added.]

Of course, the statement "they can never fall from the state of justification" is one of those Dordtian doctrines that Shepherd sees as inadequate, and looking at the matter from his point of view, he must disparage the eternal security of the saints, for if the *Westminster Confession* is correct on this point, then the role that Shepherd assigns to our good works as meeting conditions of our salvation is wrong.

Chapter 1: The Abrahamic Covenant

Chapter 1 begins in the middle of things, with the Abrahamic covenant. Shepherd does not begin with the covenant God made with Adam, the federal head and legal representative of the whole human race, Jesus Christ excepted. By omitting the first Adam, Shepherd implicitly omits the second Adam as well, the three imputations (of Adam's sin to his ordinary posterity, of his people's sins to Christ, and of Christ's perfect righteousness to his people), the substitutionary atonement, the perfect obedience of Christ — indeed the whole of redemption. In his Neolegalism, Shepherd, unlike Hendry, and perhaps inconsistently, does not deny that there are conditions to be filled, but he requires sinners themselves to fulfill at least some of the conditions for their own salvation. He rejects God's covenant of works with Adam, and in doing so, he makes our personal works a condition of our salvation.

Shepherd asserts that the Abrahamic covenant is conditional. What are the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant that each sinner must meet? Shepherd lists several, but he does not give us a complete list. Now here is a significant problem. If our meeting conditions is a prerequisite for our salvation, then we must have a complete list of the conditions we must meet, or we cannot hope to be saved. But Shepherd fails to provide us with a complete list of conditions. (The Roman Church-State also failed to provide a complete list of conditions, and it fabricated the doctrine of Purgatory to cover whatever gaps remained in the list of conditions for salvation it did provide.) What is Shepherd's list?

Circumcision, and now "baptism has come in the place of circumcision." (So presumably baptism is now a requirement for salvation.)

Faith. Shepherd tells us that "righteousness was a condition to be met, and faith met that condition." (Notice that Shepherd substitutes faith in the place of Christ in his Neolegalism. In his theology, the sinner's righteousness is his own faith.)

A living and obedient faith. Abraham's faith "was not a purely mental act." (If Abraham's faith was not purely mental, then it was partly physical. That is, faith is partly works. Faith is doing.)

Walking before the Lord and being blameless. Abraham — and all sinners who will be saved — "fulfills the obligations of the covenant," including this one.

Then, after several pages of arguing that every person must meet the conditions of salvation himself, Shepherd writes: "All of this [the "discipling of the nations"] is made possible through the covenantal righteousness of Jesus Christ. His was a living, active, and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross. This faith was credited to him as righteousness."

Now this is a remarkable statement. First, Shepherd neither quotes nor cites any verse that teaches that Christ's faith was credited to Christ as righteousness. Second, in Scripture the imputation of righteousness is not to Christ, but to his people, but Shepherd does not mention this imputation. Third, what was imputed to Christ was the guilt of the sins of his people, and Shepherd does not mention this imputation either. Shepherd has omitted the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers and the imputation of our sins to Christ, and he has substituted a different doctrine of salvation.

Shepherd confounds the matter further, and compounds his errors. He writes: "But just as Jesus was faithful in order to guarantee the blessing, so his followers must be faithful in order to inherit the blessing." In this statement he makes our faithfulness analogous to Christ's. *Christ's* faithful obedience is the condition that "guarantees" the blessing, and *our* faithful obedience is the condition that "inherits" the blessing. Not only does this scheme make us partners of Christ in redemption, but it also empties Christ's "guarantee" of all meaning. If guaranteed blessings may not be inherited or received, exactly what is the meaning of "guaranteed"? It would seem that our faithful obedience is the indispensable condition of our receiving the blessing of salvation. And that is indeed the meaning of Shepherd's Neolegalism.

Chapter 2: The Mosaic Covenant

In this chapter Shepherd discloses more of his agenda by targeting the covenant of works and the 19th century Princeton theologian Charles Hodge. Shepherd denies that *Leviticus* 18:5, *Romans* 10:3-10, and *Galatians* 3:10-13 teach a "works/merit principle." Here is what the passages say: "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them" (*Leviticus* 18:5). This Mosaic statement from *Leviticus* is quoted by Paul in *Romans* and *Galatians*:

For they [Jews] being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them" [*Leviticus* 18:5]. But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into Heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the

dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart" [Deuteronomy 30:14] (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame" [Isaiah 28:16].

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" [Deuteronomy 27:26]. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "The just shall live by faith" [Habakkuk 2:4]. Yet the law is not of faith, but "The man who does them shall live by them" [Leviticus 18:5]. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... [Galatians 3:10-13].

In these passages, and others, the Bible asserts that the man who actually kept all God's commandments would be rewarded with salvation, because he had met the condition of salvation, absolute perfection. Of course, one intention of the statement in Leviticus 18:5 is to make sinners aware that they cannot keep the law and therefore cannot obtain their salvation by their keeping of the law. Another purpose is to point to the Perfect Man who not only can but does keep the commandments perfectly. No mere man has kept or can keep all God's commandments. Only one Man has done so, Jesus Christ, and he is God the Son incarnate, not a mere man. The Man Christ Jesus has freed us from the curse of the law by fulfilling the condition of salvation as our representative and in our place.

But Shepherd denies that there is any works-merit principle taught in Scripture. When Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, Shepherd says, he is not saying that Moses taught this principle, but that he was "quoting Scripture according to the sense which his opponents understand it," that is, Paul's opponents misunderstood what Moses was saying, and Paul is quoting their misunderstanding. Shepherd writes:

God does not tempt his children to try to earn their salvation by the merit of their works. Nor does he tease them by offering a way of salvation that he knows will not work. More pointedly, the very idea of merit is foreign to the way in which God our Father relates to his children.

The subtlety of the Serpent is in these words, and it will take some time to understand what Shepherd is saying. First, he loads the language by saying "God does not tempt," counting on us to recall James' phrase and to agree with Shepherd's conclusion. But James says that God does not tempt to sin, and Shepherd says God does not tempt to salvation. The two are not quite the same, but the use of James' phrase is very cunning. Then Shepherd writes, "nor does he [God] tease them," again suggesting that the orthodox understanding of Moses and Paul impugns God's righteousness by suggesting that God tempts and teases his children. Shepherd wants us to conclude without argument that the orthodox view is wrong, for any view that blasphemes God in such a way must be wrong. Then Shepherd calls the works-merit principle "a way of salvation that he [God] knows will not work." But God knows no such thing, and Shepherd has failed to demonstrate from Scripture that he does. In fact, God declares repeatedly through his prophets that it will work: Meet my condition, keep all my statutes and my judgments, and you will be saved. This is precisely what the Man Jesus Christ did for his people: Christ alone met God's condition for salvation; Christ alone kept the statutes; Christ alone kept the covenant. Christ did not obtain our salvation freely; he paid in

full; but salvation is freely given to all those for whom he fulfilled the condition by his perfect life and death. Not only does this "way of salvation" work, it is in precisely this way that Christ met God's condition and accomplished the salvation of the elect.

Finally, Shepherd writes, "the very idea of merit is foreign to the way in which God our Father relates to his children." Again, he neither cites nor quotes any verse to support this statement. By discarding merit, Shepherd also discards justice and holiness.

Chapter 3: The New Covenant

Like John Paul II, Shepherd presents Christ as a new Moses, delivering the new law, the law we must obey in order to meet the conditions of our salvation:

As the Lord God came to Mount Sinai to deliver his commandments to Moses and all Israel, so also the Lord Jesus came to another mount to deliver the commandments of the new covenant to his disciples and to the church of the new covenant.... Far from abolishing covenant obligation, Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

Christ the Law-Giver supplants Christ the Saviour. Shepherd does not say, "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." His theology is, "The law was given through Moses, and the new law came through Jesus Christ."

The reason for this is that Shepherd rejects the "works-merit principle." *Grace*, however, has meaning only when it is set in opposition to debt and works, as Paul does. (*Mercy* has meaning only within the framework of justice.) Just as *false* has meaning only in opposition to *true*, so *grace* has meaning only in opposition to works. By denying the first half of the Biblical antithesis, merit and meritorious works, Shepherd must also deny the second half of the antithesis, grace and faith. Of course, Shepherd continues to use the word *grace*, but it bears an un-Scriptural meaning. *Faith* is no longer used in opposition to works, as the Bible uses it, nor is *grace* understood as God's unmerited favor toward sinners.

It is important to note that in Shepherd's Neolegalism the righteousness that we must have in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is not the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, but our own infused righteousness. Shepherd quotes *Matthew 7:21* as a verse supporting this conclusion, which simply shows that he does not understand that passage of Scripture. Far from teaching salvation by faith and works, the passage teaches that Christ will send to Hell those who come before him and plead their works as meeting the conditions for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Naturally the question arises in Shepherd's theology, why was the Mosaic covenant abolished, if the new covenant is simply a new law? Here is his answer:

It was defective because it could not succeed in doing what it was designed to do. The Mosaic covenant was designed to deal with the problem of sin by providing a way of salvation. Specifically, it was designed to do two things. The sacrificial system was designed to take away both the penalty of sin and sin itself. The commandments were designed to teach the Israelites how to live acceptably before God as his covenant partners.

These are remarkable words. Leaving aside the problem Shepherd has with logical consistency (here he says that God's plan "could not succeed in doing what it was designed to do," yet he has already told us that God "does not tease [his children]" by

offering them a way of salvation that he knows will not work”), he asserts that the Mosaic system was “designed to deal with the problem of sin by providing a way of salvation. Specifically, it was designed to do two things. The sacrificial system was designed to take away both the penalty of sin and sin itself.” Now this contradicts Scripture. Consider these verses:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (*Hebrews* 10:1-2, 4).

Shepherd contradicts *Hebrews*, for the sacrificial system of Moses was never designed or intended to “take away both the penalty of sin and sin itself.” Instead, it was a reminder of sins, a schoolteacher to guide the Hebrews to the one Sacrifice who was designed to “take away both the penalty of sin and sin itself.” Shepherd does not seem to understand the purpose of the sacrificial system.

He admits that “Paul declares repeatedly that observing the law cannot save a person.” But, he says, “The reason for this is not that no one can keep the law perfectly as a covenant of works.” On the contrary: That is precisely the reason given in Scripture. See *Romans* 3:10-23, or read what Moses and Paul wrote: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them” (*Deuteronomy* 27:26; *Galatians* 3:10). Or follow this conversation: “Now behold one came and said to him, ‘Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So he said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments’ ” (*Matthew* 19:16-17).

Shepherd, unheeding what Christ said, continues: “Rather, observing the law cannot save a person because the Mosaic system is no longer operative.” This statement suggests that observing the Mosaic law did in fact save persons when the Mosaic system was operative. The reason observing the law cannot save now, Shepherd says, is not that sinful men are inherently unable to keep the law, but that the Mosaic system is no longer operative. Now this seems to be a form of Dispensationalism, and perhaps worse, for Shepherd argues that the reason Paul declares that no one can be saved by observing the law is *not* because sinful men are unable to do so, but because *the Mosaic system is no longer operative*.

But there is something else important in Shepherd’s words. When Christ responded to the young man, he commanded the young man to obey the moral law, and he promised eternal life to the young man if in fact he did obey the law. This raises two questions: First, Is Christ teasing the young man with “a way of salvation that he knows will not work,” as Shepherd said earlier? Second, Is Shepherd now suggesting that the moral law is no longer operative? The logic of his argument requires that both questions be answered in the affirmative. The first answer is blasphemous; the second is antinomian.

Shepherd barges on: “Rather, observing the law cannot save a person because the Mosaic system is no longer operative. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ.” Contrary to Shepherd’s quasi-Dispensationalism, salvation has *always* come *only* through faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Chapter 4 concludes Part 1 of his book, the Erskine Seminary lectures. Shepherd returns to his role as ecumenical theologian:

The time has now come for us to return to the subject with which we began. Is there any hope for a common understanding between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism regarding the way of salvation? May I suggest that there is at least a glimmer of hope if both sides are willing to embrace a covenantal understanding of the way of salvation.

Of course, both sides have *already* embraced a covenantal understanding of the way of salvation (this is why the doctrine of covenant cannot be the distinguishing mark of Reformed theology, as Shepherd asserts it is); what Shepherd means is that both must embrace *his* covenantal understanding. Shepherd finds the same error in both Romanism and Protestantism: the works-merit principle. He repeats: “God does not, and never did, relate to his people on the basis of a works-merit principle.”

What is required from Rome [and from Geneva for that matter] is a change from a works/merit paradigm for understanding the way of salvation to a covenantal paradigm.... This change in paradigm would provide a proper basis for Rome’s legitimate insistence that full credence be given to James 2:24, Galatians 5:6, and similar passages.

Shepherd here tips his hand, for he thinks that it is Rome that gives “full credence” to James, not the Reformers. And it is Rome, not the Reformers, that “legitimately insists” on this “full credence.” However, the question is not full or half credence, but What is it that James is saying? Here again Shepherd agrees with Rome against the Reformers, and he thinks he has discovered a way to package the soteriology of Rome — faith plus works as the condition of salvation — in what he considers the leading motif and characteristic concept of the Reformation, the covenant.

Chapter 5: Covenant and the Great Commission

Part 2 of the book, titled “Covenant Light on Evangelism,” wastes little time before launching an attack on something called “easy believism.” “It is not enough,” Shepherd asserts, “to ask the sinner for a simple act of faith. The evangelist must also demand repentance.” The errors in these statements are legion. Shepherd defines neither *faith* nor *repentance*, but he seems to think repentance is penance, for it is behavior, not simply a change of mind. However, Biblical repentance is wholly “mental,” to use Shepherd’s own word; it is literally a change of mind. One of the results of repentance may be a change of behavior, but behavior is not repentance.

Shepherd continues: “But the difficulty here is that the opposite of ‘easy believism’ often turns out to be ‘hard work-ism,’ and that is not very good news. Indeed, in terms of Paul’s argument in *Romans* and *Galatians*, that destroys the gospel.” Indeed it does. But Shepherd rejects — or claims to reject — both halves of this antithesis. And therein lies the key to his rejection of the Gospel. What Shepherd sneers at as “easy believism” is the Gospel of justification by belief alone.

Now the phrase “easy believism” could mean the errors of Arminianism and Pelagianism, for those systems hold that believing the Gospel is easy, or at least possible, for the natural man, while Scripture teaches that believing the Gospel is impossible for the natural man. But that is not what Shepherd understands or intends by the slogan “easy believism.” What Shepherd understands by that phrase, and what he rejects, is evangelism that says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” He writes: “It is not enough to ask the sinner for a

simple act of faith." In fact, in Chapter 7, he tells us that "Reformed evangelists will stress that God does not simply require faith in the narrow sense of an act of trust, but also obedience to the law at every point."

By rejecting the Biblical antithesis of grace/faith versus works, Shepherd offers us a synthesis of grace/faith and works, which he cleverly presents as "covenant grace" and "covenant obligations." Now, Shepherd writes, "The preeminent covenant keeper is Jesus Christ." But Christ, while preeminent, is not the only covenant keeper. Rather, he has given us a pattern that we must imitate and thus commands us to keep the covenant ourselves: "As the covenant is kept, according to the pattern of Jesus Christ, the promises of the covenant are fulfilled." We become christi, fulfilling our covenant obligations, and thereby obtaining our own salvation. Of course, Shepherd says all the works we do are "non-meritorious," not because we are sinners, but because God never deals with his children in terms of merit. By saying that all works are non-meritorious, Shepherd thinks he has avoided the error of legalism. Requiring good works in order to obtain salvation is not legalism in Shepherd's scheme; he thinks good works must be "meritorious" in order for the system to be accurately called legalism. But if faithful obedience and good works fulfill the covenant conditions and so obtain salvation for the doer, even though they are done by the grace of Christ, they are indeed "meritorious." They are works that fulfill the covenant conditions. If the sinner does not present these good works, then the sinner cannot receive salvation.

Since Shepherd (1) denies that any works are meritorious, and (2) insists that only meritorious works done to obtain or keep salvation can constitute legalism, he has fabricated a theology in which it is impossible for legalism to exist. That is why he asserts that his theology is not legalist. Neat, huh? But Christian theology correctly recognizes the possibility and danger of legalism; therefore, Shepherd's theology is not Christian theology.

Shepherd's contention that the works he requires are non-meritorious is disingenuous, for without such works salvation cannot be obtained. A similar theological move occurred in the Roman Church-State centuries ago when the doctrine of congruent merit, as opposed to condign merit, was fabricated. Condign merit is Real Merit. Congruent merit is not Real Merit; congruent merit is "non-meritorious merit," but it still can meet the conditions necessary for obtaining salvation. (Unlike Rome, of course, Shepherd says there is no condign merit, not because men are sinners, but because God does not operate on the basis of justice, and he does not hand out rewards and punishments to those who deserve them, for no one deserves anything. The notions of justice and desert disappear along with merit.) Both Rome and Shepherd say our works are indispensable in meeting the conditions of our salvation.

Chapter 6: Covenant and Election

Shepherd tells us that "Reformed evangelistic methodology must be consciously oriented to the doctrine of the covenant, rather than to the doctrine of election." This dictum leads him to say more peculiar things. He correctly attacks the "Arminian gospel," "Christ loves you and has died for you," as not "even good at all." Then, four pages later he asserts, "The Reformed evangelist can and must preach to everyone on the basis of John 3:16, 'Christ died to save you.'" That is, the Reformed evangelist must preach an Arminian gospel that is "not even good at all." (On this issue, see Herman Hoeksema's book, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*.) Of course, *John* 3:16 does not say what Shepherd and the Arminians think it says. The Christian evangelist must indeed preach *John* 3:16, for it teaches salvation by belief alone, but he must never assert that Christ died to save

all men, for the Bible teaches no such thing, and that message, as Shepherd himself has said, is not "good at all."

Chapter 7: Covenant and Regeneration

Shepherd urges us "to look at regeneration from the perspective of covenant." When we do that, Shepherd says, "baptism...marks the point of conversion." Now note his words carefully. He does not say baptism, by which he means water baptism, "pictures" or "illustrates" conversion. Nor does he say that it "marks conversion." He says that it "marks the point of conversion." One supposes that he means "point in time," but he does not say; he is coy. But in the sentence immediately following he uses the word "moment": "Baptism is the moment when we see the transition from death to life and a person is saved." Note: "Baptism is the moment when...a person is saved." This sacramentalism is one result of orienting evangelism to an incorrect doctrine of the covenant, rather than to the doctrine of election. Rites become the substitutes for or the causes of what Shepherd calls the "secret work" of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. In fact, Shepherd exhorts us: "instead of looking at covenant from the perspective of regeneration, we ought to look at regeneration from the perspective of covenant." In short, Shepherd wants us to get all our theology backwards.

In contrast to regeneration-evangelism a methodology oriented to the covenant structure of Scripture and to the Great Commission presents *baptism as the transition point from death to life.... Baptism marks the entrance into the kingdom of God.... A sinner is not "really converted" until he is baptized.... Christians are those who have been baptized.* Unbelievers are those who have not been baptized.... The connection between baptism and regeneration comes to vivid expression when Paul says that we are saved "through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). He also says that we are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:11). ... Baptism is therefore to be understood as of a piece with the total transformation that is salvation. [Italics added.]

By his quotation of these verses in this argument, Shepherd shows that he does not know what they mean. Had he read Gordon Clark's commentaries on *Titus* and *1 Corinthians*, he might have learned something:

Our present text [*Titus* 3:5] now says that God saved us by the washing of regeneration (*palingenesis*). This phrase too excludes past and future works, for clearly it is God who washes, and we are passively washed. What is this washing? Although Calvinists quote Calvin with awe and reverence, we are not required to follow him in his few minor infelicities. On this phrase his commentary says, "I have no objection to the explanation of the whole passage in terms of baptism."

No doubt the word washing suggests baptism.... Nevertheless, one can hardly explain the whole passage in terms of baptism. This should all the more be avoided in order to show that the passage does not teach baptismal regeneration.

Meyer is more objectionable than Calvin: "From *Ephesians* 5:26 it is clear that it can mean nothing else than baptism." *Ephesians* 5:26 says, "as Christ also loved the church...having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word." And a few lines below he adds, "Paul uses that name for it as the bath by means of which God actually brings about the new birth." ...

In reply to this sacramentarianism several points are pertinent. First, let us ask whether the language is figurative or literal.... A second consideration...is that if baptism caused, or was, regeneration, the phrase would have been "the regeneration of washing." The actual phrase "the washing of regeneration" indicates that regeneration washes, not that washing regenerates.... The washing effected by regeneration is the renewal, that is, the renewing the Spirit does to us.

I shall leave Clark's comments on *1 Corinthians* for Shepherd to look up himself.

To continue with Shepherd's errors:

The sins that are washed away in baptism are supplanted by the righteousness of the kingdom of God. Sin is not only dethroned, but destroyed.... Christ, who obeyed the law for us, is obedient in us.

But water baptism does not wash away sins. And "Christ in us" meeting the conditions of our salvation is the doctrine of infused grace that the Roman Church-State teaches.

Then Shepherd writes: "It is both striking and significant that the Great Commission in neither Matthew nor Luke speaks of calling upon sinners to believe." I guess the apostles misunderstood their Master's last emphatic instructions, for they call upon sinners to believe throughout the book of *Acts*. Shepherd continues:

What is explicitly asserted is the call to repentance and obedience. When the call to faith is isolated from the call to obedience, as it frequently is, the effect is to make good works a supplement to salvation or simply the evidence of salvation.... According to the Great Commission, however, they [good works] belong to the essence of salvation....

Here Shepherd denies that works are the evidence of salvation, and asserts that they are the essence of salvation.

The chapter on Good Works in the *Westminster Confession* describes good works as the "fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith," not the essence, condition, cause, prerequisite, or antecedent of salvation. In Christianity, saving faith is the condition, the prerequisite, of good works, not the reverse. Good works are evidence of salvation already possessed. Section VI of the chapter on Good Works makes it clear that our good works are "accepted in him [Christ]" only because "the persons of believers [are] accepted through Christ." It is because we are already saved that our good works are accepted, and then "not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprouvable in God's sight, but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward...." Far from their being the essence of salvation or conditions that we must meet in order to obtain salvation, our good works are themselves accepted only because of the merits of Christ imputed to us.

Norman Shepherd has fabricated a Neolegalism that has been embraced by many affiliated with Reformed churches. This "different gospel, which is not another" was pre-emptively condemned by Paul 2000 years ago. The nominally Reformed are now on trial: Their condemnation or approval of Neolegalism will reveal whether they follow Christ or another saviour.

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