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Thursday, September 4, 2003

Dear Friends,

I had hoped that I would not have to write to you a second time regarding my resignation, but yesterday I received an unsigned, undated, six-page document titled "Response to John Robbins' Letter of Resignation." It is written in the first person plural ("We"), so I presume it was written by Ross Lindley and concurred in by Ken Farmer and Terry Jones, although the authors do not identify themselves. A member of Midway sent the "Response" to me; although it is about me, the Midway Session did not have the courtesy to send me a copy.

I regret to say that the "Response" is neither what I had hoped for nor what the Midway Session should have written. Rather than any admission of error, the "Response" confirms my letter of resignation: The current Midway Session sees nothing seriously wrong with the theology of Steven Schlissel, Steven Wilkins, and the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church; it continues to defend men who are teaching a false gospel; and it continues to attack those who are defending the true Gospel. For more than two years I hoped that Ross, Ken, and Terry would reconsider their position; not only have they failed to do so, they have now put into writing their defense of men who are causing divisions in the PCA by teaching doctrines contrary to the Scriptures and the Confession of Faith.

I do not intend to address every point in the "Response," but a few statements cannot be ignored.

I shall begin with the Session's defense of Steve Schlissel:

In our opinion there was nothing in that article [by Steve Schlissel] that was heretical or antichristian.... He is right to maintain that the covenant is conditional in this sense. God requires faith and obedience from His people in the covenant.... Mr. Schlissel was biblical in his response.

The problem, according to the Midway Session, is not Steve Schlissel, but John Robbins:

This judgment [about Schlissel] was most unfair and a misrepresentation of what Mr. Schlissel said.... John Robbins falsely assumed that Mr. Schlissel made the requirement of obedience a condition of justification.

Neither I nor the other signers of the letter to Schlissel made any such assumption. Mr. Schlissel explicitly asserted that there are “covenant conditions” that a justified sinner must meet or “perish.” “Perish” is his word. In order to be finally saved, according to Schlissel, a believer must meet certain conditions (unfortunately Schlissel does not give a complete list). Schlissel makes “faithful obedience” a condition for retaining one’s initial justification, which justification one can lose. For details, I refer you to the letter that Neil Smith, Joe Neumann, and I sent to Schlissel, published in the August 2002 *Trinity Review*, and posted at our website, www.trinityfoundation.org. Since then, Schlissel has made similar comments in other speeches and essays. He also affirmed his hearty agreement with Norman Shepherd (who is not a “Dr.”), and who was removed from the faculty of Westminster Seminary in 1982 for his false teaching on justification and the covenant. Ross, and Ken as well, I believe, were Shepherd’s students at Westminster Seminary.

Defending Schlissel’s views, the Midway Session asserts that there are “many conditional statements in Scripture concerning the necessity of a continuing and abiding faith with its resultant obedience. These conditional statements are not speaking of Christ’s work but the obedience of Christians to God.”

I wish flatly to deny this assertion. There are no such conditional statements in Scripture in which the believer’s “final salvation” is made to depend on his faithful obedience. As the *Westminster Confession* says,

They [Christians] may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, [yet] they whom God has accepted in his Beloved [Christ], effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved [17.3,1]

God indeed commands all men to obey his law (I have never said differently, despite the impression the “Response” gives), but God does not hang our salvation on our obedience, which is always sinful, but on Christ’s perfect obedience alone, contrary to the teaching of Schlissel that the Midway Session defends.

On the matter of Steve Wilkins, the Midway Session writes, “John Robbins posted a letter on his horror files of October 19 accusing Steve Wilkins of being a false teacher on whom the curse of God rests.”

You can read that short October 19, 2002 article at our website; it does not mention Steve Wilkins. There is a reason for that: The Auburn Avenue Session is the body of men responsible for publishing N. T. Wright’s lecture, and it does not sign its letters or documents. So I accused the Auburn Avenue Session of teaching a false gospel, which it does.

In order to defend the Auburn Avenue Session against the charge of teaching a false gospel, the Midway Session must defend the apostate Anglican bishop, N. T. Wright, whose lecture the Auburn Avenue Session reprinted in their church newsletter. They half-heartedly do so, saying they do not recommend Wright generally, but also falsely asserting that Wright's lecture "was not a denial of justification by faith" and that my interpretation of it was "unfounded and wrong."

The Midway Session continues: "John Robbins said that it does not matter what they [the AAPC Session] affirm. Until they repent of what they have written, they remain false teachers."

Throughout church history, heretics have been willing to pay lip service to sound doctrine. What discloses their beliefs is their refusal to retract statements contrary to the Bible. That is what defines a heretic—an obstinate refusal to retract error—and that is what the AAPC Session has done.

But the Midway Session calls the Auburn Session "orthodox on the doctrines of salvation and justification."

Well, you be the judge. Here are some statements from the "Summary Statement of Faith" adopted by the Auburn Avenue Session:

By baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to him covenantally, and given all the blessings and benefits of his work.... This does not, however, grant to the baptized [person] final salvation; rather it obligates him to fulfill the terms of the covenant....

Every baptized person, according to the AAPC, is given "all the blessings and benefits of his [Christ's] work." What are those blessings and benefits? The *Westminster Confession*, echoing Scripture, lists forgiveness of sins, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, effectual calling, regeneration, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, and much more, including "an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of Heaven" (8.5). These blessings and benefits of Christ's work are given to all who are baptized, according to the AAPC. There is neither Scriptural nor Confessional support for such an assertion of baptismal regeneration, baptismal justification, and baptismal forgiveness of sins. These are Roman Catholic doctrines.

But notice the one thing that all who are baptized do not receive: "final salvation." Despite saying that all the blessings and benefits of Christ's work are given to all baptized persons, the Auburn Statement denies that all baptized persons are finally saved. This can only mean that "final salvation" is not one of the "blessings and benefits of Christ's work." Thus the Auburn theology is an attack on Christ and the sufficiency of his perfect work for the salvation of believing sinners.

Furthermore, the clause "it [baptism] obligates him [the baptized person] to fulfill the terms of the covenant" means that "final salvation" is received only after the baptized person has satisfactorily performed all the terms of the covenant. According to the Auburn theology, one can be regenerate, be given new life by the Holy Spirit, exercise faith, be numbered among the elect, and be initially justified, receiving "all the

blessings and benefits of Christ's work," and still go to Hell. This means that Christ is not the Saviour. Our performance makes the difference between Heaven and Hell. "Final salvation" depends on the baptized person's "fulfilling the terms of the covenant." The Auburn theology changes the covenant of grace into a covenant of works, in which the sinner must perform faithfully in order to be saved at the Last Judgment. Christ's work is not sufficient for his "final salvation."

The Auburn Avenue Summary Statement of Faith continues:

In some sense, they [all baptized persons] were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit....

Thus all baptized persons are "really joined to the elect," "really sanctified by Christ's blood," and "really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit." But not all who are thus elect, sanctified, and made spiritually alive will be saved. Some will be cut off, some will become reprobate, and some will lose the new life given them by the Holy Spirit, because their works are lacking. It is their faithful obedience that makes the difference between final salvation and damnation. This is a denial of the Biblical doctrine of salvation, and an affirmation of Catholic works-righteousness.

The AAPC Summary Statement continues:

Some persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament.... Saul received the same initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance....

Please note that some of the reprobate (those "not destined for final salvation") will "enjoy real blessings purchased for them [the reprobate] by Christ's cross and applied to them [the reprobate] by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament." Please note that they receive the same grace as those who are finally saved. So Christ died for the reprobate as well as for the elect, purchasing for them "real blessings," which include "new life" and "sanctification." Gone is the Reformed doctrine of a definite atonement, as well as the doctrines of the preservation of the saints (see chapter 17 of the Westminster Confession), and the efficacy of Christ's work (see chapter 8).

The AAPC Summary Statement also means that perseverance is not one of the blessings and benefits of Christ's work, for the Auburn Avenue Session asserts that all baptized persons receive all those blessings and benefits, yet some baptized persons do not receive the gift of perseverance. They receive "the same initial covenantal grace" as those who are finally saved, but that "initial grace" is not sufficient for salvation. The Auburn theology makes the covenant of grace an external (they like the word "objective"), ineffective, empty shell, contrary to *Jeremiah* 31:31-34.

These are the men the Midway Session says are "orthodox on the doctrines of salvation and justification."

While strongly defending those teaching baptismal regeneration and a losable salvation, the Midway Session continues to accuse me of “basic unfairness” and “extrapolations,” and it fails to present evidence supporting either accusation.

According to the Midway Session, I have “accused Great Commission Publications (GCP) of denying justification by faith alone.” The “Response” does not quote my words. It simply makes an assertion. Unlike the Midway Session, I am always careful to quote the words of the men and publications I criticize. (That is why I transcribed two of Ross’ sermons in which he was teaching error on the covenant and baptism. This is what an Elder is supposed to do.)

By its remark, the Midway Session is apparently referring to a short essay posted at The Trinity Foundation’s website in which I quote GCP’s own words, printed on the backs of thousands of church bulletins distributed at hundreds of churches, including Midway, asserting that someone who believes the Westminster Confession can be a “fake.” The anonymously published GCP essay attacks belief of the Gospel, for it does not say “profess the Westminster Confession” or “recite the Shorter Catechism,” but “believe the Westminster Standards.” The GCP essay does not merely decry insincere profession or mere memorization of the Catechism, but attacks belief of the Gospel. Since the director of the GCP obstinately refused to disclose who wrote the anonymous essay, a reader can only hold the organization itself responsible for publishing the attack. GCP has yet to apologize for publishing its cunning attack on faith, the Gospel, and the Westminster Confession.

Midway Session says, “his [Robbins’] evaluations and conclusions about Andrew Sandlin were unkind and wrong”—and offers not a scintilla of evidence to support this accusation.

The “Feast Day of St. Augustine” celebrated by the Auburn Avenue Church, we are now told, was a “joke.” So it is humorous to describe church picnics as idolatrous feasts? There is nothing humorous about idolatry, especially when the church playing the “joke” has adopted a quasi-Romanist soteriology.

The Midway Session says that it was “the session’s concern over John Robbins’ methodology” that was a “major reason for disharmony in the session.” But this six-page “Response” shows that it is not primarily my methodology but my conclusions with which the Session strongly disagrees. The Midway Session thinks men teaching a false gospel are “orthodox on the doctrines of salvation and justification.” It was Ross’, Ken’s, and Terry’s defense of men teaching a false gospel that was the “major reason for disharmony in the Session.”

The Midway Session asserts that “It is not John Robbins’ prerogative to make judgmental pronouncements on others concerning heresy and apostasy.” The Session then quotes the Shepherding Committee saying the same thing: “That entity which inherits the responsibility to rebuke sharply and even to declare men by name as heretics is not one man or one independent entity operating alone. The Church itself has inherited this responsibility.” Neither the Midway Session nor the Shepherding Committee cites any Scripture to support their opinion, for good reason: There is none.

The Reformers, being students of Scripture, recognized the right of private judgment. They read, for example, that ordinary Christians are commanded to “test the spirits to see whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). There are dozens of such verses in Scripture. The *Gospels* are full of warnings by Christ to beware of false prophets, false teachers, and false brethren. Apparently Christ thought ordinary Christians, using the standard of the Scriptures, could discern them. Ordinary Christians are commanded and authorized by the Holy Spirit to test the spirits, and to identify, mark, and avoid “false prophets,” “deceivers,” and “antichrists.” The noble Bereans, who were not clerics, set the example by testing even the teachings of the apostle by Scripture, and he called them noble for doing so. Nowhere in Scripture is there any statement that ordinary Christians cannot and ought not to make such judgments about religious teachers.

The responsibilities of Elders in these matters are even greater than that of ordinary Christians. Elders are supposed to be watchmen on the walls, shepherds guarding the flock from wolves in sheep’s clothing. But the Midway Session maintains, without any Scripture support, that that is not my “prerogative.” It is, they say, the prerogative of “the Church” alone.

Indeed, “the church” does make these judgments, but the Midway Session and the Shepherding Committee have an erroneous view of the church: They want to restrict “the church” to councils (but only those councils they approve). The church, however, is the people of God. Every Christian has both the right and the duty to test, identify, pronounce judgment, and warn others about false teachers. That is one of the basic principles the Reformers upheld against the clericalism of Rome, which asserted that only clergy could judge clergy, and clergy could not be judged by ordinary Christians.

The Midway Session states that “we have never had open meetings of session at Midway Presbyterian Church.” This simply is not true. Session meetings prior to the Fall of 2002 were open; Session meetings were publicly announced, and Midway members were invited to observe. Unless the Session changed its open-meetings policy after most Midway Elders resigned in August, Session meetings are still open. The *PCA Book of Church Order* assumes that Session meetings will be open to members, and the Bible requires it. The opinion of the Stated Clerk of the PCA, since it is not supported by any Scripture, is of no authority.

As I said at the outset, I regret that the Midway Session has hardened its position. Far from my charge that the Midway Session has come down on the wrong side in the justification controversy being “ludicrous,” this six-page “Response,” with its defense of those teaching a false gospel, confirms it. Midway Session’s continued defense of men who are propagating a false gospel, and its continued attack on those defending the true Gospel, is a very serious matter. Unless it is corrected, Midway’s candle will be snuffed out.

In Christ,