

## Trial of John O. Kinnaird Reasons for the verdict of 1/25/03

The Interim Session of Bethany OPC, Oxford, PA met on three Saturdays (11/23/02, 11/30/02 & 1/25/03) to hear the evidence regarding the teachings of Elder John O. Kinnaird. On the last day the five men of the session deliberated and announced its decision to find Mr. Kinnaird guilty of the charge: "with teaching a doctrine of justification by faith and works, contrary to the Word of God and the Westminster Standards." Note that our task was to focus upon the three Specifications (taken from three separate documents) in the charges brought by the accusers, and ONLY upon these three Specifications. Many other statements made by Elder Kinnaird may have been above reproach and largely beneficial to the Body of Christ.

The following are the session's reasons for coming to such a verdict:

1) An overall assessment of the importance of the matter

The WLC #77 states:

**Q. 77. Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?**

**A. Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.**

Here our standards speak in terms of the perfection of justification and the "imperfection" of sanctification. The judicatory concluded that there was error, as well as confusion, in the statements of Elder Kinnaird that inadequately differentiated justification and sanctification. Specifically, the judicatory noted that Elder Kinnaird's words taught that:

A) justification was not conclusive at conversion,  
and thus inadequate;  
and

B) sanctification, by the believer's law-keeping or good works or holiness (or some combination of these), finished the acceptance that God requires for entrance to heaven.

The matter of this error might seem trivial to some observing the trial, but the Standards (as well as other doctrinal standards taken by other in Protestant Christendom; eg Heidelberg Catechism #1,21,30,56,60-64) make clear that such teaching goes to the heart of Protestantism, let alone Calvinism. Thus, the judicatory believed that such an error is most grievous to sound doctrine.

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2) Regarding the first Specification

Quotes were taken from Elder Kinnaird's Personal Declaration and Theological Statements:

The first statement was made, "...Neither the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, which all Christians receive at justification ... can suffice for that purpose. [i.e., the "purpose" is stated to be "fully conformed to the image of Christ in true and personal righteousness and holiness," as written in the prior sentence]. This statement the judicatory found very troubling, as the statement on face value is denigrating the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of His people. Cf. WCF "On Justification," 11, 1 to 3:

**I. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: 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; nor 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, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.**

**II. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.**

**III. 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; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.**

The above underlined portions exclude the contribution of the believer's works. They explicitly speak of Christ's work "alone," His obedience and satisfaction and righteousness; His **FULL** discharge of our debt, His proper, real and **FULL** satisfaction of the Father's justice.

Elder Kinnaird's quote continues, "If we are to be conformed to his [Christ's] image, we too must have a real and personal righteousness." This statement gives the impression that Christ's work and death are insufficient, since His work cannot "suffice" to pay for His people's salvation.

Note: The word "suffice" is a particularly poor nomenclature in Elder Kinnaird's Declaration...(no matter what point Elder Kinnaird is trying to make), since

Webster's defines "suffice" as : "to meet or satisfy a need" or "to be enough for." The judicatory considered it a great error in teaching that Christ's work for our salvation does not "suffice" in a particular area. To make the statement is then to countenance the law-abiding works of believers as making up, by their own efforts, what is lacking in Christ's work for their salvation and thereby securing their own salvation. This wrongly adds the element of the believer's own works as the necessary condition to be pronounced righteous on the Day of Judgment.

Elder Kinnaird's "real and personal righteousness" is presented as something additional in some way; and it is not clearly stated in *what* way. The righteousness that the believer depends on is *always* Christ's, whether imputed in Justification or Imparted in Sanctification, and is always "accounted" and "accepted" as *if* it was our real and personal righteousness (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21, WLC, #72). Elder Kinnaird's statements are erroneous distortions of clear biblical teaching.

A second quote taken from Elder Kinnaird's Declaration... says, "It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous on that Day of Judgment." This quote is taken from his section subtitled "The Final Judgement." However, this statement (cited with WCF 33,1 & 2, Romans 2:1-16) is not couched with the balance of teaching that the WCF does, by clarifying that the deciding factor for being denied entrance into everlasting life is to "obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ" (WCF 33,2). Elder Kinnaird's statement appears to attribute the Christian's sanctification ("doing good" and "perseverance") as the deciding factor, thus gravely confusing justification and sanctification; **AND** to teach, effectively, a doctrine of justification by faith and works.

Colossians 1:12-14 speaks of how the Father "has qualified" believers to share in a heavenly inheritance. How? Through the Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Our "qualification: is by the Son's redemptive-forgiving work on the Cross (cf. vss. 20-22), not the sanctifying work of the Spirit. To use John Murray's words, it is the "redemption accomplished" part of our salvation through Christ which *qualifies us* for Judgment Day -- **NOT** the "redemption applied" part of our salvation through the Holy Spirit. [note chapter 3, "The Perfection of the Atonement," in his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*]

\* The judicatory voted 4 to 1 (Watson) to find Mr. Kinnaird guilty regarding Specification 1.

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### 3) Regarding the second Specification

Quotes were taken from a sermon by Elder Kinnaird entitled, "Though the Waters Roar and the Mountains Quake:"

"Thus we rightly conclude that those inside the city are those who have kept the law of God and those only," (referring to Revelation 19:8)

and

"...the decision...made on that great day of judgement [is] in accordance with what you have done in this life." (referring to Romans 2:6-8 and Revelation 22:12).

These statements are contrary to the statements made in WCF 8,5, which speaks "Of Christ the Mediator:"

**V. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.**

One Scripture verse cited at WCF 8,5 is Hebrews 10:4, "because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

Again, Christ's work is exalted, not someone else's.

Yes, Elder Kinnaird's sermon later says that salvation is found in no one else that Christ (here he quotes Acts 4:12, and Romans 10:9,11,13). However, the statements in question appear wholly gratuitous and without a needed Scriptural balance, that the Christian's keeping of the law and his deeds are only accepted because they are "in Christ;" cf. WCF 16,2 & 6. And also these statements are without the Scriptural balance that Christ perfectly fulfilled and kept the law for us, in our place:

**¼ the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof [of Christ's work of redemption] were communicated unto the elect¼ (WCF 8,6); also cf. WCF 8,4-5, and 11,3; and WLC #71-73.**

Without the balance that continually points us to Christ's perfect work on behalf of his people, Elder Kinnaird's statements confound and confuse the doctrines of justification and sanctification: thus effectively teaching a doctrine of faith and works.

\* The judicatory voted 5 to 0 to find Mr. Kinnaird guilty regarding Specification 2.

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4) Regarding the third Specification

Quotes were taken from postings on a Yahoo! Internet chat room:

"These good works are a required condition if we would stand in the Day of Judgement and they are supplied by God to all His people. Every description of the Judgement events speak of these good works. Without them, no one will see God. Our God is not unjust..."

and

"Who are these people who thus benefit - who stand on the Day of Judgement? They are those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

In Elder Kinnaird's posting, immediately prior to the first quote, he is referring to Hebrews 12:14, and says:

"God has provided not only justification from the guilt of sin, he has also, for all those begotten from above by the seed of God, provided that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14."

But in the next sentence Elder Kinnaird equates "holiness" with "good works," and "no one will see the Lord" with "the Day of Judgement." The judicatory saw this as a presumptuous exegesis of the verse: biased, and in error. The WCF "On Sanctification," 13,1 cites Hebrews 12:14:

**I. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.**

The WCF quotes Hebrews 12:14 with the idea that sanctification, progressively in the life of the Christian, is of necessity. However, sanctification in the Westminster Standards, is always portrayed as imperfect; cf. WCF 13,2-3:

**II. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.**

**III. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

How could imperfect sanctification (imperfect *because of* our remaining sin), with its attempts at good works and law-keeping, be how we "stand on Judgment Day?"

Elder Kinnaird's words suggest:

what is done by man

(notwithstanding the gratuitous phrase that "they are supplied by God to all his people")

is what enables one to enter heaven

Thus again Christ's work is improperly detracted from by glaring **OMISSION**. This leads to the erroneous conclusion that the believers' own works are required for being declared righteous at the Last Day. Note the following statements taken from the article "Justification and Merit," p. 1,852 in The New Geneva Study Bible, 1995:

... Justification is God's act of pardoning sinners and accepting them as righteous for Christ's sake. In it, God puts permanently right their previously estranged relationship with Himself. ...

... God's justifying decision is in effect the judgment of the Last Day regarding where we will spend eternity, brought forward into the present and pronounced here and now. It is a judgment on our eternal destiny; God will never go back on it, ...

... A justification that needs to be completed by the recipient is no resting place.

Also note Calvin (Institutes, Bk III, Ch 11 ["of Justification by Faith. Both the Name and Reality Defined"], sec 23):

... You see that our righteousness is not in ourselves, but in Christ. ...

"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:3-4). Here the only fulfillment to which he refers is that which we obtain by imputation. ...

... In order to appear in the presence of God for salvation, we must send forth that fragrant odour, having our vices covered and buried by his perfection.

\* The judicatory voted 4 to 0, with one present but not voting (Watson), to find Mr. Kinnaird guilty regarding Specification 3.

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The Interim Session of Bethany OPC, Oxford, PA:

Rev. Douglas C. Winward, Jr., moderator  
Rev. Douglas A. Watson, clerk  
Elder J. Gary Bryant  
Rev. Joel C. Kershner  
Rev. Michael A. Obel

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