

**COMPARE AND CONTRAST SAVING FAITH IN THE WRITINGS OF NORMAN
SHEPHERD AND THAT OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH**

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ABSTRACT

Historically Reformed theology has spoken of justification by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially. From the time of the Reformation, Reformed people have affirmed the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Indeed, *sola fide* has almost universally been accepted in protestant circles, let alone Reformed circles.

However, retired theologian Norman Shepherd has now challenged the usefulness and accuracy of *sola fide*. Reformed people are used to Roman Catholic theologians questioning the doctrine, and of late the insights of many within the New Perspective movement. However, Shepherd is unique because he began writing on this issue before the ground breaking work of E.P Sanders was even published. Shepherd's challenge finds added significance because he writes from the viewpoint of a respected theologian within the Reformed community.

Using the paradigm of covenant promise and obligation, Shepherd disputes the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He asserts that the promise of salvation is only realised when the obligations of the Covenant are met. According to Shepherd, these obligations are fourfold (faith, repentance, good works and perseverance) and without which, no one will see the Lord.

Although traditionally Reformed Theology has spoken of justification by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially. Shepherd speaks of justification by Christ meritoriously and faithfulness instrumentally. It is the position of this paper that Shepherd's reformulation of saving faith as saving faithfulness, is inconsistent with, and a departure from Reformed orthodoxy as found in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST SAVING FAITH IN THE WRITINGS OF NORMAN SHEPHERD AND THAT OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Introduction

In comparing and contrasting saving faith in the writings of Norman Shepherd, this paper will briefly survey the contributions of Reformed scholars to provide a useful definition of saving faith. It will attempt to draw conclusions on the soteriological function of faith and in particular its relationship to justification. Having achieved this, it will then seek to establish the nature of saving faith and its relationship to that of repentance as the required responses to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The findings will then provide the presuppositions that the remaining chapters of this thesis shall take for granted.

Having laid bare the theological foundations that will underpin this paper, it will then in a systematic fashion survey the pertinent writings of Norman Shepherd (categorised as early and late) to build an accurate picture of what Shepherd believes constitutes saving faith. As the paper unfolds it will make use of the historical survey to compare and contrast saving faith in Shepherd's writings with that of Reformed orthodoxy making tentative conclusions along the way. After this has been completed a brief survey of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the same matters will allow a more conclusive comparison and contrast between saving faith in the Confession and saving faith in Shepherd's writings.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF SAVING FAITH

The Instrumental Function of Faith in Justification

Historically Reformed theology speaks of being justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially.¹ With few exceptions, it has managed to maintain the biblical relationship of faith and works to justification without confusing either the ground of our justification or the nature of saving faith.² This is reflected in the major Reformed creeds that stipulate faith as ‘only an instrument’ or as ‘the alone instrument through which we are justified.’³ Understood in this way, faith is the means and not the cause of justification, and as such has no merit in itself. Accordingly, faith is an instrument and not a condition of justification to avoid the implication that faith causes justification.

However, some Reformed writers have used the term condition but only in the sense of the necessary order in which justification comes. Robert Shaw notes:

Some worthy divines have called faith a condition, who were far from being of the opinion that it is a condition properly called, on the performance of which men should, according to the gracious covenant of God, have a right to justification as their reward. They merely intended, that without faith we cannot be justified – that faith must precede justification in the order of time or of nature. But as the term condition is very ambiguous, and calculated to mislead the ignorant, it should be avoided.⁴

Rather than thinking of faith as a condition, some Reformed scholars have spoken of faith as the hand that receives Christ, as an expression of the instrumental nature of faith in relation to justification.⁵ The concern at all times is to be quite clear that faith is not the cause of

¹ Rowland Ward, “Some Thoughts on Theology and Justification” *The Presbyterian Banner*, 2002 [cited 6 October 2005]. Available from http://www.pressiechurch.org/Theol_1/some_thoughts_on_covenant_Ward2.htm.

² This is not to say that works have no part in Reformed theology, since Reformed scholars have always maintained that though we are justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies, is never alone.

³ J.R Beeke, and S Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999). Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 22 and the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 11.2, 94-95.

⁴ Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Inverness: Christian Focus 1974. Francis Turretin and John Owen are two such divines.

⁵ Don Kistler, ed., *Justification by Faith Alone* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995) 67-68. Examples are Augustus Toplady *The Complete Works of Augustus Toplady* (1794; re-released in America by Sprinkle Publications in 1987) pp. 441-442. Charles Spurgeon “Saving Faith” (Sermon preached on March 15, 1874) [cited 6 October 2005] at <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1162.htm>.

justification (meritorious or non meritorious), but the means by which the sinner may be imputed with the merits of Jesus Christ and therefore stand justified before the bar of God.

Hienrich Heppe summarising the Reformers' teaching states the following, 'regards justification faith is purely a passive thing, bringing nothing of ours to conciliate God, but receiving from Christ what we lack.'⁶ As Reymond acknowledges:

The Reformers' clarity of vision respecting the instrumental function of faith with the real repository of salvific power being Christ himself and Christ alone resulted from their recognition that Scripture everywhere represents saving faith as (1) the gift of grace, (2) the diametrical opposite of law keeping with regards to its referent and (3) the only human response to God's effectual summons which comports with grace.⁷

Faith then 'consists not in doing something but in receiving something.'⁸ Hodge is equally emphatic regarding the instrumental function of faith:

It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ... It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or the nature of faith; and in this the whole biblical representation centers, so that we could not more radically misconceive it then by transferring to faith even the smallest fraction of that saving energy which is attributed in the Scriptures solely to Christ Himself.⁹

Faith then justifies because it reaches out and receives the righteousness of Christ offered in the gospel, of itself it has no saving power, other than the means through which the Father justifies us. Faith then in Reformed thinking functions as the instrument through which the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to those who believe. Thus the Reformed can speak of being justified by Christ meritoriously and by faith instrumentally.¹⁰

⁶ Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: Wakeman Great Reprints, 1951) 554. Also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). "For, as regards justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ what we lack." Book III. xiii. 5.

⁷ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998, 731.

⁸ J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* Pennsylvania, USA: Banner Of Truth, 1991, 172.

⁹ Morton H. Smith, "Justification by Faith Alone." *Katekomen* 14, no. 1 (2002): 1-14, 4.

¹⁰ The full statement of course is 'justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially.'

The Nature of Saving Faith.

According to Robert Reymond ‘saving faith is comprised of three constituent elements: knowledge (notitia), assent (assensus) and trust (fiducia).’¹¹ Knowledge is first because faith comes from hearing God’s Word. Calvin suggests that true faith consists of the knowledge of God, and in particular, knowledge of his great mercy in Christ:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise of Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.¹²

Knowledge then is foundational to faith. Though knowledge of God’s saving activity in Christ is essential, it is not enough for the formation of saving faith. Calvin continues:

And it will not be enough for the mind to be illuminated by the Spirit of God unless the heart is also strengthened and supported by his power. In this matter the schoolmen go completely astray, who in considering faith identify it with a bare and simple assent arising out of knowledge, and leave out confidence and assurance of heart.¹³

Here Calvin grants that knowledge and assent are part of the nature of saving faith but insists that confidence and assurance should also accompany it. Here he is concerned to counter what he sees as the error of the schoolmen who argue that assent to the knowledge of God devoid of confidence or trust, is sufficient to save.¹⁴

Building upon the Reformers John Murray explains the relationship between assent and trust in the following manner, ‘As assensus is cognition passed into conviction, so fiducia is conviction passed into confidence.’¹⁵ Murray not only agrees with the ideas of Luther and Calvin that saving faith is more than mere assent, but also explains the process of how

¹¹ Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 726.

¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, III ii.7

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III ii.33

¹⁴ There is some doubt that this is a true picture of Catholicism, given that the New Catholic Encyclopedia states that saving faith is ‘fiducial assent to revealed truth.’ This challenges the common charge that Catholicism teaches that saving faith is ‘mere assent’. Perhaps the difference is that in Catholic teaching trust is understood as a characteristic of assent, as opposed to the Reformers, where it is a separate element.

knowledge moves from conviction to confidence in Christ and his salvific promises.¹⁶ For Murray the distinguishing character of faith is seen in this process of conviction (assent) to confidence (fiducia) as the believer rests and relies upon Jesus Christ for his redemption.¹⁷

Gordon Clark has challenged this common view of the threefold nature of saving faith insisting it is knowledge and assent only,

...faith by definition is assent to understood propositions. Not all cases of assent, even assent to biblical propositions, are saving faith; but all saving faith is assent to one or more biblical propositions.¹⁸

Here Clark states that knowledge of certain propositions concerning the Bible may not constitute saving faith. For example, even if someone assents to the knowledge that the world was created in six days, this does not constitute saving faith. Nonetheless, Clark argues that all saving faith is assent to certain biblical propositions and in particular the doctrine of atonement. He does acknowledge however: ‘the Reformers wanted to say something else. In addition to believing, that is, understanding and accepting, fides was said to include and require fiducia.’¹⁹

Nevertheless, according to Clark ‘the term fiducia, which today is often confidently joined with knowledge and assent to make the definition of faith, has never been unambiguously explained.’²⁰ He states (though does not attempt to justify) that ‘saving faith remains an intellectual assent – not to any random proposition, such as “there is one God” but to the doctrine of the atonement.’²¹

¹⁵ John Murray *Collected Writings of John Murray 2: Systematic Theology*. 1984 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977, 258. Also see A.A Hodge *The Confession of Faith*. 1983 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1869, 206-207. Also L Berkhof *Systematic Theology*. 1988 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958, 503ff.

¹⁶ Clark, *Saving Faith*, 147.

¹⁷ Murray, *Collected Writings*, 258-259.

¹⁸ Clark, *Saving Faith*, 88

¹⁹ Ibid., 147.

²⁰ Ibid., 150.

²¹ Ibid., 157.

In rejecting the Reformers' definition Clark represents a minority view, since the Heidelberg Catechism reflecting Continental Reformed thinking states saving faith 'is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for true all that God has revealed to us in his Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the Gospel in my heart.'²² Likewise the Westminster Confession of Faith reflects British Reformed thinking when it also defines saving faith as '...accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification...' ²³

Nonetheless it should be noted that there has been distinguished men throughout the history of Reformed thinking who have taught that confidence is an effect of saving faith but not the nature of saving faith, Heppe summarises:

Some think, among them Beza and Zanchius, that this trust is rather hope and the result and effect of faith rather than the form of faith itself or part of it. We, however, with all respect to the Judgement of these gentlemen, feel together with most writers of the Reformed Church and among them Calvin and Luther along with all Luther's disciples, that trust is the very form of faith as justifying and its noblest part, or at least that it is included in justifying faith.²⁴

Whether saving faith included trust as the majority of Reformed writers believed or it was considered part of assent, or an effect of saving faith, as the minority taught, what is clear from our survey is that saving faith is passive, as well as being instrumental when it comes to Justification. In Reformed thinking, faith functions as the hand that reaches out, receives, and rests upon Christ and his righteousness for justification.

²² Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 94.

²³ Ibid., 95.

²⁴ Heppe. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 534.

The Relationship of Faith to Repentance.

Like the function and nature of faith, generally there is agreement among Reformed scholars concerning the close relationship of faith to repentance. Murray writes, ‘it is impossible to disentangle faith and repentance. Saving faith is permeated with repentance and repentance with faith.’²⁵ However, allowing for a consensus, it should also be noted that there is disagreement concerning the priority of repentance and faith.

Some theologians have argued that repentance must precede faith and others have argued that repentance follows faith.²⁶ Like AA Hodge, Calvin held the view that repentance was a subset of faith teaching that it ‘not only constantly follows faith, but is also born of faith.’²⁷ Heppes summarising the continental theologians agrees,

...faith is always bound up with repentance, but it is not part of it. Faith is primarily a relation of man to Christ. Repentance on the other hand is a relation, resting on faith in Christ, of man to God and to God’s will. Therefore repentance can only enter in, where faith is already present as its presupposition.²⁸

Nevertheless, many Reformed writers maintain that you cannot separate the two, since repentance and faith are two aspects of the one event of conversion.²⁹ Williamson notes, ‘in faith and repentance we simply see the new nature beginning to assert itself.’ He then concludes, ‘...we must realize that repentance and faith are inseparable.’³⁰ Gordon Clarke goes further saying, ‘in this sense faith and repentance, both gifts of God, are the same thing.’³¹

Arguing that to ‘repent is to change one’s mind’ and to assent to propositions concerning God

²⁵ John Murray. *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955, 113.

²⁶ Hoekema. *Saved by Grace*, 123.

²⁷ Calvin. *Institutes*, III iii.1

²⁸ Heppes. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 574.

²⁹ Hoekema. *Saved by Grace*, 123. Also Murray “Redemption” 113.

³⁰ G.I. Williamson. *Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. Philadelphia, USA: Reformed and Presbyterian Publishing, 1964, 97. Williamson argues that repentance and faith accompany one another rather than follow one another.

³¹ Clark. *Saving Faith*, 51. Hence, the call to repentance (but no mention of faith) for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 34:45-47) and in other places no mention of repentance but a call to believe (John 3:16ff).

also requires changing one's mind, consequently, the two are essentially one.³² However, most Reformed scholars hold that though they should not be separated, they should be distinguished.

Consequently, because repentance and faith are a necessary expression of the new nature born of regeneration, Reformed scholars have taught that repentance like faith is necessary for salvation, as the Westminster Confession states it is 'of such necessity to all sinners that none may expect pardon without it.'³³ Not because it is necessary for regeneration, but as a necessary consequence of regeneration (like faith).³⁴

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this brief survey may be stated as follows: (1) saving faith functions instrumentally as the hand that reaches out and receives Christ and his righteousness and in this sense, saving faith is essentially passive regarding justification. (2) saving faith consists of the knowledge of God's mercy in Christ, and that saving faith is assent to such propositions that leads to a resting in Christ for the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of souls. (3) saving faith and repentance flow out of regeneration, and that properly understood, repentance is the mental activity of changing one's mind concerning God, sin and salvation.

Having drawn some historical conclusions on the meaning of saving faith in Reformed theology, this paper will now begin to evaluate the teachings of Norman Shepherd on this same matter. Afterwards saving faith in Shepherd's writings will be compared and contrasted with that of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Further conclusion will then be drawn highlighting similarities, yet significant differences, in their respective formulations.

³² Ibid., 51.

³³ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 109.

³⁴ This has led some scholars to view repentance and faith as conditions of justification; however, only ever in the sense of the necessary order in which justification comes.

SAVING FAITH IN THE EARLY WRITINGS OF NORMAN SHEPHERD

The Covenant Context for Evangelism.

In 1975 Norman Shepherd gave a paper at a presynodical conference of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America entitled 'The Covenant Context for Evangelism.'³⁵ Afterwards it was published as a chapter with the same title in 'The New Testament Student and Theology'.³⁶ In the opening comments of his paper Shepherd opines that as far as Reformed Churches are concerned, 'the purer the doctrine, the fewer the people.'³⁷ His paper seeks to establish three basic theses concerning evangelism and covenant. First, the Great Commission is patterned on the Abrahamic Covenant of Promise and Obligation. Second, that Reformed evangelistic methodology must be shaped by covenant [of grace] rather than the decrees of God. Third, baptism rather than regeneration is the point of transition from unbelief to belief, or from condemnation to salvation.³⁸

This paper contains in seminal form all of the theological concerns of Shepherd that would permeate his writings over the next thirty years. This paper will only be concerned with

³⁵ Norman Shepherd taught at Westminster Theological Seminary following on from John Murray from 1963-1981. Controversial in his articulation of reformed theology, in particular his view on covenant and justification, he was embroiled in controversy from 1975-81 until the board of WTS finally relieved him of his teaching position. Charges then were filed against Mr Shepherd with his OPC Presbytery, however, Mr Shepherd left the OPC and joined the Christian Reformed Church where he is now a Minister Emeritus without these charges being pursued. The implications of this controversy are still being felt to this day in various reformed denominations while many of the faculty of WTS still remain sympathetic to Shepherd's teaching.

Some controversial aspects of Mr Shepherd's theology are his rejection of a covenant of works and the idea of merit, and as a consequence, the active obedience of Christ. His insistence that election and therefore salvation be viewed from the perspective of covenant as opposed to the eternal decrees of God and the role of baptism as marking one's entry into the covenant of grace and its benefits (which may be lost) are well known.

However, it is his view of justification by faith and works (non meritorious) that have consistently caused concern and objection. Consequently, in 1981 many notable Christian theologians and leaders including Roger Nicole, RC Sproul, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, O Palmer Robertson, Robert Reymond, George Knight III, W Stanford Reid, Morton Smith, Albert Martin, Robert Godfrey, W Hendrickson and Meredith Kline among others signed the infamous 'letter of forty five' expressing concern over Norman Shepherd's formulations that forced the board of Westminster Theological Seminary to act. Hence, the Norman Shepherd controversy.

³⁶ Norman Shepherd. *The Covenant Context for Evangelism*. Edited by John H Skilton, *The New Testament Student and Theology*. Nutley, USA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975.

³⁷ Ibid., 51.

³⁸ Sinclair Ferguson, 'Sinclair Ferguson's Critique of Norman Shepherd's the Covenant Context for Evangelism' *Banner of Truth*, July (1977): 3.

his first point, since Shepherd's thesis is that the 'Great Commission arises out of, is patterned after, and must be understood in the terms of, the covenant structure of the Old Testament, and in particular, in terms of the covenant with Abraham.'³⁹ According to Shepherd, privilege (getting in the covenant) entails responsibility (staying in the covenant).⁴⁰ This of course may be understood in a way that is consistent with Reformed teaching, specifically; obedience is the evidence of someone in covenant with God.⁴¹ However, it seems doubtful this is Shepherd's intention since he argues that "the covenant keeper par excellence is Jesus Christ..." and that such a pattern of 'covenant keeping' is the only way the promises (salvation) are to be realised.⁴²

Of course in Jesus' case this is true. The only way he could realise the promises attached to the Covenant of Redemption was to vicariously live and die on behalf of the elect and as such be the representative Covenant keeper in the Covenant of Grace.⁴³ Thus, his Covenant keeping was the means through which the Covenant promises are realised. However, Shepherd then argues that this pattern is the same found with Abraham and is the same pattern given in the Great Commission, and as such, it is the pattern for all who would claim to be Christian. Shepherd notes:

³⁹ Shepherd, 'The Covenant Context for Evangelism' 57.

⁴⁰ Shepherd does not use the New Perspective categories of 'getting in' and 'staying in' but as his theology unfolds the categories are similar. Traditionally Reformed theology has not used such categories because of its emphasis on election, as such, those who are in – stay in.

⁴¹ That we are justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially.

⁴² Ibid., 56. Accordingly, obedience then as (not faith alone) is the way of realising salvation.

⁴³ Reformed Theology teaches that the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit made a covenant or plan between themselves. This covenant or plan of redemption included God's choosing of a people to be saved (Eph 1:4 – Elect), through whom this salvation would be accomplished (Eph 3:11 - Christ) and through whom it would be applied (2 Thess 2:13 - Holy Spirit). The essence of this covenant was Jesus' willingness to become our representative and our righteousness (Rom 5:12ff) through his earthly life of obedience to God's law (Gal 4:4-5) and his atoning death as a propitiation to soak up God's wrath against sin (Rom 3:25). This results in the Father conferring (covenanting) a kingdom upon Jesus (Luke 22:29; Gal 3:9;16) where Jesus will rule and reign over his elect people. Consequently, the eternal covenant finds its expression in redemptive history through the Covenant of Works and Grace.

It is both striking and significant that the Great Commission is not given in either Matthew or Luke in terms of calling upon men to believe. Faith is not mentioned specifically, but only by implication. What is explicitly asserted is the call to repentance and good works. *When the call of faith is isolated from the call of obedience, as it frequently is, the effect is to make good works the supplement to salvation or simply the evidence of salvation.* Some would even make them an optional supplement. In terms of the Great Commission they belong to the essence of salvation, which is freedom from sin and not simply from sin's consequences. *Because the works are done in obedience to all that Christ has commanded, they are suffused and qualified by faith,* without which no man can please God (Heb 11:6).⁴⁴

It appears that Shepherd wants to say something different from orthodox formulations; otherwise, his call to rethink our paradigms and practices would be superfluous.⁴⁵

Consequently, one wonders when he uses the word salvation if he has in mind justification, if so, he is saying that repentance and good works are not 'simply the evidence of salvation', but of the 'very essence of salvation'. If however, he uses the term salvation in its broad sense, then he is correct to say that no one can expect to be saved without repentance and good works.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, it is notable when Shepherd observes that the Great Commission is bereft of any reference to faith, he seems to suggest that repentance and good works are its synonym. Shepherd realises there may be an objection that his thesis sounds a little like salvation by faith and works and so immediately qualifies his thesis by saying 'because the works are done in obedience to all that Christ has commanded, they are suffused and qualified by faith.'⁴⁷

The vagueness of some of his comments makes it difficult to assess at this point exactly what Shepherd believes regarding the relationship between faith, repentance and good works. However, since the Great Commission relates to gospel proclamation, repentance and faith, not covenant keeping (even if suffused with faith) has historically been understood as the required

⁴⁴ Ibid., 74 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁵ We are justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially.

⁴⁶ Here I understand salvation to refer to our union with Christ that results in regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification. See also Westminster Confession of Faith XV:III and XVI:II.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 74

response. Yet Shepherd's insistence on using the pattern of Jesus as a Covenant keeper (as the only way of realising the covenant promises) inevitably leads to the impression that covenant keeping (obedience) is the required response to Gospel proclamation.

Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance and Good Works.⁴⁸

Since Shepherd's teaching of covenant keeping raised concerns amongst some members of the faculty at Westminster Seminary, it was inevitable that these same concerns would also be raised in his own Presbytery. Consequently, to avoid charges being brought by the Presbytery an agreement was brokered in 1978 that Shepherd would produce a theological paper outlining his position for the Presbytery's scrutiny.

In presenting his thirty-four theses, Shepherd attempted to elucidate the relationship of faith, repentance and good works in a way that was consistent with his ordination vows to uphold, maintain and defend the system of doctrine found in the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁴⁹ Understandably, most of the thirty-four theses caused no concern, however, some of his theses continued to cause unease. As in his earlier writings, the confusion related to his insistence in defining faith as faithfulness, and an apparent unwillingness to acknowledge that there is a distinction that must be made between faith and its evidence or fruit, which is works. This becomes apparent in Theses 11, 19 and 20 where he writes:

Justifying faith is obedient faith, that is, 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6), and therefore faith that yields obedience to the commands of Scripture. [Thesis 11]

Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are his disciples, who walk in the Spirit and keep covenant with God, are in a state of justification and will be justified on the day of judgment; whereas unbelieving, ungodly, unrighteous, and impenitent sinners who are covenant breakers or strangers to the covenant of grace, are under the wrath and curse of God, and on the day of judgment will be condemned to hell forever, unless they flee from the wrath to come by turning to the Lord in faith and repentance (Psalm 1; John 5:28,29). [Thesis 19]

⁴⁸ This paper was presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on November 18, 1978. As the Shepherd controversy had now become public, this paper was meant to clarify his position and alleviate any theological concerns his Presbytery might have. It should also be noted that Shepherd wrote another paper before this one entitled "The Relationship of Good Works to Justification in the Westminster Standards" and it was presented to the faculty of WTS but Shepherd insists this was not meant to be made public and that it was intentionally explorative and even loose in its formulations. Though I have seen extracts of this and read responses to it by O Palmer Robertson "Nineteen Errors or Misleading Statements" I have chosen to omit this work on the basis that although it has found its way into the public domain Shepherd maintains it was a private document. I did email Shepherd (17/8/2005) asking if he was willing to furnish me a copy with the purpose of analysing it, but he chose not to respond.

⁴⁹ O. Palmer Robertson. *The Current Justification Controversy*. Tennessee, USA: The Trinity Foundation, 2003, 34-35.

The Pauline affirmation in Romans 2:13, 'the doers of the Law will be justified,' is not to be understood hypothetically in the sense that there are no persons who fall into that class, but in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified (compare Luke 8:21; James 1:22-25). [Thesis 20]⁵⁰

If Shepherd maintained the Reformed distinction between faith and its fruit, works, then thesis 11 is most acceptable. However, given theses 19 and 20 it becomes clear that in Shepherd's scheme, justification is a status that is maintained and confirmed on the Last Day predicated upon the believer's covenant keeping. For example, in thesis 20 he maintains that when Paul says 'it is the doers of the law that will be justified' it was not meant to be understood hypothetically but as the paradigm for all faithful believers, that all believers must be 'doers of the law.'⁵¹

Richard Phillips challenges Shepherd's reading of Scripture, and in particular his understanding of Romans 2 and James 2 as articulated in his thirty-four theses:

The problem here is not ambiguity of terminology, as has often been said in Shepherd's defense, but a clear refutation of a definition of faith distinct from works. He is asserting that justifying faith is not merely 'shown' by it works, as James 2:18 says and as the flow of James' argument indicates, but that justifying faith and its works are one and the same thing... Furthermore, Shepherd's scheme becomes clear when he adds that justification ultimately takes place at the final Judgement and that the obedient believer may lose his or her justification by failing to continue in faithful obedience... This is a far cry from the Reformed understanding of faith alone as the condition of the Covenant of Grace, that is, faith as trusting in what Jesus has done for us.⁵²

Phillips contends that Shepherd is not misunderstood as many suggest, but is clearly seeking to reformulate the definition of saving faith to be inclusive of good works. As a consequence,

⁵⁰ Norman Shepherd, 'Thirty-Four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works' 1978 [cited 21 July 2005 2005]. Available from http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/norman_shepherd/the_34_theses.htm. Theses 19-20.

⁵¹ Richard Phillips, 'Covenant Confusion.' (Paper presented at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformation Theology, Phoenix, USA, April, 2004) [cited 4 June 2005] 17pp at http://www.gpts.edu/resources/resource_covconfusion.html. See also Brian Schwertley, *A Defense Of "Active Obedience" of Jesus Christ in the Justification of Sinners: A Biblical Refutation of Norman Shepherd on the Perceptive Obedience of the Saviour* Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2004 [cited 29 March 2005 2005]. Available from <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/Active%20Obedience.htm>. Here Schwertley says Shepherd understands Rom 2:13 "...in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified."

⁵² Phillips, 'Covenant Confusion' 12-13.

Phillips notes that in Shepherd's scheme, the state of justification may in fact be lost, dependent upon the covenant obedience of the believer. Theses 21 and 22 seem to confirm such an assessment:

The exclusive ground of the justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his obedience, which is simply the perseverance of the saints in the way of truth and righteousness, is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification (Heb. 3:6, 14). [Thesis 21]

The righteousness of Jesus Christ ever remains the exclusive ground of the believer's justification, but the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Heb. 12:14). [Thesis 22]⁵³

It is difficult to read Shepherd's theses in any other way than justification being maintained by covenant keeping (obedience). The question arises, is justification contingent upon covenant keeping (obedience) or upon the finished work of Jesus Christ? If the former then we must conclude that justification is a process, if the latter, then we can say it is a once for all event (declaration) that does not take our obedience into account, but the obedience of Jesus Christ alone.

Shepherd's attempts to answer the question only prove how elusive a clear answer will be. Shepherd affirms that the righteousness of Christ is the exclusive grounds of the believer's justification, but before we even have time to digest such an affirmation he immediately equivocates:

The righteousness of Jesus Christ ever remains the exclusive ground of the believer's justification, but the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the judgment of the last day (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Heb. 12:14). [Thesis 23]⁵⁴

One can only assume that the ambiguity of Thesis 23 is intentional. Having affirmed that Christ is the exclusive ground of justification, he then states that the believer's personal godliness is also necessary. Again the question must be asked, how can Christ be the exclusive ground of justification if the believer's obedience is necessary for justification?

⁵³ Shepherd, 'Thirty-four Thesis', Theses 21-22.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Thesis 23.

The only consistent explanation is that justification is not a once for all verdict but a process that culminates at Judgement Day and takes into account the believer's personal godliness (obedience). Yet Shepherd maintains that it is 'by faith the sinner receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness... and in this way is justified.'⁵⁵ How then can he teach that works are necessary to justification whilst affirming we are justified by faith? The answer to this apparent contradiction is Shepherd's definition of saving faith. For Shepherd, saving faith is inclusive of non-meritorious good works, and such works (properly understood) are the inevitable outcome of Christ's righteousness infused into the believer. In this way, he can teach that works are necessary to justification while affirming we are justified by faith.

However, though this might afford a coherent reading of Shepherd, it must also be said that such a reading is out of step with Reformed theology. It becomes increasingly clear that this is brought about due to his conflation of the doctrine of justification and sanctification in what he understands to be the obligations of the covenant. This puts him at odds with Reformed theologians who have always maintained that good works are the way of salvation (sanctification), but not the way of justification.⁵⁶ As Waters notes:

Shepherd confounds two propositions that the Reformed have always affirmed: (a) one's claim to justification is contingent on his continuing righteousness; (b) one's justification itself is not contingent on his continuing righteousness. What's at stake, when we consider works, is not our justification, but the validity of our profession.⁵⁷

Shepherd's conflation of the categories of justification and sanctification, which he incorporates under the term salvation, inevitably leads to a conflation of faith and its fruit and evidence, obedience. If the categories of justification and sanctification were consistently maintained (kept distinct) though understood to be related, then it would be easier to maintain and relate saving faith and its various fruit.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Thesis 6.

⁵⁶ Guy Prentiss Waters. *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul*. New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2004, 210.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 210.

CONCLUSION

We may note that in Shepherd's early writings several features emerge regarding the conflation of several theological categories. There is a tendency to equate faith with repentance and obedience, as well as confusing the salvific categories of justification and sanctification. This confusion is compounded by his preference for the categories of covenant promises and obligations without clearly articulating their correspondence and relationship to one another.

It becomes increasingly obvious that Shepherd's usage of the covenant categories to describe salvation and how it is received, is designed to allow faithfulness as opposed to faith, to be the condition (instrument) through which the righteousness of Christ will ultimately be imputed. In this way, he can say that works are necessary to justification while still affirming we are justified by faith, since saving faith is inclusive of non-meritorious good works.

SAVING FAITH IN THE LATER WRITINGS OF NORMAN SHEPHERD

Call Of Grace and Law and Gospel in Covenant Perspective

Since 2000, Shepherd's book 'The Call of Grace' as well as articles in various journals and a chapter in the book 'Backbone of the Bible' has been published.⁵⁸ Unremarkably, his book 'The Call of Grace,' as well as his pamphlet 'Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective' draw upon similar arguments and follow a similar outline as his first work 'The Covenant Context for Evangelism.' First, he seeks to establish a covenant paradigm of promise and obligation, with the main thrust being 'just as Jesus was faithful in order to guarantee the blessing, so his followers must be faithful in order to inherit the blessing.'⁵⁹ Then he outlines what he believes to be obligations or conditions that Jesus' followers must meet to inherit the blessings of salvation.⁶⁰ As in his earlier writings Shepherd states that promise and obligation always go together, just as the gospel promises of eternal life form one side of the New Covenant, obligation forms the other side.⁶¹

What then becomes apparent is that these conditions or obligations of the covenant (faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance) are what he understands to be saving faith. He calls these obligations, conditions that are indispensable to the enjoyment of salvation.⁶² By salvation, he means justification, this is patent when he writes 'the gospel promises pardon for

⁵⁸ He has written *Call of Grace*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2000 . 'Justification by Faith Alone.' *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11, no. 2 (2002): 75-89. *Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology*. Edited by Andrew Sandlin, *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective*. Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2004. *Justification by Works in Reformed Theology*. Edited by Andrew Sandlin, *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective*. Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2004. 'Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective.' Paper presented at the Trust and Obey: A Symposium on Law and Gospel, Illinois, 11/3/2004 2004.

⁵⁹ Shepherd. *Call of Grace*, 19.

⁶⁰ In *Call of Grace* he states the four obligations/conditions are faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance, 45-50. In 'Law and Gospel' he states the obligations/conditions are faith, repentance and obedience, 11-12. This is similar to 'Covenant Context' where he states the four obligations/conditions are faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance.

⁶¹ Ibid., 45.

⁶² Ibid., 50. It should also be noted that a pursuant obligation is not the same as a preceding condition.

sin and acceptance by God. It promises eternal life after the final judgment.’⁶³ Shepherd then teaches that the forensic act of justification is only realised and made fruitful through faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance.⁶⁴ This is a severe departure from Reformed theology. How can repentance (understood as deeds), obedience and perseverance which of course requires a lifetime be conditions of justification (a once for all judgment that occurs at conversion) unless in fact justification occurs after this life? What emerges in Shepherd’s writings is that justification is a state that is maintained by covenant keeping and only ever confirmed at the end of the ages.

Shepherd’s insistence that the only way of realising the covenant promises (justification etc) is to meet the conditions of faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance, is in stark contrast to Reformed orthodoxy. Whereas to avoid the implication that faith causes justification, Reformed theologians have taught that faith is an instrument but not a condition of justification. Nevertheless, even allowing for usage of the term condition, it must only be understood in the sense of the necessary order in which justification comes. This is also true of repentance since to ‘repent is to change one’s mind’ and to assent to propositions concerning God also requires changing one’s mind, consequently, the two (faith and repentance) are essentially one, repentance is a subset of faith.⁶⁵

It is at this point that Shepherd’s divergence for Reformed teaching becomes quite pronounced. For Shepherd believes it is faithfulness and not faith that justifies. And when the Bible speaks of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, it has in mind actual deeds as opposed to an essentially epistemic understanding of repentance. For example, he writes ‘Notice how Paul calls his hearers not simply to faith, but to faith and repentance.’⁶⁶ Shepherd’s concern here is

⁶³ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

not to deny the relationship, since he believes repentance is part of saving faith, but to illustrate what he believes is the non-epistemic nature of repentance. Calvin Beisner however illustrates the weakness of this position when he writes,

...when Peter instructs the listeners to his Pentecost sermon as to what they must do [to be saved from God's Judgement], he says "you [plural] repent for the remission of your [plural] sins, and let each [singular] of you be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.." (acts 2:38 my translation) he does not mention faith. Why not? Because it is implicit in repentance; repentance is faith, faith is repentance. When Paul and Silas instruct the Philippian jailer what he must do to be saved, they say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.." (Acts 16:31) They do not mention repentance. why not? Because it is implicit in faith, faith is repentance and repentance is faith.⁶⁷

Beisner, like Reformed theologians before him maintains the essential epistemic nature of repentance and its symbiotic relationship to faith. Although Shepherd agrees, 'repentance and faith are indissolubly tied together' he also maintains that 'Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 24:47).'⁶⁸ Therefore, 'Repentance is not simply a mental act. It is not simply sorrow for sin, but a turning away from sin (Acts 26:20).'⁶⁹ He continues:

The New Testament, as well as the Old, clearly teaches that repentance entails more than sorrow for sin. Repentance includes turning away from sin and making a new beginning. When Paul defends of his ministry before king Agrippa he says, 'first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds' (acts 26:20).⁷⁰

However, 'Paul does not say that repentance includes turning away from sin, he says it is proved by deeds (in this case, turning away from sin).'⁷¹ In other words, there is a necessary distinction that should be made between repentance and its fruit (turning away from sin) just as it is necessary to differentiate faith and its fruit (obedience). But by maintaining that 'making a

⁶⁷ Calvin E Beisner, *Critical Comments on Norman Shepherd's the Call of Grace* 2001 [cited 21 September 2005]. Available at <http://www.paulperspective.com/docs/beisner2.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Shepherd, 'Law and Gospel' 12.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁰ Shepherd, *Call of Grace*, 47.

⁷¹ Beisner, *Critical Comments*, 5.

new beginning' is a necessary condition of justification he makes justification dependent on the ongoing fruit of repentance and not the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Shepherd then continues to outline the conditions to be met for justification; 'faith produces repentance, and repentance is evident in the lifestyle of the believer. Thus, the obligations of the new covenant include not only faith and repentance, but also *obedience*.'⁷² He affirms this elsewhere when he writes,

...the Lord leads us into possession of all he has promised by way of obedience... Just as faith and repentance are indissolubly tied together so also are repentance and obedience. True faith bears fruit in repentance and obedience, and this is the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).⁷³

Here Shepherd defines what he calls 'true faith.' And whilst it is accurate to say that 'true faith bears fruit in repentance and obedience' it is quite another to say "he leads us into possession" of the covenant promises (justification) by way of obedience. Whereas, faith that is repentance, or faith that includes repentance, is the instrument through which the righteousness of Christ (justification) is imputed to believers, obedience certainly is not.⁷⁴

The Bible treats obedience as the evidence of salvation but never a condition of salvation. Nevertheless, Shepherd views obedience as the obedience of faith, or the fullness of faith or more simply, faithfulness to the Lord.⁷⁵ And it is through the obedience of faith that the believer is led into the possession of eternal life. Beisner writes:

If we say that the obedience that is the fruit of justifying faith must precede justification as its condition, then we have failed to distinguish between faith (the cause) and works/obedience (the effect), and we have again destroyed the faith/works distinction that lies at the foundation of Paul's insistence that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28).⁷⁶

⁷² Shepherd, *Call of Grace*, 47, (His emphasis).

⁷³ Shepherd, 'Law and Gospel' 12.

⁷⁴ Beisner, *Critical Comments* 6.

⁷⁵ Shepherd, *Call of Grace*, 39.

⁷⁶ Beisner, *Critical Comments*, 7.

Shepherd not only blurs the biblical distinctions, he also endangers the once for all nature of justification as a forensic act of God. Given that justification is the gateway to eternal life, it is evident that Shepherd understands justification (as opposed to vindication) as occurring at the last day. In this way, obedience throughout the believer's life (sanctification) becomes the condition to final justification in Shepherd's covenantal scheme.

Shepherd concludes his understanding of saving faith with the inclusion of perseverance as a condition of justification.⁷⁷ It may be that he is simply suggesting one must continue to believe the promises of God in Christ. However, this is not the case, since Shepherd is adamant that the book of Hebrews teaches us it is perseverance in works not belief, which is required. He elucidates further:

The book of Hebrews is quite significant in this respect. The whole book is a call to those who have professed faith in Jesus to persevere in that faith. 'We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. "...How do we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Heb 2:1,3) Similarly, Hebrews 10:35-36 exhorts the readers, "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

Notice that it is not simply perseverance in belief, but perseverance in doing the will of God. This is the way in which you receive what has been promised as a gift of sovereign grace.⁷⁸

Shepherd reminds the reader that Hebrews is not encouraging 'perseverance in belief, but perseverance in doing the will of God.' In juxtaposing the two, we are meant to understand that the way of receiving the promises is persevering in good works. Although he asserts this, he certainly hasn't proved it, in fact, it seems certain that the reference to doing God's will is to heed the command to believe in Christ Jesus. Heb 10:37, 39b reads, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by *faith*.' Therefore, he concludes that they are 'those who *believe* and are saved.'⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Shepherd, *Call of Grace*, 48. In his later work 'Law and Gospel' this fourth obligation of saving faith is absent, no explanation is offered as to why.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48-9.

⁷⁹ Italics mine for emphasis.

While it is true to say that those who are justified will persevere in faith and this will be evident in obedience, it is most unhelpful to say that perseverance in obedience is the way one is justified. Yet Shepherd is adamant on what constitutes the conditions of eternal life:

They are conditions, but they are not meritorious conditions. Faith is required, but faith looks away from personal merit to the promises of God. Repentance and obedience flow from faith as the fullness of faith. This is faithfulness, and faithfulness is perseverance in faith. A living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life.⁸⁰

Whilst any fair reading of Shepherd must acknowledge his disavowal of any idea that the believer merits his or her own salvation, it must also be acknowledge that Shepherd is challenging the Reformed view that faith that is repentance, or faith that includes repentance, is the instrument of justification, and therefore eternal life. Shepherd is advocating ‘faithfulness’ as the instrument of justification and consequently repentant deeds and obedience to the will of God throughout the believer’s life (sanctification) are conditional to being justified. This is plain when he writes, ‘The free gift of salvation is received through faith, and saving faith is not dead faith, but a living and active faith.’⁸¹

This is in contrast to Reformed theology, which speaks of being justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially. Shepherd advocates justification by Christ meritoriously, and by faithfulness instrumentally. Sanctification then is the fullness or essence of the faith in Shepherd’s thinking and as such, is the instrument of justification. Mark Karlberg concludes his assessment of Shepherd with the following observation,

...the primary thesis can be summarized as follows: the way of salvation, i.e., justification, is the way of faith and good works. The faith that saves-the faith that justifies-is active, living and abiding. It perseveres to the end. The way or ‘instrument’ of justification (though Shepherd does not employ the term ‘instrument’) is faith and works.⁸²

⁸⁰ Shepherd. *Call of Grace*, 57

⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

⁸² Mark Karlberg, ‘Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism.’ *Trinity Journal* 22:1 (Spring 2001): 136.

Consequently, Shepherd's writings are often ambiguous, because although he can say we are saved by faith, what he means is that we are saved by faithfulness. Saving faith then is faithfulness, or as he often puts it, covenant keeping. What we find in Shepherd is that justification is never distinct from sanctification, yet neither is the relationship properly explained. What Shepherd wants to teach is not altogether clear until he relates saving faith, justification and salvation together in the *ordo salutis*.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE⁸³

In his article published in *Reformation and Revival* journal, Shepherd at last seeks to relate his understanding of saving faith to that of justification, indeed, he finally articulates where he sees it appearing in the *ordo salutis*. Hence, he begins his article by asking what ‘we mean when we say that justification is by faith alone?’ In other words, ‘How should we understand it?’⁸⁴ Because it is clear to anyone who has read Shepherd he does not like the phrase ‘justification by faith alone,’ because he believes it encourages a serious misunderstanding of the gospel.⁸⁵ Moreover, although Shepherd does finally endorse *sola fide*, he does so, only after severe qualification.

Shepherd outlines in the beginning of his article the trajectories in which he wants to go. At the outset, he flags his discontent with the historical understanding of *sola fide*, by questioning the common understanding of it in the Confession,

...although ‘justification by faith alone’ is commonly used among us, the interesting thing is the Westminster Standards do not use the formula. Neither the Confession nor the Catechisms say that we are justified by faith alone. What they do say is that faith is ‘the alone instrument of qualification.’ Now we have to ask, What is meant by this formula [*sic*] And is it the same as saying justification by faith alone?⁸⁶

Here Shepherd drives a wedge between ‘justification by faith alone’ and faith as the ‘alone instrument of justification.’ He argues that when the Confession states that faith is the alone instrument its concern is to say, ‘faith is not the ground of our justification’ but only the instrument through which the righteousness of Christ is imputed and on this ground alone, God declares us righteous.⁸⁷ He argues that the Divines were attempting to counter the idea

⁸³ Norman Shepherd, ‘Justification by Faith Alone.’ *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11, no. 2 (2002): 75-89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 76

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-77. The reference to the WCF is chapter 11 and section 2.

promoted by Roman Catholicism that there were other instruments of justification, namely baptism.

According to Shepherd their concern was to exclude baptism as an instrument of justification. And this desire to exclude baptism led the Divines to say faith was the ‘alone instrument’ and not any desire to say that faith alone (minus works) justifies. Quoting the Westminster Confession Shepherd writes ‘Justifying faith is never alone, “but ever accompanied with all other saving graces.”’⁸⁸ Thus he argues, ‘...justifying faith does not have the other gifts and graces added to it at a later point, after it has brought about justification, but is itself a living, active, and obedient faith.’⁸⁹ Shepherd is tilling the theological soil so that he might plant the idea that when the Confession says, ‘faith alone,’ it means faithfulness alone and not faithfulness plus baptism.

Under the heading of ‘Obedient Faith,’ Shepherd quotes from chapter 14 section 2 concerning saving faith and correctly notes that saving faith is of course justifying faith. He then jumps to chapter 16, section 2 and attempts to clear up what he thinks may be a misunderstanding of the Confession. Concerning good works (evangelical obedience) the confession states, ‘...good works, done in obedience to God’s commandment, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.’⁹⁰ This of course sits well with Reformed theology that speaks of being justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially.⁹¹ However, according to Shepherd we must not think that works are only evidences, as if somehow faith could exist without them, but remember that faith is never, ever alone.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 80-81.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁹¹ Rowland Ward, ‘Some Thoughts on Theology and Justification’ The Presbyterian Banner, 2002 [cited 6 October 2005. Available from http://www.pressiechurch.org/Theol_1/some_thoughts_on_covenant_Ward2.htm.

Finally, Shepherd makes his theological argument why justification is inclusive of repentant deeds and obedience, when he states:

It is after chapter 13 on sanctification that the Confession goes on to deal with saving faith, repentance and good works in chapters 14,15,16. The point is, of course, that saving faith does not precede the new birth, but follows upon regeneration. Regeneration initiates the process of sanctification, and saving faith, or justifying faith, emerges in the believer in the process of sanctification. This process brings to life not only faith but also repentance and obedience. Just this priority of regeneration to faith explains why faith can never be alone ‘but is ever accompanied with all the other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.’⁹²

There are a number of problems with what Shepherd has to say here. First, he suggests the order of the chapters in the Confession are suggestive that sanctification precedes saving faith, repentance and good works, a suggestion that is clearly at odds with the confession itself. It is obvious to most, that chapters 10-18 do not follow the *ordo salutis* but chapters 10-13 deal with the acts of God, and chapters 14-18 deal with the acts of men.⁹³ As Waldron notes, ‘the order of the confession actually suggests (when properly understood) that justification precedes sanctification and that faith precedes repentance and good works. The order of the confession suggests, in other words, the very view that Shepherd rejects.’⁹⁴

Shepherd argues that ‘faith is logically prior to justification’ and that faith comes from regeneration and regeneration is the ‘initiation of sanctification.’ Faith according to Shepherd ‘emerges in the believer in the process of sanctification.’⁹⁵ Though Shepherd does not draw the obvious conclusion, one must assume that justification also emerges in the process of sanctification. This of course would explain Shepherd’s insistence that faith, repentant deeds,

⁹² Shepherd, ‘Justification by Faith Alone.’ 83.

⁹³ Beeke, *Reformed Confessions*, 89-127. The WCF articulates the acts of God – chp.10 effectual calling; chp.11 justification; chp.12 adoption; chp.13 sanctification and the acts of men chp.14 saving faith; chp.15 repentance; chp.16 good works; chp.17 perseverance; and chp.18 assurance

⁹⁴ Samuel Waldron, ‘John Calvin versus Norman Shepherd on Sola Fide’ *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* Vol 11, No.2 (July, 2005): 87-106.

⁹⁵ Shepherd, ‘Justification by Faith Alone.’ 83.

good works and perseverance (all part of the sanctification process) are all conditions to justification.

Responding to Shepherd's contention that 'faith emerges in the process of sanctification' Waldron contends, 'Even if one grants that regeneration is to be understood as the inception of sanctification and the origin of faith, this does not mean that faith emerges within the *process* of sanctification. At most, it means that faith originates at the *inception* of sanctification.'⁹⁶ Waldron could have even been more forthright, the chapter on saving faith in the Westminster Confession is quite devastating for Shepherd's contention, since we read, 'the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life.'⁹⁷ It is self evident that if sanctification is by means of faith, it cannot therefore precede faith in the *ordo salutis*. The confession teaches that effectual calling (regeneration) produces faith; faith joins us to Christ (actual or realised union), and justification, sanctification and eternal life flow from that actual union of Christ Jesus and those in him.

What becomes apparent is that Shepherd following on from John Murray adheres to a different *ordo salutis* pertaining to actual union with Christ. Robert Reymond makes the following observations concerning Murray's *ordo salutis* '...Murray's insistence that it is effectual calling that *actually* unites one to Christ and that it is this union with Christ which then unites one to the inwardly operative grace of regeneration that enables a sinner to repent and believe.'⁹⁸ Whereas the Westminster shorter catechism teaches, 'The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, *by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ* in our effectual calling.'⁹⁹ The difference here is that it is through the instrumentality of faith in

⁹⁶ Ibid., 92 (Emphasis his).

⁹⁷ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 95, emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ Robert Reymond. *A New Systematic Theology* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998, 736.

⁹⁹ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 91. Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.30.

Christ, that those chosen ‘in Christ’ before the foundation of heaven and earth actually become united to Christ.¹⁰⁰ Consequently then, all the saving graces (justification, adoption, definitive and progressive sanctification etc) flow from the actual (realised) union of Christ and the believer.

However, Shepherd building on Murray argues that at the point of effectual calling (regeneration) there is actual union with Christ. And since regeneration initiates the process of sanctification, he then concludes that saving faith, or justifying faith, emerges in the believer in the process of sanctification. Moreover, it would appear that Shepherd posits regeneration and therefore actual union with Christ at baptism when he writes, ‘...covenant sign and seal marks conversion and entrance into the Church as the body of Christ. From the perspective of covenant, he is united to Christ when he is baptized.’¹⁰¹ Therefore, given that baptism is union with Christ and all the saving graces flow from the actual union of Christ and the believer, it has become obvious for the first time, how Shepherd’s soteriology functions in the context of covenant.

Baptism then, is the point of ‘conversion or entrance’ into the body of Christ, and so it is true to say that sanctification has now already commenced.¹⁰² And that the promises of eternal life are conditioned on covenant keeping, that is, justification is conditioned upon faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance. Consequently, since saving faith emerges from the process of sanctification, justification is by way of non-meritorious works of faith performed in throughout the life of the believer. Waldron comes to the same conclusion regarding Shepherd’s soteriology when he says, ‘Thus, when Shepherd affirms justification by faith

¹⁰⁰ Reymond. *Systematic Theology*, 736.

¹⁰¹ Shepherd. *Call of Grace*, 94.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 94.

alone, he means justification by works of faith alone and not works of merit.¹⁰³ David Linden draws the same conclusion, though he articulates it in a slightly more acidic fashion:

In this article, by invalid reasoning, strained distinctions and nuances hard to grasp, the door of justification had been propped open for good works to enter in as a component of faith itself. His Trojan horse is his reworked definition of faith, but the enemy hidden inside this faith with a new definition turns out to be our obedience.¹⁰⁴

It is now unmistakable that Shepherd teaches salvation by way of non-meritorious works of faith. It is justification by faithfulness. Instead of justification by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially, Shepherd advocates justification by Christ meritoriously, and by faithfulness instrumentally.

¹⁰³ Waldron, 'John Calvin versus Norman Shepherd' 96.

¹⁰⁴ David Linden, 'A Review of Justification by Faith Alone in Reformation and Revival Journal Vol 11, Number 2, Spring 2002' 2003 [cited 23 July 2005.] Available from www.grebeweb.com/linden/ntw-just_aug2.html.

CONCLUSION

Previously, it has been difficult to piece together all that Shepherd says about the categories of promise and obligation and relate that comparatively to the more traditional Reformed categories. Despite these challenges, from the outset it has been unmistakable that to his mind, saving faith is composed of faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance. Furthermore, he has repeatedly written that faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance are non-meritorious conditions of justification that must be met if one is to be saved.

Although he has also spoken of justification as a forensic act, at the same time he speaks of the need of evangelical obedience to be justified. Where evangelical obedience is required, so is time, justification then is a process with moral renewal as its foundation. Final justification then is posited at the last day, which is why he maintains ‘...the personal godliness of the believer is also necessary for his justification in the Judgement of the last day.’¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, Shepherd reminds us that abiding in Christ and keeping his commandments ‘are all necessary for continuing in the state of justification’ that will apparently become final at the last day.¹⁰⁶

The conclusion of this paper is that saving faith in the writings of Norman Shepherd is significantly different from the historical Reformed understanding as expressed through the majority of Reformed scholars and its creeds. We now turn to the Westminster Confession of Faith to discover what it says concerning saving faith and compare and contrast the two.

¹⁰⁵ Shepherd, ‘Thirty-four Theses’, Thesis 22.

¹⁰⁶ Shepherd, ‘Thirty-four Theses’, Thesis 23.

SAVING FAITH IN THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

WCF Chapter 14 - Saving Faith and Chapter 16 Good Works.

Having argued that saving faith is faith, repentance, works and perseverance, Shepherd also states that ‘when the call to faith is isolated from the call to obedience, as it is frequently, the effect is to make good works a supplement to salvation or the evidence of salvation.’¹⁰⁷ According to Shepherd this is a terrible mistake since evangelical obedience ‘belongs to the essence of salvation.’¹⁰⁸ Consequently, Shepherd is consistent in his rejection of the distinction between faith and its evidence or fruit, which is works. According to Shepherd ‘Justifying faith is obedient faith.’¹⁰⁹ Richard Phillips comments, ‘He is asserting that justifying faith is not merely “shown” by its works, as James 2:18 says and as the flow of James’ argument indicates, but that justifying faith and its works are one and the same thing...’¹¹⁰

However, saving faith in the Confession is clearly distinguished from its fruit or evidence. Although saving faith is never bereft of the other saving graces, it is not the same either. Consequently, the Confession says:

By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.¹¹¹

It is important to note that saving faith is assent. That is, it believes as true whatsoever is revealed in the Word of God. However saving faith not only assents, but also trusts, as the Confession says, ‘accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for justification.’¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Shepherd. *Call of Grace*, 104.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁹ Shepherd, ‘Thirty four Theses’, Theses 11 and 19.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, ‘Covenant Confusion’, Pg 12-13.

¹¹¹ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 95. WCF 14.2.

¹¹² Ibid.

Although faith believes all that is written in God's Word the principal acts are 'accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for justification.'¹¹³ John Murray explains the relationship between assent and trust in the following manner, 'As assensus is cognition passed into conviction, so fiducia is conviction passed into confidence.'¹¹⁴ For Murray (like the Confession) the distinguishing character of faith is seen in this process of conviction (assent) to confidence (fiducia) as the believer rests and relies upon Jesus Christ for their redemption.¹¹⁵ However, unlike Shepherd, the confession distinguishes between faith and its fruit. Hodge commenting on chapter 14 section 2 says saving faith,

...is proved by what are said to be the effects or fruits of faith. By faith the Christian is said to be 'persuaded of the promises;' 'to obtain them;' 'to embrace them;' 'to subdue kingdoms;' 'to work righteousness;' 'to stop mouths of lions;' Heb xi.'¹¹⁶

Consequently, faith assenting to the revelation of God is evidenced by various responses like obedience, trembling and embracing the promises of God. However, these proofs, or evidences of faith are not the essence of faith as Shepherd contends, but the fruits and evidences of faith. The relationship of faith and works is not one of essence but one of evidence. In the words of the Confession 'good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith...'¹¹⁷

Shepherd however continually stresses that justification by faith has always meant, 'by a true and living faith.'¹¹⁸ In 'Call of Grace' he elucidates what this 'living, active and abiding faith is when he writes:

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ John Murray. *Collected Writings of John Murray 2: Systematic Theology*. 1984 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977, 258. Also see A.A Hodge *The Confession of Faith*. 1983 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1869, 206-207. Also L Berkhof *Systematic Theology*. 1988 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958, 503ff.

¹¹⁵ Murray. *Collected Writings*, 258-259.

¹¹⁶ A.A Hodge. *The Confession of Faith*. 1983 ed. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1869, 205.

¹¹⁷ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 117. WCF 16.2.

¹¹⁸ Shepherd, 'Law and Gospel', 9.

Repentance and obedience flow from faith as the fullness of faith. This is faithfulness, and faithfulness is perseverance in faith. A living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life.¹¹⁹

Shepherd is advocating 'faithfulness', which is an active and lively faith as the instrument of justification. Consequently repentant deeds and obedience to the will of God throughout the believer's life (sanctification) are conditional to being justified. This is plain when he also writes, 'The free gift of salvation is received through faith, and saving faith is not dead faith, but a living and active faith.'¹²⁰ Entry into eternal life is through justification, yet Shepherd says 'we enter into it by way of a living, active, and obedient faith.'¹²¹ According to Shepherd, non meritorious good works are the essence of a living, active, and obedient faith.

The Confession however says this about good works:

These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.¹²²

Good works contra Shepherd, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. They are not the essence of a true and lively faith, they are the fruit and evidence of a true and lively faith (saving faith). Shaw expounds this further:

They are the *fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith*. An inoperative faith, which produces not the fruits of righteousness, is pronounced by the Apostle James to be dead.—James ii. 2, 6. Of a living faith good works are the native *fruits*, and they are the proper *evidences* that faith is unfeigned. "Show me," says the same apostle, "thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." James ii. 18.¹²³

Works then are not the essence, but the evidence of saving faith. In the words of the

Confession they are in the believer's life the manifestation of thankfulness. The traditional

¹¹⁹ Shepherd. *Call of Grace*, 57.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 57.

¹²¹ Ibid., 51.

¹²² Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 115. WCF 16.2.

¹²³ Robert Shaw. *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Inverness: Christian Focus 1974, 93.

formula of justified by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially is a good summary of the Confession's position.

Yet this is exactly the view that Shepherd objects to when he writes, 'the effect is to make good works a supplement to salvation or simply the *evidence* of salvation...however, they belong to the essence of salvation...' ¹²⁴ Clark commenting on chapter 16 section 2 argues strongly that works do not belong to the essence of faith, but the evidence of faith:

...section ii asserts that good works, i.e., obedience to God's revealed commandments, are the result and evidence of true faith. The relationship between faith and works is really very simple and easy to understand, even though from age to age so many people entertain confused notions about it. The relationship is that faith is the cause of good works and good works are the effect of faith. ¹²⁵

Here again good works are understood as the effects of faith, but not the essence of faith. Clark states that the relationship between faith and its fruit is a simple one, there is no ambiguity, there is no confusion, works are not the essence of faith but the evidence of faith. Charles Hodge concurs saying 'they express the gratitude of the believer.' ¹²⁶ Therefore, we may conclude that the Confession teaches that faith is the 'alone instrument of justification' and in doing so excludes works of faith or merit. ¹²⁷

In conclusion we can be confident that we have the correct understanding of the Confession because of the clarity of question 73 and its answer in the Westminster Larger Catechism:

Q73: How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?

A73: Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his

¹²⁴ Ibid., 104, emphasis mine.

¹²⁵ Gordon Clark. *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* 2001 ed. Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 1965, 162.

¹²⁶ Hodge. *The Confession of Faith*, 223.

¹²⁷ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 95.

justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applies Christ and his righteousness.¹²⁸

Here the catechism clarifies the function of faith in the justification of sinners with the express purpose of affirming the instrumental (not ground) function of faith in justification. It does this by a positive stating of the instrumental nature of faith as well as describing negatively those things that should not be considered an instrument of justification. Accordingly, when it says ‘faith justifies a sinner’ it is speaking of faith as the instrument (or as the hand) that receives Christ and his righteousness.

At the same time it is also quite explicit concerning those things that should not be considered instrumental in justification.¹²⁹ Specifically the accompanying graces of faith (sanctification etc) and its fruit (good works) are not to be considered as instruments (conditions) of justification. In addition to this the catechism specifically calls good works the fruit of faith and in doing so, excludes them as the essence of faith. Consequently, good works are not an instrument or condition of justification, but they are the evidence of a justified person.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ What the catechism speaks of as an instrument, Shepherd speaks of as a condition. Shepherd maintains that faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance are non-meritorious conditions (obligations) of salvation (justification).

WCF Chapter 15 – Repentance

Having excluded works of faith as instrumental in justification, and having affirmed that works are the evidence and not the essence of faith, we now turn to the place of repentance in the believer's salvation. Here the Confession is quite clear on the importance of repentance, stating that repentance is of 'such necessity to all sinners that none might expect pardon without it.'¹³⁰ In full it affirms the following:

Although repentance is not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.¹³¹

Repentance then is indispensable to justification. At this point, Shepherd and the Confession are in agreement. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the confession is quick to establish that repentance is not the cause of pardon, of itself it can not satisfy God's wrath, but nonetheless it is necessary, and no one should expect pardon without it.

Yet, the issue that needs resolving is what does the Confession teach concerning the nature of repentance? Shepherd believes that repentance has a non-epistemic aspect to it that includes the new obedience he believes is necessary for justification. This is evident in Shepherd's comments concerning the proclamation of the gospel:

Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47). Repentance is not simply a mental act. It is not simply sorrow for sin, but a turning away from sin (Acts 26:20). Repentance and faith are indissolubly tied together. You can not turn to Christ in faith for the forgiveness of sin without turning away from the sin that is so offensive to God.¹³²

Shepherd has a reference to Acts 26:20 where Paul says to King Agrippa 'first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.'¹³³ Ironically, the

¹³⁰ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 109. WCF 15.3.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Shepherd, 'Law and Gospel' 12.

¹³³ Acts 26:20, NIV.

very verse Shepherd quotes, properly understood, actually disproves his point. Paul does not say that repentance includes turning away from sinful deeds, he says it is proved by deeds. In other words, there is a necessary distinction that should be made between repentance and its fruit (turning away from sin) just as it is necessary to differentiate between faith and its fruit (evangelical obedience).

Although Shepherd is unclear on the distinction of repentance and the deeds that prove it, the Confession has no difficulty separating repentance and its fruit, new obedience.

According to the Confession in chapter 15 section 2 we read:

By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.¹³⁴

Wilkinson states that apart from the fear of judgment ‘this paragraph mentions another factor that enters into genuine repentance. It is a deep sense of the real nature of sin, or the “filthiness and odiousness” of it.’¹³⁵ It is notable that repentance is defined with epistemic categories of fear and apprehension as opposed to deeds or actions.

While not denying that repentance is proved by deeds, the Confession in adopting epistemic categories as opposed to those that speak of actions, deeds or even the fruits of repentance, denies Shepherd’s thesis. According to the Confession the idea of turning from sin to God is not one of actual deeds, but a mental turning away from sin and a turning to God in Christ instead. Commenting on this Clark writes:

This turning is called conversion, so that conversion is part of repentance. Then further, hatred of sin and turning to God carries with it a *desire* to obey God’s commandments. These three aspects of repentance (sorrow, conversion, obedience) can be summed up in the etymological meaning of the word, which is, ‘a change of mind.’ Repentance therefore is a change of mind with respect to sin and God. From this description it will be seen that repentance is not an act

¹³⁴ Ibid., 109. WCF 15.2.

¹³⁵ T.L Wilkinson. *The Westminster Confession Now* (self published 1992) 103.

that occurs just once or several times sporadically: it is a lifelong habit, a continuing state of mind, a fixed disposition or temperament.¹³⁶

According to Clark the burden of the Confession is to explain repentance in terms of a state of mind. A disposition that now hates sin and loves God. And as a disposition, it will be maintained for life and as such, the believer's life will be adorned by the fruit of repentance which is new obedience.

However, it is imperative that we remember that to repent is to change one's mind about sin, God and salvation. When the confession speaks of repentance it speaks of such a state of mind, and not acts of new obedience. The Westminster Shorter Catechism makes this clear in question and answer number 87:

Q87: What is repentance unto life?

A87: Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.¹³⁷

Here the catechism affirms that epistemic nature repentance by using the categories of conviction and apprehension concerning sin and its ugliness and the marvelous mercy of God in Christ. Consequently, when it speaks of turning from sin to God, it makes it clear it is done with a *purpose* of new obedience. However, it does not say 'turn from it (sin) unto God' with new obedience, but 'turn from it (sin) unto God, with full *purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.*'¹³⁸ This paper believes that there is clear appreciation in the standards of the epistemic nature of repentance, and that this is confirmed by the categories it chooses to use in describing the nature of repentance. Though repentance will issue in new obedience, the Confession has no difficulty in differentiating between repentance (change of mind) and its fruit, new obedience.

¹³⁶ Clark. *What Do Presbyterian Believe*, 155.

¹³⁷ Beeke. *Reformed Confessions*, 109.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion.

The conclusions of this brief survey of the Westminster Confession may be stated as follows: (1) that the Confession understands saving faith is assent to all that is revealed in the Word of God, which will be principally manifest in a trusting and resting in Christ for the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of souls. (2) The Confession establishes that works of faith (good works) are the evidence but not the essence of faith. Consequently, faith alone functions as the instrument of justification through which the righteousness of Christ is imputed. In this sense, saving faith is essentially passive regarding justification. (3) That repentance is the mental activity of changing one's mind concerning God, sin and salvation. Consequently, the adoption of epistemic categories to describe repentance has been done to exclude the fruit of new obedience from its essence.

What is now apparent is that there is a notable difference between Shepherd's articulation of saving faith and that of the Westminster Confession of Faith. We now turn to the last chapter of this work where a summary of our comparisons and contrasts will be made and final conclusions stated concerning the divide between Shepherd and the Confession on saving faith.

CONCLUSION: CONTRASTING SAVING FAITH IN THE WRITINGS OF NORMAN SHEPHERD AND THAT OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH.

Clarity in Theological Terms

In drawing together and summarising the teaching of Shepherd and the Confession on saving faith several observations can be made. It is important to read Shepherd carefully taking into account that he is using different categories than the Confession. He uses categories of promise and obligation as opposed to traditional Reformed categories explaining justification and its instrument(s). The differences are not that of biblical categories vis-à-vis theological categories, since covenant obligations is a theological construct, but the lack of precision in the way Shepherd uses his terms.

You will look in vain for a clear distinction between justification and sanctification. It will be an exercise in futility looking for an unambiguous statement concerning justification and when it takes place. Although at times Shepherd speaks of justification as a forensic act, he seems to posit it at the Last Day, where the Bible only speaks of an open vindication and reward at the Last day of the already justified in accordance with the fruits of justification.¹³⁹ It would be a pointless exercise to search for a coherent explanation of how saving faith and all the other saving graces fit into the *ordo salutis* because although Shepherd states that sanctification precedes justification he never offers more than a sentence or two in explanation of how saving faith emerges in the process of sanctification.

Shepherd's writings are often said to be ambiguous, a good example of this is when he makes the statement no one can expect to be saved without repentance and good works.¹⁴⁰ Since, salvation is normally understood to be inclusive of justification, sanctification and glorification. And if we understand salvation in that way, what he says can be understood in an

¹³⁹ Murray, *Collected Writings*, 219-221. Reymond. *Systematic Theology*, 749.

¹⁴⁰ Here I understand salvation to refer to our union with Christ that results in regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification. See also Westminster Confession of Faith 15.3 and 16.2.

orthodox fashion. However, if when he uses the word salvation he has in mind justification, and it appears that he does, then he is saying that repentance and good works are not simply the evidence of salvation, but of the very essence of salvation.

This ambiguity is also evident in his tendency to equate faith with repentance and obedience, as well as confusing the salvific categories of justification and sanctification. This confusion is compounded by his preference for the categories of covenant promises and obligations (as opposed to the more traditional Reformed categories) without clearly articulating their correspondence and relationship to one another. It is unfortunate because the ambiguity in his writings leads to a suspicion that he is not open about what he wants to say, and that often inhibits a generous reading of his works.

Defining Saving faith

What is not ambiguous is that the theological category of obligation in Shepherd's writings is the equivalent of the Reformed category of saving faith. According to Shepherd, promise and obligation always go together, just as the gospel promises of eternal life form one side of the New Covenant, obligation forms the other side.¹⁴¹ Therefore, these obligations of the covenant (faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance) are what he understands to be equivalent of saving or justifying faith.

Shepherd states that these obligations (faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance) or conditions are indispensable to the enjoyment of salvation.¹⁴² By salvation, he means justification, since he writes 'the gospel promises pardon for sin and acceptance by God. It promises *eternal life after the final judgment*.'¹⁴³ If justification can only be realised through faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance, it must be admitted that final justification and

¹⁴¹ Shepherd. *Call of Grace*, 45.

¹⁴² Ibid., 50. It should also be noted that a pursuant obligation is not the same as a preceding condition.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 45. Emphasis mine.

therefore eternal life can not be assured in this lifetime.¹⁴⁴ This paper concludes that this is a severe departure from Reformed theology. Whereas the Confession states that faith is the alone instrument of justification, Shepherd's category of obligation becomes the instrument of salvation. Whereas the Confession states it is necessary to differentiate between the evidence of faith (good works) and essence of faith (assent and trust) Shepherd argues that we must not do this, since faith and its fruit are of the same essence.

Whereas the Confession uses epistemic categories to describe repentance as a change of mind concerning God, sin and salvation, Shepherd uses categories of actions and deeds to describe the repentance required to be justified. Whereas the Confession differentiates between repentance and its fruit (new obedience), Shepherd states that new obedience is the very essence of repentance, and that repentance (deeds) are an obligation of the New Covenant and therefore an instrument of justification. It is the conclusion of this paper that Shepherd's insistence that the only way of realising the covenant promises (justification etc) is to meet the conditions of faith, repentance, obedience and perseverance, is in stark contrast to Reformed orthodoxy.

Justification by Faith or Faithfulness?

According to Shepherd, justification (a once for all judgment that occurs at conversion) is said to be conditioned upon all the obligations of the New Covenant being met. Given the nature of repentance (understood as deeds), and obedience and perseverance (which require a lifetime) then it becomes apparent that final justification must occur in the future. Then the question arises is justification contingent upon covenant keeping (obedience) or upon the finished work of Jesus Christ? If the former then we must conclude that justification is a

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 45.

process, if the latter, then we can say it is a once for all event (declaration) that does not take our obedience into account, but the obedience of Jesus Christ alone.

It is unfortunate that in Shepherd's writings salvation is conditioned on a fourfold obligation of faith, repentance, good works and perseverance as the instrument through which the righteousness of Christ is received. Whereas Shepherd agrees with the Confession that we are saved by Christ's righteousness, he departs from the Confession on the matter of how the promises of salvation are to be received. Even when Shepherd writes we are saved by faith, what he means is that we are saved by faithfulness. Saving faith then is faithfulness, or as he often puts it, covenant keeping.

What we find in Shepherd is that justification is never distinct from sanctification, yet neither is the relationship properly explained. However, what is undeniable is that Shepherd is advocating 'faithfulness', which to him is an active and lively faith as the instrument of justification. Consequently, repentant deeds and obedience to the will of God throughout the believer's life (sanctification) are conditional to being justified. This is plain when he also writes, 'The free gift of salvation is received through faith, and saving faith is not dead faith, but a living and active faith.'¹⁴⁵ Entry into eternal life is through justification, yet Shepherd says 'we enter into it by way of a living, active, and obedient faith.'¹⁴⁶ According to Shepherd then, non-meritorious good works are the essence of a living, active, and obedient faith, this is justification by faithfulness.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 51.

Conclusion

Whereas historically Reformed theology has spoken of justification by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially, Shepherd does not.¹⁴⁷ What this paper has shown is that Shepherd speaks of justification by Christ meritoriously and faithfulness instrumentally. Shepherd does not challenge the office of saving faith as the non meritorious instrument of justification, but he does challenge the essence or nature of saving faith.

For Shepherd saving faith is faithfulness (faith, repentance, good works and perseverance) and that puts him at odds with the Confession. Consequently, even when he cautiously affirms historical formulas like justification by faith alone, it is evident that he means justification by works of faith alone and not works of merit.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, this paper concludes that Shepherd and the Confession teach two different ways of justification and therefore salvation. One is by grace alone and faith alone, the other is by grace alone and faithfulness alone.

¹⁴⁷ Rowland Ward, "Some Thoughts on Theology and Justification" The Presbyterian Banner, 2002 [cited 6 October 2005. Available from http://www.pressiechurch.org/Theol_1/some_thoughts_on_covenant_Ward2.htm.

¹⁴⁸ Waldron, 'John Calvin versus Norman Shepherd' 96.

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