

**DOCTRINAL TESTIMONY  
REGARDING  
RECENT ERRORS**

May 2007



MID-AMERICA  
REFORMED SEMINARY



## PREFACE

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)

This *Doctrinal Testimony Regarding Recent Errors* represents the outcome of careful reflection by Mid-America Reformed Seminary’s Faculty and Board upon the present controversies relating to the doctrine of justification and related issues. At its May 2006 meeting, the Board of Trustees of Mid-America Reformed Seminary directed the Faculty “to compose a clear statement concerning the doctrine of justification by faith with respect to current controversies relating to this doctrine, so that the Board may consider the statement for approval at its next meeting.” In response to this mandate, the Faculty appointed an ad hoc committee to prepare an initial draft of a proposed statement. After the Faculty unanimously approved the statement, it was forwarded to the Board of Trustees for its consideration. The Board of Trustees also unanimously approved the proposed statement without amendment at its May 2007 meeting.

We offer this testimony to the churches and to all believers who cherish the gospel of free justification by grace alone on the basis of the work of Christ alone. It is our hope that the testimony will make clear where Mid-America Reformed Seminary’s Faculty and Board stand in the context of contemporary discussion. We also offer this testimony as a witness to the gospel in our time. In a period of great uncertainty and confusion, the message of God’s saving grace in Christ must be trumpeted, not muted or distorted. It is our prayer that the testimony will serve to that end.

For the Board and Faculty,

Cornelis P. Venema, President  
May, 2007

**ABBREVIATIONS**

BC	Belgic Confession (1561/1618-19)
CD	Canons of Dort (1618-19)
FC	French Confession (1559)
FCH	Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675)
GC	Geneva Catechism (1541)
HC	Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
IAR	Irish Articles of Religion (1615)
LC	Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)
SC	Scottish Confession (1560)
SHC	Second Helvetic Confession (1566)
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

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**Preamble**

The current climate of theological discussion has revealed a number of errors that are having harmful effects within confessionally Reformed churches and are subverting the understanding of the gospel as articulated and affirmed in the Reformed confessions.

The faculty and Board of Trustees of Mid-America Reformed Seminary unwaveringly subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Confession of Faith. We also hold in high regard the numerous Reformed confessions produced in the wider body of Reformed churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In light of our vows of subscription and commitment to defend the teachings of Scripture, we are duty bound to address some of the theological errors threatening confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches today.

Indeed, a number of so-called proponents of Reformed theology have propagated an entire set of theological errors and fallacies which find their focus in the doctrine of justification. These errors are bringing about confusion within the churches, and are so egregious that they are undermining, even bringing about the abandonment of, the testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as these teachings have gained a hearing particularly among some conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches, and inasmuch as these views constitute serious theological error contrary to the

teachings and doctrines of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, the faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, with its Board of Trustees, feels compelled to express our determined opposition to these errors, and for the sake of the gospel and its defense offers the following testimony. We ultimately look to Christ, the church's only Head and the supreme Judge of all persons, to defend his church, trusting in his solemn declaration that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church (Matt. 16:18).

With no animosity toward persons, and recognizing that we all see as "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), we humbly but resolutely stand against the theological errors now current, propagated by certain teachings of what has become known as the Federal Vision, by certain teachings of what has become known as the New Perspective on Paul, and by certain teachings of other individuals and theological movements.

The purpose of this document is to identify carefully, to explain clearly, and to evaluate pastorally those errors of teaching. The approach of this document is unashamedly confessional, since we are persuaded that these errors, and especially the theological and pastoral issues they presume to remedy, are faithfully, biblically, and fully addressed by the creeds and confessions to which orthodox Reformed and Presbyterian churches are committed. The repeated appeals to these creeds and confessions assume that biblical references contained in the various confessions do indeed support and validate their teachings, and therefore that we need not demonstrate or argue that validity. Because they faithfully express the church's sustained response to biblical truth, we must guard against any kind of attitude which wearies of careful doctrinal teaching as though it were merely scholastic or provincial.

This Testimony consists of three parts: first, "A General Statement"; second, a "Digest of Errors"; and finally, an elucidation of these errors by "Articles of Affirmation and Denial." This document is not set forth as a confessional

standard, but it is presented as an application of Scripture and Confession to contemporary false teaching. We offer this Testimony out of love for the church and her Lord, and with a jealousy to defend the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ against all who would compromise, distort, or deny it. We do not claim that this Testimony is beyond improvement. We do hope it provides those who have been confused or led astray by current erroneous teachings with a clear statement of the gospel of salvation, and invite all who read this to embrace fully the richly biblical truth confessed among the Reformed churches.

## **1. A General Statement**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This general introductory statement summarizes by topic the errors of teaching that are presently disrupting the churches. We emphasize that this general statement should be read, understood, and interpreted in terms of the longer articles of exposition that follow it. Because these errors involve essential doctrines of the Christian gospel, and affect the proper administration of the means of grace, we are compelled to address this pastoral testimony to those whom we love and serve as a seminary committed to training men for the office of minister of the Word and sacraments.

### **1.1 The Covenant of Works**

Man as a creature of God, even as a moral creature created in God's own image (upright, wise, and just), does not place God under obligation to him. On the contrary, man as creature is always under obligation to God and therefore owes God obedience without any right or promise of reward. Therefore, as Creator, God is not obliged to reward or bless human obedience to him unless he voluntarily and gratuitously condescends to enter into a relationship with man in order to bless him. God has been pleased to express his condescending to man by way of a covenant. This covenant is often called the covenant of works; it is also called the covenant of creation, the covenant of nature, or the covenant of life. It is the original pre-fall, covenant relationship between God and man in paradise, and in establishing it, God shows his kindness, goodness, and graciousness to man. For in this covenant God promised life to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. God thus placed man, created in his image, under



this pre-fall covenant in order to bless and reward human obedience rendered in fellowship with him inasmuch as man may not expect to walk in fellowship with God in the way of disobedience; nor may man sin against God with impunity; nor does God's love and benevolence, or grace and goodness, allow for human beings to relate to God contrary to his law. In fact, disobedience brings the curse of death and enmity with God.

Moreover, the promise attached to the covenant of works was not a continuation only of earthly life and happiness but also the possession of heavenly life—a life, namely, of both body and soul in the bliss of unbreakable fellowship with God. The Tree of Life prefigures this very thing unto Adam and reappears as a symbol of the glory and blessing of Christ's redemptive work (Gen. 2:9; 3:24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14). Indeed, Christ works redemption by fulfilling the law of God in our stead; he suffers the curse and penalty of the law, even death, and meets all the obligations of love and service to the Lord prescribed by the law. Thus his obedience is the fulfillment of the law and brings forth for his people the heavenly reward of the new heaven and the new earth (Rom. 2:26; Rev. 21:1; and see WCF, 7:1, 2; FCH, 7-8). Christ thus fulfills for his people, who with Adam and all others are under its sentence of death, the original provisions of the covenant of works.

To misunderstand or to misconstrue the pre-fall covenant, or to deny this covenant altogether, leads inevitably to serious errors regarding the covenant of grace and the mediatorship of Jesus Christ. In addition, this leads to compromising or denying the way of salvation through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believing sinners by faith alone.

Because this covenant was established with man before his fall into sin, and because the subsequent covenant of grace was established in Christ with fallen sinners, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace must be understood as related but distinct covenants. Although there

exists both continuity and discontinuity between these two covenants, no shared feature of continuity may eclipse the real discontinuities between them.

We freely acknowledge that not every theological formulation of this covenant may correspond to the description we provide in this testimony. Nevertheless, we testify that the Bible and the Reformed confessions clearly teach this pre-fall covenant or assume its key features as necessary to the proper understanding both of the way of salvation and of the history of redemption.

## 1.2 The Covenant of Grace

God made the covenant of grace with Christ as the second Adam and with all the elect in him. By his atoning death Christ establishes the new covenant, effectually secures salvation for his elect, and obtains for them every spiritual blessing and benefit. In this covenant of grace, God “freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe” (WCF 7:3).

Failure to maintain that the person and work of Jesus Christ comprises the substance and fulfillment of the covenant of grace compromises the understanding of redemption as a divine gift and gracious bequeathal to fallen but elect sinners, wherein salvation is made divinely effectual. This error renders the covenant of grace a mere offer of salvation to those under the covenant, nothing more than a divine initiative that must await man’s decision (apart from the efficacious grace and promise of the covenant) to bring this covenant to fruition and final fulfillment.

The teaching that each member of the visible church is necessarily savingly united to Jesus Christ and partakes of all the spiritual benefits of Christ’s finished work seriously

confuses the relationship between covenant and election. While the doctrine of election may not be construed in a way that renders the covenant powerless, neither may the doctrine of the covenant be formulated in a way that empties election of its unconditional, effectual, and eternal blessedness. Moreover, this confusion inevitably leads to the kind of covenant objectivism that removes or redefines the need for living faith, thereby injuring the practice of holiness and corrupting the gift of assurance.

### **1.3 Law and Gospel**

The law of God, which is holy, righteous, and good, reveals God's perpetual will for the life of men, his image-bearers. The gospel of Jesus Christ reveals God's provision for the salvation of his people through the work of Christ. Though sinful man is unable to keep God's law or find favor with him on the basis of obedience to the law, God has, in the Person and work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, provided for the free justification and sanctification of his people. When it concerns the believer's justification, the law and the gospel must be clearly distinguished. Only the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who obeyed the law perfectly and suffered its penalty on behalf of his own, is sufficient to justify those who believe in him. However, those whom God justifies, he also sanctifies through the Holy Spirit who renews them in obedience to the law as a rule of gratitude.

To misconstrue or deny the distinction between law and gospel is an error that destroys the gospel as the glad tidings of salvation in Jesus Christ alone, and undermines the law by failing to distinguish between its three distinct uses relative to the gospel and to the work of redemption (as a teacher of sin, a restraint upon human wickedness, and a rule of gratitude). To dismiss either the categories of law and gospel, or their mutual relation, as merely the legacy of Lutheranism is biblically and historically false. At stake in this error is

nothing less than the entire work of God himself in creation, redemption, and consummation. Although law and gospel have many features in common, they differ significantly—and both their similarities and differences form the foundation and substratum of the history of redemption.

We repudiate the abuse of the distinction between law and gospel, especially the abuses of legalism and antinomianism, as if one may be saved by law-keeping or one may be a Christian without personal holiness. We would also caution, however, against moralism as a refined expression of legalism, whereby people are taught that their obedience secures their position in the covenant of grace or guarantees their perseverance in that covenant.

#### 1.4 Merit

The biblical concept of merit seeks to explain the nature of divine justice, and within the biblical pattern of salvation, identifies total human inability to please God or place him in our debt. The rejection of the idea of “merit” in any form, and with it the so-called “merit paradigm,” necessarily compromises the place of God’s righteousness in judging sin and sinners. Rejecting any notion of merit also subverts the gracious work of Christ who procured salvation by fulfilling the demands of divine justice. In these ways, the rejection of merit distorts God’s work of creation and redemption in that neither his justice and righteousness (expressed in law), nor his mercy and grace (expressed in gospel), are grounded in God’s unchangeable nature as holy, righteous, and good. Apart from this grounding in God’s nature, justice and mercy become a matter of divine capriciousness.

We affirm that human creatures, and especially fallen human creatures, cannot merit any blessing or reward from God except by way of covenant and the gracious provisions he promises in the covenant—this being so for both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. However,

inasmuch as God does promise (according to the covenant of works) to bless human obedience to his law or divine will, his bestowal or granting a blessing to the faithful and obedient is a matter of God's covenanted truth and justice. Though God's favor and goodness are revealed in the disproportion between the requirement of the covenant of works and the eternal reward promised, this covenant required the obedience of faith as its condition. In the way of obedience, Adam could have claimed the promised reward as justly merited according to the terms of the covenant. Because of the fall of Adam as covenant or representative head, humanity has lost (as in, demerited) God's favor and thereafter could never obtain eternal life in the way of obedience to the obligations of the covenant. All men, by virtue of original and actual sin, can merit only eternal damnation and death. Only Jesus Christ could merit eternal life for us, because only Jesus Christ is perfectly righteous as the eternal Son of God, being most holy and free from all sin, and completely free from sin as a man, having in his creaturely nature fulfilled the law, both for himself as a rule of holiness and for us according to his mediatorial office as our Surety. In meeting the demands of God's law for his elect, including suffering its negative sanction of eternal death, Christ merited and obtained eternal life for them.

This concept of merit accounts, then, for how sinners are saved. By his sovereign good pleasure, God the Father justly rewards his Son, Jesus Christ, as our Mediator, for his lifelong obedience which culminated in and included his atoning death, and this blessing is granted to all those who by grace through faith are engrafted into Christ. Rejecting the idea of merit renders this way of salvation unintelligible and empties union with Christ of its redemptive efficacy.

We freely acknowledge that not every theological formulation of the concept of merit may correspond to the description we provide in this testimony. Nevertheless, we testify that the Bible and the Reformed confessions clearly teach that merit rightly defined belongs necessarily to a

proper understanding both of the accomplishment and the application of redemption.

### **1.5 Baptism and Church Membership**

To conceive of the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism as tied to the moment of its administration, or to maintain that all recipients of the visible sign of baptism are by that very fact, according to the divine economy, saved—i.e., redemptively united to Christ, justified, reconciled, forgiven, and redeemed—is a doctrine of baptismal regeneration in which baptism functions *ex opere operato*. This teaching leads either to gross presumption and religious formalism, or to religious doubt and despair of personal salvation. This teaching also undermines sovereign grace, since some of those baptized and thus alleged to be saved can subsequently lose their salvation.

The church is properly distinguished as the visible church, consisting of those who profess faith in Christ, together with their children, and the invisible church, consisting of all the elect, true Christian believers who depend fully upon Jesus Christ for their salvation, washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by his Holy Spirit. The teaching that every baptized member of the church is savingly united to Jesus Christ apart from the exercise of repentance and faith, and that therefore every baptized member receives—apart from living faith—all the benefits of salvation promised in the gospel distorts biblical teaching concerning divine election, the necessity and function of faith in salvation, and perseverance in grace.

### **1.6 Paedocommunion**

We believe that because of the feebleness of our faith, God ordained sacraments for us in order to seal his promises to us, to pledge his good will toward us, and to nourish and sustain

our faith; he added these to the Word of the gospel as supplemental means of grace. The two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are not, however, identical to each other in every respect, for baptism is to be administered only once, which is a sign and seal of our admission into the visible church and of our regeneration and engrafting into Christ, and is properly administered to the infants of believers, whereas the Lord's Supper is to be administered often for the spiritual nourishment of believers, and so only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves (BC, 33; WLC, *Q/A* 177; GC, *Q/A* 323, 364-365).

### 1.7 Justification

All of these errors culminate and come to expression in erroneous conceptions of the doctrine of justification, especially regarding the role of faith and the meaning of divine righteousness. We agree with the orthodox confessional statement of this doctrine, which affirms that God justifies believing sinners through faith alone (i.e., faith in its receptive capacity only) by imputing to believers the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ alone (consisting in his entire obedience, active and passive). Some contemporary statements about justification misrepresent and replace this orthodox formulation with a doctrine of justification as mere vindication, or justification as the badge which serves to identify ecclesiastical membership. Equally mistaken and unbiblical is any formulation of the doctrine of justification through Christ's sacrificial work on the cross received by faith wherein such justification either depends upon the good works borne as the fruit of the believer's faith, or is acquired through faith understood as faithfulness.

We remain unpersuaded—by either contemporary extra-biblical insights regarding ancient Jewish religion or by contemporary theological assertions regarding the social dimensions of the gospel—that the confessions and

churchmen of the Reformation fundamentally misapprehended this central and fundamental truth of the gospel. Because divine redemption is foundational to the existence of a redeemed people, the unity of soteriology and ecclesiology may not eclipse the priority of soteriology. This means, among other things, that while the doctrine of justification may not be restricted to the believer's individual experience, this divine act of justification surely finds its deepest application at the point of the believer's personal salvation in Christ Jesus. We testify to the danger of reversing the priority of soteriology to ecclesiology, a danger which consists of incorporating faith and obedience themselves as the effectual cause or ground of our salvation.

### **1.8 Assurance of Salvation and Perseverance Therein**

Those whom God effectually calls unto salvation neither can nor will ultimately fall away from grace or lose their salvation. This blessing of perseverance is supplied along with divine election, and given to members of the new covenant who through faith are united to Christ Jesus. Believers may therefore be confidently assured of their salvation, a confidence based on nothing less than the finished and continuing perfect work of Jesus Christ. Within this context, biblical warnings against apostasy serve to summon all believers unto faithfulness in holiness before the Lord, without making their perseverance in grace dependent in any way upon their obedience—which itself is a gift and work of grace.



## 2. Digest of Errors

By way of summary, the various proponents of the current set of errors, which find their focus in an erroneous and moralistic doctrine of justification, teach some or all of the following errors:

1. that a doctrine of the covenant of works is unbiblical;
2. that gospel precedes law in the divine/human relationship before the fall;
3. that, before the fall, grace circumvents God's law in this relationship; or that, prior to the fall, for God to demand obedience and righteousness from humans in order to enjoy fellowship with him is works righteousness;
4. that God required only faith, not works of obedience, from Adam in paradise;
5. that there was no probationary period or test of man's obedience in paradise;
6. that the pre-fall covenant in paradise contained or implied no eschatological promise;
7. that the stipulations and restipulations in the pre-fall covenant are identical to the stipulations and restipulations in the covenant of grace—namely, man lives under God's grace, must trust or have faith in him, and enjoys blessing so long as he obediently keeps covenant;
8. that the covenant of grace is not primarily about God's provision of Christ as the Savior of his people but about each party of the covenant meeting their obligations, so that God's grace and human responsibility are correlated: God must give Christ for salvation, and the human party of the covenant must meet his or her covenant obligations in order for that covenant to come to fruition;
9. that the covenant of grace is as breakable and precarious as the covenant in paradise, since its promises and threatenings are objective realities that await the human party of the covenant to determine which reality is subjectively appropriated;

10. that the covenant of grace is basically a divine proposal in which God offers salvation on the condition that the human party of the covenant repent, believe, and continue in obedience to the demands of the covenant;
11. that the covenant of grace is not a testamentary covenant or a covenant by testament;
12. that the covenant of grace may not be defined as being made with those ordained to eternal life or with the elect in Christ, or with Christ, the second Adam, and the elect in him;
13. that it is wrong to speak of a dual aspect of this covenant;
14. that the distinction between law and gospel is erroneous;
15. that the law is gospel and the gospel is law;
16. that the use of the idea of merit involves a paradigm of works righteousness contrary to God's covenant relationship of love for or friendship with man both before the fall and after the fall.
17. that justification entails only the forgiveness of sins, not the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer as the complete fulfillment of the law of God;
18. that the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone is false;
19. that justification primarily means to belong to the people of God, rather than to be forgiven and accepted by God through Christ's imputed righteousness to believing sinners;
20. that justification is not to be defined by the idea of imputation;
21. that not all so-called good works of believers are excluded from their justification before God, and so some of the believer's good works are included in their justification before God;
22. that justification is by faith through its works of love or faith in its working or doing good works;
23. that the (non-meritorious) good works of believers are the basis for or determinative of one's final justification;

24. that justification is not by faith alone but by faithfulness, that is, by works of human obedience which qualify faith as the instrument for receiving Christ;
25. that Jesus Christ's active obedience serves to qualify him to be Savior and Mediator, but this fulfillment of righteousness is not imputed to believers as part of the ground of their righteousness before God;
26. that good works, or what are termed non-meritorious good works, are not simply the fruit of faith and justification but (partly) constitute the ground or the means or the instrument of justification;
27. that the good works believers perform are necessary for being accepted by God;
28. that justification is incomplete, and that there will be a final or second justification on judgment day;
29. that the distinction between "the sign" (such as the water of baptism or the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper) and "the thing signified" (Christ's redemptive work) is false, since they are one and the same;
30. that the sign of the sacraments is in itself the reality;
31. that the sacraments offer a different grace than the Word of God, such that unless infants and small children receive the Lord's Supper they are being starved of grace;
32. that the efficacy of baptism is tied to the moment of baptism—that is, baptismal regeneration is true and right doctrine;
33. that God's grace is conveyed through the sacraments *ex opere operato* (by the act performed);
34. that all the baptized, head for head, are united to Christ and saved;
35. that some of those who are baptized *and saved* can (and do) lose their salvation;
36. that small children and infants should be admitted to the Lord's Table prior to a responsible profession of faith;
37. that, unless covenant children partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they are being spiritually starved;

38. that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper imparts to its recipients a grace or blessing distinct and different from the grace of the Word of God and the sacrament of baptism;
39. that divine grace is resistible unto eternal damnation on the part of those who are elect, saved, forgiven, and united to Christ;
40. that the blood of Christ is not sufficient and efficacious in all for whom it was shed and applied, inasmuch as among those who enjoy forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation through Christ's blood, some lose these blessings since they break the covenant and subsequently perish eternally;
41. that there are two kinds of election—one unto temporary salvation, another unto eternal salvation;
42. that eternal election is conditional—namely only those are elect unto eternal salvation who continue in the way of covenant obedience and faithfulness, whereas those who are counted under the covenant and do not meet this condition enjoy genuinely saving but not eternally saving election;
43. that being saved and united to Christ does not necessarily or inevitably mean that one will persevere in that salvation by God's grace, for his grace can be resisted unto the loss of salvation and a permanent falling away.
44. that the distinction between the visible and invisible church is invalid, since each and every member of the visible church is said to be God's elect and saved;
45. that the invisible church refers to the church in eschatological glory.

### 3. Articles of Affirmation and Denial

#### 3.1 The Covenant of Works (cf. Errors 1-7)

##### Article 1

We affirm that the distance between God and his human creatures is so great that man would never have come into the full blessing of fellowship with God unless God, according to his love and goodness, had voluntarily and freely condescended to Adam and established a covenant with him and all his posterity, whereby he promised to reward perfect and personal obedience already due him as man's Creator, promising life and blessing to Adam and his posterity upon condition of perfect and personal obedience (see WCF, 7:1, 2; 19:1; LC, *Q/A* 20, 22, 91-92; FCH, 7, 8, 9).

We deny the teaching that this covenant does not require obedience to God and his commands, or that God does not reward this obedience according to the positive and gratuitous sanction of the covenant, or that only faith, not works, was required in the covenant in paradise.

##### Article 2

We affirm that man owes God perfect obedience even apart from a covenant and that God was under no obligation to bless or reward such obedience; nonetheless, God gratuitously established the covenant of works in order to bless and reward human obedience—which obedience in itself deserves nothing inasmuch as it is owed to God as God—according to the promise of the covenant (BC, 14; WCF, 7:1; LC, *Q/A* 20).

We deny the claim that the covenant of works means that God does not deal benevolently or graciously or lovingly with man; and we deny that the condition of obedience to God in the covenant of works can be equated with the instrumentality of faith in relation to justification in the covenant of grace.

**Article 3**

We affirm that the penalty of the covenant of works was eternal death for Adam and all his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation (LC, *Q/A* 22), and that Adam's violation of the covenant of works brought all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation into an estate of sin and misery wherein they are incapable of any spiritual good and wholly and continually inclined to all evil (LC, *Q/A* 25).

We deny the claim that God did not impose the demands of his holiness or his righteous will upon Adam in paradise.

**Article 4**

We affirm that the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are distinct covenants, and should not be confused or amalgamated, for the first covenant deals with man in a state of integrity, whereas the second covenant finds man corrupted, wholly depraved, and under the penalty of death, so that God, in order to rescue sinners from the penalty of the covenant of works, must provide the remedy through a Mediator and second Head, namely through his Son Jesus Christ, the substance of the evangelical covenant, in whom he freely offers to sinners life and salvation, requiring of them faith in his Beloved unto their salvation, and promising to give to all who are ordained to life, the elect, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe (WCF, 7:2-4; LC, *Q/A* 32; FCH, 23; BC, 17-18).

We deny that God has only one manner of dealing with human beings throughout history, namely, first accepting them by grace and then requiring them to meet the demands of this grace in the way of faithful obedience in order to remain in his favor, for this overthrows Christ's work for his people and makes the fruition and certainty of the covenant of grace depend upon human beings.

**Article 5**

We affirm the perpetuity of God's law in the divine/human relationship—pre-fall, post-fall, in redemption,

and in glory, for God is unchangeable and he does not deny his justice in order to save his sinful people (HC, *Q/A* 6, 9, 11, 12, 16-18, 86, 90-91, 115; BC, 14, 20; CD, III/IV:4; WCF, 4:2; 15:2; 16:1-2; 19:1-2, 5-7; 20:1; LC, *Q/A* 17, 86, 91-97).

We deny that God's law is set aside in order to save sinners, as if Christ's meritorious and redemptive work of salvation is not the strict fulfillment of the law of God on behalf of his people.

### 3.2 The Covenant of Grace (cf. Errors 8-11)

#### Article 6

We affirm that in addition to the covenant of works made with Adam, God made a covenant of grace with Christ as the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:47) and all the elect in him as his seed in order to deliver the elect out of a state of misery and bring them into an estate of salvation (LC, *Q/A* 30-31; cf. FCH, 8, 13; WCF, 7:3).

We deny that God's grace is ineffectual, even as we deny that Christ's atoning work is insufficient to save all whom he intends and were given to him to save, and so we deny, as to its essence or efficacious saving promise, that the covenant of grace is made with the non-elect.

#### Article 7

We affirm that Christ is the substance and fulfillment of the covenant of grace, and therefore his death establishes the new covenant in his blood (WCF, 7:6; LC, *Q/A* 35).

We deny that the purpose of Christ's death was only to acquire for the Father the mere right to enter once more into a covenant with men, whether of grace or of works, for this conflicts with Scripture, which teaches that Christ *has become the guarantee and mediator of a better*—that is, *a new covenant* (Heb. 7:22; 9:15), *and that a will is in force only when someone has died* (Heb. 9:17) (CD, II, rejection of errors 2).

**Article 8**

We affirm that God not only offers sinners salvation and life by faith in Jesus Christ in this covenant of grace, but also promises to give unto all the elect the Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe (WCF, 8:2; CD, III/IV, 10-17).

We therefore deny any definition of the covenant of grace that would make the substance of the promise, Christ, apply equally to the elect and reprobate alike; we therefore also deny that God wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ's death, and that the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves (CD, II, rejection of errors 6).

**Article 9**

We affirm that the covenant of grace, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator and the everlasting inheritance he bestows, is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a Testament, for all blessings of salvation derive from him and are bequeathed by him to his own, including faith and repentance (WCF, 7:4).

We deny that faith and repentance are derived from ourselves or that these blessings come to sinners apart from Christ and the promises of the covenant of grace.

**Article 10**

We affirm that Christ is the substance of the covenant of grace, for he satisfies the requirements of the law of God (or God's holiness and righteousness) on behalf of his elect, undergoing the penalty of the covenant of works in their stead, even unto death on the cross, and fulfilling all of the obligations of God's standard of holiness and justice, so that



sinner, in being united to Christ by faith, can be reckoned as law-keepers, as if they never sinned nor had been sinners, as if they had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for them (WCF, 7:3-6; LC, *Q/A* 35; FCH, 4-5, 13-14; HC, *Q/A* 60).

We deny that the covenant of grace is rightly defined as a gracious relationship between God and sinners wherein God makes salvation obtainable by his Son and makes a proposal or offer of salvation to the covenanted, namely that this salvation is theirs if they will meet the conditions of the covenant, that is, the conditions of faith and repentance and continuing works of obedience.

### 3.3 Covenant and Election (cf. Errors 12-13)

#### Article 11

We affirm that God has appointed the elect unto glory, and that all those who are elect unto glory, *and those only*, will be redeemed, justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation (WCF, 3:6; 8:1; CD, I:7).

We deny that these saving benefits accrue to members of the covenant and the visible church simply by baptism, and so we also deny that any who are not elect unto glory have in any manner or sense the saving benefits of justification, adoption, or sanctification.

#### Article 12

We affirm that this doctrine of election is highly useful for the glory of God and the comfort of believers (WCF, 3:8; CD, I:12-13, 16).

We deny that this doctrine of election is of little use or should not be taught in the church; we also deny that election cannot be part of our assurance.

#### Article 13

We affirm that God's eternal purpose was to give a people to Christ as his seed who would be by him in time

redeemed, effectually called, justified, and glorified (WCF, 8:1, 5; CD, I:7, II:8).

We deny that Christ purchased any temporal saving benefits for the reprobate, even those that are members of the visible church, such that they would be redeemed, effectually called, justified, and sanctified only for a time; and, conversely, we deny the teaching that some of the chosen can perish and do in fact perish eternally, with no decision of God to prevent it (CD, I, rejection of errors 6).

#### **Article 14**

We affirm that Christ did purchase not only reconciliation but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father gave to him (WCF, 8:5; CD, II:8).

We deny that there is a saving election that is temporal in character or an election to a temporary (non-eternal) salvation; we also deny that any person for whom Christ purchased reconciliation will fail to inherit the kingdom of heaven; we likewise deny that God's election to eternal life is of many kinds: one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and the latter in turn either incomplete, revocable, conditional, or else complete, irrevocable, and absolute. Moreover, we deny the claim that there is one election to faith and another to salvation, so that there can be an election to justifying faith apart from an absolute election to salvation (CD, I, rejection of errors 2).

#### **Article 15**

We affirm that Christ is the Surety of God's elect, and he meets all the obligations of the covenant of grace in the elect, fulfilling the conditions of this covenant in them according to God's covenant grace (FCH, 4-5, 13-14; cf. WCF, 7:4; 3:6).

We deny that the covenant of grace depends upon the human party of the covenant to make the covenant effectual or to bring it to fruition in the covenanted. We also deny that God provides each and every member of the covenant of grace with sufficient strength to keep the covenant, and is

ready to preserve this strength in him if he performs his duty, and that even with all these blessings in place which are necessary to keep covenant, it still always depends on the choice of man's will whether or not he does so (cf. CD, V, rejection of errors 2).

#### **Article 16**

We affirm that the covenant of grace, as to its saving purpose, is a bequeathal by Christ the Testator, and therefore is testamentary in character and made with the elect in Christ alone (WCF, 7:3; LC, *Q/A* 31; FCH, 4-5, 13-14).

We deny that the reprobate receive Christ and his benefits in receiving the visible signs of the covenant of grace, though they participate in the external blessings and privileges of this covenant and are under its legal obligations. We likewise deny that God the Father appointed his Son to death on the cross with the fixed and definite plan to save all under the covenant (as though some of the covenanted for whom Christ died nonetheless fail to come to salvation); moreover, we deny that God the Father appointed his Son without a fixed and definite plan to save anyone by name, so that the necessity, usefulness, and worth of what Christ's death obtained could have stood intact and altogether perfect, complete and whole, even if the redemption that was obtained had never in actual fact been applied to any individual (cf. CD, II, rejection of errors 1).

#### **Article 17**

We affirm that all the covenanted are to look for assurance of salvation not by speculating about their election in the divine counsel; rather, they are to look to the revealed Word of God in Christ, which contains the promise and call of the gospel, even as all the covenanted are to look to the testimony and promise of God in the visible signs and seals of the covenant of grace, heeding that call and pleading God's promise revealed therein in the way of faith (CD, V:10; WCF, 18:1-4; LC, *Q/A* 80-81).

We deny that the doctrine of election is rightly conceived when it is preached in a way that calls into question the promise and call of the gospel in the Word and sacraments.

### **3.4 Law and Gospel (cf. Errors 14-15)**

#### **3.4.1 Law**

##### **Article 18**

We affirm that God's law was first written upon man's heart in paradise (called the law of nature) and later written down in the Decalogue, containing the moral law of God, so that we might have a more exact knowledge of his righteous will (CD, III/IV:6; LC, *Q/A* 17, 92; WCF, 19:1).

We deny the claim that God did not write his moral law upon man's heart in paradise and subsequently did not republish this law in a more exact form in the Decalogue.

##### **Article 19**

We affirm that the law of God is holy, righteous, and good, and, even after the fall, is the abiding or perpetual standard of God's justice, revealing his perfect will, and therefore requires God's moral creatures to render perfect and full obedience to it, so that anything less than perfect and full obedience to the law renders humans increasingly guilty before God (WCF, 19:1-2, 5-7; 20:1; LC, *Q/A* 91-97).

We deny that God's grace or love or some sort of divine kindness negates the strict standards of God's moral law, or that God originally did not require humans to be holy as he is holy, or that they could break his law with impunity, or that God expects man only to do what is in him or what is relatively good (in distinction from more heinous violations of his law).

##### **Article 20**

We affirm that God gave to Adam the law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to

personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it (WCF, 19:1; BC, 14; LC, *Q/A* 20).

We deny that God enters into a relationship with man, his image-bearer, by setting aside the demands of his holy will and perfect law, even as we deny any formulation of the covenant in paradise that excludes God's law.

#### **Article 21**

We affirm that the law of God exposes all human beings as sinners, so that Adam and all his posterity are under the condemnatory sentence of the covenant of works except God provide a remedy to our corruption and guilt, concerning which the law of Moses serves to reiterate even as it announces the gospel in the form of the promise of Messiah to come, as reflected in the levitical rites and ceremonial law (HC, *Q/A* 3-5, 115; WCF, 19:1; 6:6; BC, 25).

We deny that the moral law was given to sinners through Moses in order that they might be justified by keeping it; rather, the law was given to teach us God's standard of holiness and to convict us of our sin, misery, and state of condemnation without Christ, and, so, despairing of ourselves, we might seek salvation in Christ by faith alone.

#### **Article 22**

We affirm that the law, after Adam's fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments, and written in two tables, commonly called his moral law, and it forever binds all human beings, both the justified and the unjustified, to obedience unto it (WCF, 19:2,3; LC, *Q/A* 95).

We deny that the gospel sets aside the demands of the law; rather, the gospel provides for the fulfillment of the law unto the salvation of God's people.

**Article 23**

We affirm that Christ alone has met all the requirements and obligations of the law on behalf of his elect and therefore salvation is in Christ alone—that is, we affirm that salvation is through Christ’s perfect fulfillment of the law, both in suffering its negative sanction and in satisfying all of its positive requirements, and that his obedience and fulfillment of the law is imputed to believing sinners for their justification and righteousness before God (HC, *Q/A* 10-19; BC, 20, 25; CD, I:2-4, 7; II:1, 2, 4, 5; WCF, 7:5-6; 19:1-7; LC, *Q/A* 36-40; FCH, 15).

We deny that salvation is apart from the fulfillment of God’s original covenant requirements in paradise, which indeed find fulfillment in Christ who is the substance of the covenant of grace; and so we also deny that we are justified by our so-called meritorious or non-meritorious good works.

**Article 24**

We affirm that true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, and therefore the law is abrogated to the extent that it no longer condemns believers, nor works wrath in them, nor threatens them with the curse of death, for believers are not under law but under grace (WCF, 19:6; LC, *Q/A* 97).

We deny that believers are saved by Christ so that they might be restored to Adam’s situation in paradise, and thus again come under the obligation of obedience as a legal yoke and the threat of God’s wrath, for they are under grace, reckoned righteous in Christ, who has fulfilled all righteousness for them.

**Article 25**

We affirm that the law continues to be of great use to believers, for it abides as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and of their duty to God and their neighbor, and it continues to expose to them their sin, so that, throughout their lives, they may learn more and more to know their sinful

nature and become more earnest in seeking the remission of sins and righteousness in Christ, and seek the grace of the Holy Spirit more fervently unto their sanctification and renewal after the image of God, till after this life they arrive at the goal, namely, perfection (WFC, 19:6; HC, *Q/A* 115).

We deny that these uses of the law are contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do in fact comply with it, the Holy Spirit subduing and enabling the will of the believer to do freely and cheerfully, from a heart of love and gratitude, what God's law requires.

### 3.4.2 Gospel

#### Article 26

We affirm that what is properly called the “gospel” refers to the joyful message or good news concerning Jesus Christ as God's gift for the salvation of his people, and thus the gospel announces God's purpose to save his people by his only Son, Jesus Christ (in the Old Testament, as the One promised to come, and in the New Testament, as the One having come) offered to sinners in the way of faith, bestowed to the elect by the internal call of the gospel and according to the promise of the covenant of grace (SHC, 13:3; WCF, 10:1-2).

We deny that the word “gospel” refers simply to the New Testament and that the word “law” simply refers to the Old Testament, for the gospel is revealed in the Old Testament as promise and through shadows and types, and the law is still administered as a tutor to sin and as a guide to gratitude in the New Testament.

#### Article 27

We affirm that the gospel—the doctrine of the Son of God, our Savior—was first revealed from heaven in paradise immediately after the fall, and afterwards was published by the Patriarchs and Prophets, which God was pleased to represent by the shadows of sacrifices and other ceremonies

of the law, and which he has accomplished, in the fullness of time, by his only begotten Son, Christ the Lord—our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, for he is our perfect Mediator, satisfying for all of our sins, uniting us to himself by true faith, and bringing us to glory (HC, *Q/A* 19; SHC, 13:1, 3, 5-6).

We deny that the gospel refers to a time prior to man's fall into sin or that it can be rightly defined apart from Christ's work of redemption for human sin.

#### **Article 28**

We affirm that the gospel, unlike the law, was not written on man's heart in paradise, and so it is not at all in us by nature but is revealed from heaven and so must be supernaturally revealed.

We deny that the gospel is a kind of second law or imposes a new form of the covenant of works upon believing and forgiven sinners.

#### **Article 29**

We affirm that the proper distinction between law and gospel is necessary in order to maintain the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

We deny that law and gospel are simply different aspects of one another, for if this were true, then the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ would have been written on man's heart in paradise prior to the fall.

### **3.4.3 Relationship between Law and Gospel**

#### **Article 30**

We affirm that law and gospel have the following in common with one another: (1) both are from God who is holy, righteous, and true, and the overflowing fountain of all good; (2) both reveal God as our highest good, the God whose standard of righteousness must be fulfilled; (3) both have as their first and principal end that God may be glorified



and that human beings might live in fellowship with God; (4) both reveal that humans must be clothed with righteousness in order to be accepted before God and to participate in eternal life; (5) both address man as fallen and depraved; (6) both set forth the majesty and justice of God, though the gospel sets this forth as pacified and satisfied by God's mercy manifested in Christ; and (7) both call believers to faith and obedience, but the law is impotent to effect such in sinners, whereas God accomplishes this in us through the gospel.

We deny that this commonality between law and gospel negates the senses in which law and gospel stand in antithesis to one another.

#### **Article 31**

We affirm that law and gospel differ in several ways as well: (1) they differ in regard to *the means* of obtaining righteousness before God, for the law rightly seeks in us this righteousness, as what we owe God as his creatures, but the gospel teaches us that we obtain this righteousness by our Surety through faith alone, who on our behalf rendered to God all that we owe him; (2) they differ concerning their particular ends—the law particularly aims to show us our sin and drive us to seek Christ; the gospel particularly aims to exhibit Christ to us clearly and distinctly; (3) they differ in their ability to save us, for by reason of *human weakness and depravity*, the law without the gospel can testify to what is holy, good, and perfect, but it cannot make us holy, good, or perfect, while the gospel, through Christ, does all of these things (WCF, 19, 20).

We deny that it is proper to say the law is gospel and the gospel is law, which involves a hopeless equivocation of the terms and destroys true religion.

#### **Article 32**

We affirm that, according to the gospel, Christ has purchased liberty for believers, which consists of their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemnation of God's

wrath, and the curse of the moral law, as well as their deliverance from this present evil world under the dominion of sin, the sting of death, and everlasting damnation, and so it also includes their free access to God, a new heart that yields obedience to God from love and a willing mind, and eternal glory in communion with God (WCF, 20:1).

We deny that the law or the attempts to obey the law by either the regenerate or unregenerate can grant this liberty to fallen human beings.

### **Article 33**

We affirm that the law stands in opposition to the gospel when it stands isolated from Christ, such that the law, without the gospel, is the letter that kills and is the ministration of death (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 6:14; 2 Cor. 3:6), and so by itself the law declares the truth without the power of the Spirit, whereas the gospel proclaims God's will in the power of the Spirit who gives life; the law points out the way of holiness but is powerless to make us holy, while the gospel is the good message of Jesus Christ and is the instrument of life inasmuch as it frees us from the curse of the law and restores us to fellowship with God; the law declares us unrighteous and condemns us, but the gospel declares us righteous in Christ by faith and justifies us; and, finally, inasmuch as we stand condemned before the law, the law makes us fear; the gospel, however, brings us freedom and assurance of God's favor (cf. e.g., Rom. 8:15; CD, III/IV, 5-6; SHC, 13:4).

We deny that this function of the law negates another, positive function of the law in the life of believers as a guide for thankful service.

### **Article 34**

We affirm that the law is a guide of gratitude because of the gospel, without being a new law of works, and this is the proper function of the law (LC, *Q/A* 95, 97; HC, *Q/A* 2, 64, 86, 91, 115; WCF, 19:6).

We deny the claim of antinomians who assert that believers are free to live outside the dictates or requirements of the law of God.

#### **Article 35**

We affirm that the gospel embraces the right use of the law of God, so that believers, with all seriousness of purpose, begin to live according to all and not only some of God's commandments; from the law they also continue to discover the fullness and the depths of their sinfulness, and are driven to seek Christ more eagerly for righteousness, and strive to be renewed more and more after the image of Christ (HC, *Q/A* 114-115; cf. WCF, 19:6).

We deny that the small beginning of obedience that the Holy Spirit works in believers or any of their good works in any way forms a ground of justification, for believers are saved by Christ alone and all his merits inasmuch as all that is required for our salvation is in him; and therefore anyone who has Christ by faith has salvation entirely, and to add anything to Christ, as though his work is insufficient for our salvation, is a most enormous blasphemy against God, for it would then follow that Jesus Christ is half a Savior (BC, 22; cf. GC, *Q/A* 121-123).

### **3.5 Salvation and Merit (cf. Error 16)**

#### **Article 36**

We affirm that human creatures, and especially fallen human creatures, cannot merit any blessing or reward from God except by way of covenant and the gracious provisions he promises in the covenant—this being so for both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace; however, inasmuch as God does promise (according to the covenant of works) to bless human obedience to his law or divine will, his bestowal or granting a blessing to the faithful and obedient is a matter of being true to himself (i.e., to his promises) and

thus a matter of justice (cf. WCF, 7:1, 16:5; BC, 14; FCH, 7-9; 12-15).

We deny that humans relate to and fellowship with God without honoring and upholding his holiness, majesty, and righteousness.

#### **Article 37**

We affirm that humans do not merit anything by their works of obedience in gratitude for their redemption except God graciously reward our works, for merit, properly defined, requires the following: (1) that the work is not due or owed (for no one merits by paying what he owes, he only satisfies); (2) that it is ours (for no one merits from another); (3) that it is absolutely perfect and free from all stain (for where sin is, there merit cannot be); (4) that it is equal and proportioned to the reward and recompense (otherwise it would be a gift, not merit); and (5) that the reward is due such a work from justice (thus a work not owed is commonly defined as one that makes a reward a matter of justice) (WFC, 16:4-6).

We therefore deny that humans meet any of the requirements of merit so defined, for (1) our good works or acts of obedience to God are not undue or unowed, but owed, for whatever we are and are able to do, all this we owe to God, whose debtors we are therefore rightly called; (2) our acts of obedience are not ours, as such, but they all are gifts of grace and fruits of the Spirit; (3) they are imperfect and still tainted with various impurities; (4) they are not commensurate with future glory since there is no proportion between the finite and temporal and the infinite and eternal; and (5) the reward promised to them is purely gratuitous and undue and therefore this reward does not derive from some internal merit or intrinsic worth of the work; rather, the reward derives exclusively from God's gracious estimation of it, forgiving the corruption in our good works and crowning them by his grace.

**Article 38**

We affirm that so-called “non-meritorious good works,” said to be part of the ingredients of justifying faith, are misnamed and misleading since, as set forth by the proponents of this doctrine, these works in fact function in a meritorious manner, being the *causa sine qua non* (or indispensable condition) of the instrumentality of the faith that justifies (cf. LC, *Q/A* 72).

We deny that believers are capable of any sort of *meritorious* good works, for all their works are tainted by sin and need God’s forgiveness in order to be made acceptable, and therefore believers are capable only of non-meritorious good works and perform only non-meritorious good works (WCF, 16:4-5; HC, *Q/A* 62-63, 114-115; LC, *Q/A* 149-152).

**Article 39**

We affirm that God maintains his standard of holiness and righteousness in entering into fellowship with human beings and also in reconciling them to himself in redemption, as evidenced in Christ’s righteous fulfillment of the law and the application of his merits to sinners (BC, 20, 22, 23; WCF, 8:5).

We deny that God’s good pleasure and purpose means that he chooses the intrinsically unworthy act of faith, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a ground of salvation; and that he graciously desires to count faith as perfect obedience and to look upon it as worthy of the reward of eternal life (CD, I, rejection of errors 3); we also deny that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, failed certainly to merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or basis to relate in a new way with men and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on the free choice of man; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them (CD, II, rejection of errors 3).

### 3.6 Justification by Faith Alone

#### 3.6.1 Effectual Calling

##### Article 40

We affirm that all those whom God has predestined unto eternal life, *and those only*, he calls effectually out of the state of sin and death unto grace and salvation by Jesus Christ (WCF, 10:1-2; LC, *Q/A* 67-68; CD, III/IV, 10-14; BC, 22, 24; HC, *Q/A* 21, 53, 65; FC, 21, GC, *Q/A* 96).

We deny that *each* and *every person* under the covenant infallibly receives the grace of effectual calling or irresistible grace or has Christ's atoning work administered to them (cf. CD, III/IV, 8-9; II, 8-9; WCF, 10:4, 8:1, 5-6, 8; LC, *Q/A* 68; FCH, 13-16).

##### Article 41

We affirm that union with Christ ordinarily occurs in effectual calling and that only the elect are effectually called and united to Christ (LC, *Q/A* 65, 68; WCF, 10:1, 4; HC, *Q/A* 20).

We deny that the non-elect are ever united or engrafted to Christ, share in his saving benefits, and enjoy fellowship with God through the blood of Christ.

##### Article 42

We affirm that the reprobate may experience some common operations of the Spirit with the elect (WCF, 10:4; CD, III/IV, 8-9).

We deny that these common operations cause the reprobate, even those reprobate who are baptized and under the covenant, to truly come to Christ, be saved, effectually called, justified, adopted, or sanctified.

#### 3.6.2 Justification (cf. Errors 17-21)

##### Article 43

We affirm that justification is an act of God's grace whereby God pardons the sins of those he effectually calls,

not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone, by imputing the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ unto them, received by faith alone (WCF, 11:1; LC, *Q/A* 70-71; HC, *Q/A* 60; FC, 18; SHC, 15:1-3; GC, *Q/A* 118).

We deny that God imputes faith itself, the act of believing, or any other obedience as the believer's righteousness (WCF, 11:1; LC, *Q/A* 72-73; BC, 22; HC, *Q/A* 61).

#### **Article 44**

We affirm that God accounts and accepts the justified as righteous, not by infusing righteousness into them, nor by some good work in them, but by Christ's merits alone (LC, *Q/A* 70; BC, 22, 23).

We deny therefore that justification is by anything done by or achieved in the believer, including so-called non-meritorious good works.

#### **Article 45**

We affirm therefore that the ground of our acceptance before God is the righteousness of another, namely Jesus Christ—his full obedience to the law and satisfaction for sin (BC, 22-23; HC, *Q/A* 60-61; WFC, 11:1; SHC, 15:3).

We deny that believers have any righteousness to contribute for their justification inasmuch as believers have no righteousness that can meet the standards of God's holiness and justice.

#### **Article 46**

We affirm that in showing mercy and bringing salvation to sinners, God achieves this by fulfilling the demands of his holiness and justice, so that Christ fully discharged the debt of all those justified, and made a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice on our behalf, and therefore our justification is wholly a free gift of God's grace and the satisfaction of God's exact justice (WCF, 8:3-5; BC, 20).

We therefore deny the claim that God lowers his standard of holiness and justice in order to justify and save sinners, or that God, in the covenant of grace, has withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, and now graciously and freely counts faith itself or the works that accompany faith, even the imperfect and non-meritorious works of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this faith as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

**Article 47**

We affirm that those who are justified are justified perfectly in this life (LC, *Q/A* 77) and they can never fall from the state of justification (WCF, 11:5; FC, 17).

We deny, therefore, that any are justified except the elect (WCF, 3:6), even as we deny any definition of justification that would extend it in any way whatsoever to the reprobate.

**3.6.3 Justifying Faith (cf. Errors 22-24)**

**Article 48**

We affirm that justifying faith receives and rests upon Christ and his merits held forth in the gospel, for faith is the instrument by which we are bonded to Christ and all his benefits; that is, in embracing Christ by faith we receive all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place, and so we are pardoned of all our sins and reckoned righteous and accepted before God in Christ (LC, *Q/A* 72; BC, 22, 23).

We deny that justifying faith justifies believing sinners because of any of those other graces that do always accompany it or because of any act of it being imputed to them for their justification (LC, *Q/A* 73).

**Article 49**

We affirm therefore that justifying faith does not refer to all the operations and fruits of faith, but refers to believing sinners, empty-handed and fleeing to Christ, receiving Christ



and all his benefits for their justification before God, i.e., “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” (WCF, 14:2; LC, *Q/A* 73; BC, 22; HC, *Q/A* 61).

We deny that faith is anything more than an instrumental condition for justification; and we deny that the instrument of faith is something more than a receiving of what Christ gives or that it is graciously counted by God as our righteousness; we also deny that either Adam, before he sinned, or Christ, the second Adam, needed this justifying faith and was counted righteous by such a faith.

#### **Article 50**

We affirm that faith is not of ourselves but the gift of God, wrought in his elect by the Holy Spirit and according to his free mercy (WCF, 11:4; SHC, 16:2; HC, *Q/A* 21, 53; FC, 21; SHC, 15:4).

We deny that the elect are justified from eternity; rather, from eternity God decreed to justify the elect in due time, that is, when the Holy Spirit applies Christ unto them (WCF, 11:4).

### **3.6.4 By Faith Alone, Apart from Works (cf. Errors 25-28)**

#### **Article 51**

We affirm that justification by faith alone means that we are righteous before God by Christ alone—that is, justification is only by Christ and his righteousness imputed to us, for Christ has stood in our place and fulfilled the whole law of God and all righteousness on our behalf by his active and passive obedience (HC, *Q/A* 60-61; BC, 23; WCF, 11:1, 3; FC, 20).

We deny that justification may rightly be redefined as consisting solely in the forgiveness of our sins through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (his passive obedience), or that

justification is primarily an identity marker of belonging to the visible church or a badge of vindication.

#### **Article 52**

We affirm that since Christ has done everything for believing sinners, whereby they stand before God fully and completely righteous, all believers can do is receive this gift by faith—that is, by faith alone, exclusive of all works, even those works that are the fruits of faith (HC, *Q/A* 61; BC, 22; WCF, 11:2).

We deny that faith alone means that the fruits that accompany our faith, such as works of love, or faith in its faithfulness, or faith in its non-meritorious working, or any other kind of works, are included in the definition and instrumentality of justifying faith; and so we deny that justifying faith is faith as a virtue.

#### **Article 53**

We affirm that faith is merely the instrument for receiving Christ and accepting his merit.

We deny the claim that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life (CD, II, rejection of errors 4).

### **3.7 Sacraments of the Covenant of Grace (cf. Errors 29-31)**

#### **3.7.1 Sacraments as Signs and Seals**

#### **Article 54**

We affirm that sacraments are visible signs and seals instituted by God to signify and seal the promises of the covenant of grace to us—God’s gracious salvation in Christ with all his benefits—and so they aid and comfort us with

Christ because of the infirmity of our faith, even as they testify of our faith and grateful devotion to God because of the free gift of salvation, and call us to faithful service to the Lord (WCF, 27:1; LC, *Q/A* 162, 163; BC, 23, 33; HC, *Q/A* 66; GC, *Q/A* 310; FC, 34; SHC, 19:1, 2, 4; IAR, 85).

We deny that the benefits of the sacraments are given to all recipients of the outward signs, for Christ and his benefits are bestowed only to the children of promise and worthy receivers (WCF, 27:3).

#### **Article 55**

We affirm that there is in every sacrament a “sacramental union” between the sign and the thing signified—the signs include the element that is used, along with the entire outward transaction; the thing signified is Christ and all his benefits, or participation in Christ and all the blessings he gives (WCF, 27:2; BC, 33-35; HC *Q/A* 73, 79; LC, *Q/A* 163; SHC, 19:1, 9-12).

We deny the complete separation of the sign and thing signified and also the simple identity between them, for though the visible elements of the sacraments and the thing signified are joined together, not all receive both of them, inasmuch as unbelievers and the reprobate certainly take the sacrament to their condemnation, but do not receive the truth of the sacrament—that is, Christ, who is the thing signified and communicated only to believers (cf. BC, 35).

#### **Article 56**

We affirm that due to this union between the visible elements and Christ, the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other; and therefore we may call sacraments outward signs through which God operates by his Spirit in that he does not signify anything to us in vain; yet we maintain that the substance and truth of the sacraments is Jesus Christ, and “that of themselves they are only smoke and shadow”; nonetheless, by virtue of the divine institution and promise there is a connection and union between the sign

and the thing signified, first of resemblance and second of joint exhibition and reception, so that anyone who receives the signs in the way appropriate to the divine institution, i.e., by faith, receives simultaneously the thing signified (HC, *Q/A* 69-73; FC, 34; WCF, 17:2).

We deny that the sacramental union of sign and thing signified refers to a local, spatial, material, or physical union, or even a kind of spiritual union whereby God infuses them with his power, for the visible signs do not contain within themselves, nor do they confer from any power in themselves, God's grace to sinners (cf. WCF, 29:7; SHC, 21:3-10).

### **3.7.2 Efficacy of the Sacraments (cf. Errors 32-33)**

#### **Article 57**

We affirm that the grace that is set forth in or by the right use of the sacraments is not conferred by any power residing in them, and so the efficacy of a sacrament does not abide in the sacrament itself; rather, the efficacy of the sacraments, like the Word, resides solely with the Holy Spirit who unites those belonging to Christ with Christ and all his benefits (GC, *Q/A* 311-313; SHC, 19:8-9, 11).

We therefore deny that they are bare or empty signs, or mere memorials, since by means of them God grants his grace to his people in the way of faith (GC, *Q/A* 317-320).

#### **Article 58**

We affirm that in the sacraments, according to God's institution and in their right use, which is by faith, "God gives us really and in fact that which he there sets forth to us; and that consequently with these signs is given the true possession and enjoyment of that which they present to us" (FC, 37), and so we affirm that the water of baptism, "being a feeble element, still testifies to us in truth the inward cleansing of our souls in the blood of Jesus Christ by the efficacy of his Spirit..." (FC, 38).

We deny “the doctrine of those who teach that grace and the things signified are so bound to and included in the signs that whoever participate outwardly in the signs, no matter what sort of persons they be, also inwardly participate in the grace and things signified” (SHC, 19:11).

### 3.7.3 Baptism (cf. Errors 34-35)

#### Article 59

We affirm that baptism is “a sacrament of our admission into the church, sealing unto us our new birth (and consequently our justification, adoption, and sanctification) by the communion which we have with Jesus Christ” (IAR, 89); or in the words of the French Confession, we confess that “baptism is given as a pledge of our adoption; for by it we are grafted into the body of Christ, so as to be washed and cleansed by his blood, and then renewed in purity of life by his Holy Spirit. We hold, also that although we are baptized only once, yet the gain that it symbolizes to us reaches over our whole lives and to our death, so that we have a lasting witness that Jesus Christ will always be our justification and sanctification” (FC, 35; cf. SHC, 20:1-2; cf. BC, 34; HC, *Q/A* 69-70, 72-73; WCF, 28:1, 6).

We deny that baptism saves us or in itself effectuates what it portrays and certifies (GC, *Q/A* 328-329).

#### Article 60

We affirm that the grace of baptism is “not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in his appointed time,” namely, the elect (WCF, 28:6; also 3:6, 8:1).

We deny that grace and salvation are so inseparably annexed unto baptism that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated (WCF, 28:5; GC, *Q/A* 316, 329). We also deny that in regenerating man, God does not bring to bear that power of his omnipotence whereby he may

powerfully and unfailingly bend man's will to faith and conversion; we deny that even when God has accomplished all the works of grace which he uses for man's conversion, man nevertheless can, and in actual fact often does, so resist God and the Spirit in their intent and will to regenerate him, that man completely thwarts his own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in his own power whether or not to be reborn (CD, III/IV, rejection of errors 8).

#### **Article 61**

We affirm that it is a great sin to disregard baptism, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably attached to it that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all who are baptized are "undoubtedly regenerated" (WCF, 28:5).

We deny that the efficacy of baptism is tied to the moment in which baptism is administered (WCF, 28:6), for the imparting of saving blessing to which baptism points can precede, come after, or take place at the moment of baptism.

### **3.7.4 Lord's Supper (cf. Errors 36-38)**

#### **Article 62**

We affirm that Christ instituted the Lord's Supper for those who are truly displeased with themselves for their sins, yet who nevertheless trust that their sins are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and likewise that the sinful weakness that remains in them is covered by the suffering and death of Christ; and these very ones also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life (HC, *Q/A* 81; also BC, 35; WLC, *Q/A* 177; GC, *Q/A* 344, 357-360).

We deny that hypocrites and those who are unrepentant may properly come to the Lord's Table; rather, in coming they eat and drink judgment on themselves. We also deny that infants and small children, inasmuch as they are incapable of examining themselves, of grasping the culpability of their sins and the work of Christ for redemption, and of

exercising faith in Christ, can be nurtured or blessed in partaking of the Lord's Supper (HC, *Q/A* 81; SC, 23). We likewise deny that the Supper imparts blessing to its recipients by the mere act of partaking or receiving; the sacrament is without benefit except it is appropriated and received spiritually by faith, that is, by the Spirit through faith (BC, 35).

### **3.8 Perseverance and Assurance (cf. Errors 39-43)**

#### **Article 63**

We affirm that those whom God has effectually called can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved (WCF, 17:1; HC, *Q/A* 54).

We deny the apostasy of the saints; i.e., that anyone who truly comes to Christ falls away unto damnation (WCF, 10:4), or that those who truly believe and have been born again can commit the sin that leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit) and lose their salvation (CD, V, rejection of errors 4), or that they not only can forfeit justifying faith as well as grace and salvation totally and to the end, but also in actual fact do often forfeit them and are lost forever (CD, V, rejection of errors 3); and so we deny that there is any temporary participation in justification, adoption, and sanctification.

#### **Article 64**

We affirm that the perseverance of true believers is an effect of election and is a gift of God produced by Christ's death.

We deny that perseverance is a condition of the new covenant that man must fulfill by his covenant faithfulness, so that election and justification may be temporal gifts of God (cf. CD, V, rejection of errors 1).

**Article 65**

We affirm that the faith of those who believe only temporarily differs from justifying and saving faith.

We deny that this faith differs in duration alone (CD, V, rejection of errors 7).

**Article 66**

We affirm that believers may “be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace” (WCF, 18:1), and baptism testifies of the same.

We deny that in this life there is no fruit, no awareness, and no assurance of one’s unchangeable election to glory, except as conditional upon something changeable and contingent (CD, I, rejection of errors 7); and we deny that baptism effectuates this state of grace, though it does call us to trust God’s promises and rest in Christ, the thing signified in our baptism.

**Article 67**

We affirm that this assurance is not a bare and conjectural persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope but an “infallible assurance of faith” (WCF, 18:2-3).

We deny that the perseverance of true believers is not an effect of election or a gift of God produced by Christ’s death, but a condition of the new covenant which man, prior to (what some call) his “conditional” election and justification, must fulfill by his free will or his own covenant faithfulness (CD, V, rejection of errors 1).

**Article 68**

We affirm that this assurance derives from the promises of salvation in Christ, which are proclaimed in the Word and signified and sealed in the sacraments, and from the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts of our adoption whereby we cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; WCF, 18:2). Such assurance is also confirmed by the doctrine of election (WCF, 3:8) and by the endeavor of believers to walk in good conscience and obedience before God (LC, *Q/A* 80;



HC, *Q/A* 1, 21, 44, 49, 52-53, 58, 65, 67, 69, 73, 75, 79, 86, 120; BC, 24, 26).

We deny that baptism (or the sacraments together) is the sole or principal means of assurance, for the divine Word of promise is always prior to sacrament.

### **3.9 Membership in the Church of Christ (cf. Errors 44-45)**

#### **Article 69**

We affirm that the church is rightly distinguished into the invisible church consisting of all the elect—i.e., true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit—and the visible church consisting of all those who profess true faith and their children, though mixed with hypocrites and false brothers (WCF, 25:1-2, 5; BC, 27, 29; HC, *Q/A* 54; LC, *Q/A* 61-66; GC, *Q/A* 93, 96, 100).

We deny that *each* and *every person* who is in the visible church is certainly, inevitably, and individually God's elect, justified, and saved (LC, *Q/A* 61).

#### **Article 70**

We affirm that all those who are in the visible church and under the covenant of grace possess certain privileges and blessings that are not possessed by those who are not members of the visible church and the covenant of grace, such as the fellowship of God's people, offers of grace by Christ in the ministry of the gospel and the testimony of the sacraments, excluding none that will come to him (LC, *Q/A* 63).

We deny that each and every person who is in the visible Church is united to Christ spiritually and mystically, or really and inseparably, as his or her head and husband (LC, *Q/A* 65).

**Article 71**

We affirm that the benefits of the invisible Church include justification, adoption, and sanctification, and that these are given *only* to the elect (LC, *Q/A* 68-69).

We deny that the covenant of grace, inasmuch as it is made with elect alone, according to its saving essence and goal, means that the baptism of the non-elect is an invalid or false baptism.