

Examination Questions for Pastor Douglas Wilson

Personal

1. **Why did you request that your session request this questioning?** *While we believe (strongly) that ministers who are in good standing with their church and presbytery should not have to “prove their innocence” in any setting, we also believe in the law of charity. This means that we recognize that there is a controversy that has grown to a level where many well-meaning individuals have been unsettled. We see ourselves in a similar position to the apostle Paul who, when he visited Jerusalem, agreed to pay the Nazarite vows of four young men so that the broader church could be assured that the slanderous things being said about him were false. For that reason, I asked my session if they could request such an exam. They agreed to do this and made the request of the moderator. He consulted with a number of CRE ministers, and then granted the request. And here we are.*
2. **It seems like one result of Federal Vision is blurred definitions of terms that were once clear and thus comforting. Terms such as justification, Christian, election, salvation, and regeneration seem now to be used in ways that are unknown, unclear and discomforting. Are you concerned that you may have contributed to this loss of certitude and comfort, and thus caused some to stumble?** *Yes, I would have to say so. Whenever a controversy of this magnitude and extent breaks out, it would be arrogance to maintain that all the fault has to lay with the other side entirely. At the same time, I can say that this sort of thing was not done deliberately. The controversy that has come about is not something we were trying to create in any way. I am not so naïve as to believe that everyone would have been satisfied had we conducted ourselves perfectly, but I do believe that many honest Christians have been unsettled by this. To the extent that we bear responsibility for any of this, we want to acknowledge it, and correct ourselves where we can. That, incidentally, is one reason for an examination such as this. At the same time, there are some important doctrinal issues we are dealing with as we seek to be faithful to all of Scripture. And faithfulness to Scripture is also a confessional requirement, one that sometimes requires us to ask uncomfortable questions.*
3. **Have you vowed to uphold and defend the system of doctrine contained in the WCF? Have you taken any exceptions to the WCF? ... Other than these exceptions, you agree with everything in the WCF?** *I currently subscribe to the Reformed Evangelical Confession. But Christ Church is in the process of adopting a Book of Confessions, which includes the 39 Articles, the Three Forms, and the original Westminster Confession of Faith. I have not yet subscribed to the Westminster Confession, but my subscription to the original Westminster Confession is therefore likely. When that happens, my exceptions will be the same as what follows. These are the exceptions noted in our proposed Book of Confessions: **1. Chapter 7: Of God’s Covenant with Man**— Para . 2: (cf. Chp. 19, para. 1, 6). We would clarify that the “covenant of works” was not meritorious and we deny that any covenant can be kept without faith. Good works, even in this covenant were a result of faith, as illustrated by the Sabbath rest which was Adam’s first full day in the presence of God. **2. Chapter 21: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day**— Para . 8: We believe that along with works of piety, necessity, and mercy, the command also calls us to rest our bodies on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 16:30 ; 31:15-17). We do not believe the intention of*

Scripture was to exclude recreation, especially in the context of the fellowship of God's people. **3. Chapter 24: Of Marriage**— Para 4: Delete the last sentence, which reads, "The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband's kindred, nearer in blood than of her own." **4. Chapter 25: Of the Church**— Para . 6: Though we believe the Pope of Rome to be anti-Christian, we do not believe him necessarily to be the Anti-Christ, Man of Lawlessness, or Beast of Revelation, etc. **5. Chapter 27: Of the Sacraments**— Para . 4: Ministers of the Word should ordinarily lead in the administration of the Sacraments, yet we believe that it is permissible for the sacraments to be administered with the oversight of any elder, lawfully ordained. **6. Chapter 28: Of Baptism**— Para . 3: We believe that the proper modes of baptism include sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. Para . 4: Being a church composed of both paedobaptists and those holding to believer's baptism, we expressly allow men otherwise qualified to serve as elders, but who hold to believer's baptism, to make an exception to WCF XXVIII. 4, which states, "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized." **7. Chapter 29: Of The Lord's Supper**— Para . 7: We would clarify that "worthy receivers" of the Lord's Supper may include all baptized covenant members who are able to physically eat and drink the elements, including very young children being raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (provided that they are not under discipline). We deny that an artificial standard of age or mental capacity is consistent with the biblical basis for partaking of the Supper. We defer to the heads of households in discerning the capacity of their young children to partake in the Supper. Other than these exceptions, I agree with everything in the Confession.

4. **In your view, what historic confession of faith most faithfully expresses the system of doctrine taught in the Bible?** *Taking this as a limited question, I would answer with the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Confession, I believe, most faithfully expresses the system of doctrine taught in the Bible. But at the same time, I believe that the Bible teaches far more than just a "system of doctrine." The poetry, history, literature, liturgy and wisdom of Scripture do not exclude biblical doctrine, but they do go far beyond it. The Westminster is nevertheless a great synopsis of the great doctrinal themes of the Bible. It is not a great synopsis of the Bible itself, and I do not believe it was ever intended to be by thoughtful people.*
5. **Do you have any exceptions, qualifications, or scruples to that confession in the areas of this examination? Please explain.** *No, I do not have any exceptions in any area dealing with the federal vision controversy. However, one qualification I would like to note is that I believe the covenant of works mentioned in Chapter VII is badly named. I would prefer something like the covenant of life (WLC 20), or the covenant of creation. I believe that this covenant obligated Adam to whole-hearted obedience to the requirement of God. The one stipulation I would add is that, had Adam stood, he would have been required to thank God for His gracious protection and provision. And had Adam stood, he would have done so by believing the Word of God. In other words, it would all have been by grace through faith. Since Adam was not fallen, the nature of the grace would have been different than it is when dealing with mankind in sin. But it would have been gracious nonetheless.*

6. **In each of the following specific areas of doctrine, which of the historic confessions do you think presents the best treatment? (justification, covenant, church, and sacraments).** *I am not well-versed enough in all the reformational confessions to say which one represents these topics the best. But I know the Westminster Confession fairly well, and I agree with what it teaches on justification, covenant, church, and sacraments. The one point of comparison I am willing to make is that while the Westminster Shorter Catechism is strong on definitions, I think the Heidelberg Catechism is more pastoral. In Christ Church, we teach our children both catechisms, which I think provides a good balance.*
7. **Which theologians have most influenced your understanding of covenant and the sacraments?** *John Calvin, by a long shot. Some years after I became a soteriological Calvinist, I also became a sacramental Calvinist.*
8. **Have you read the RPCUS resolutions “With reference to the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ Movement”? If so, with which of the resolutions do you disagree? Please explain the nature of your disagreement.** *Yes, I have some acquaintance with that document. Out of the eighteen statements made there, I agreed with fifteen of them. The three I differed with (or differed with what was probably intended by them) were as follows: I differed with their statement that “any doctrine that denies the Covenant of Works is contrary to the Bible and the Westminster Standards.” My reasons for this were explained above. I do believe Adam was in covenant with God, but I do not believe that Adam was required to fulfill this covenant by any works apart from faith responding to God’s gracious word. I also differed with their statement on paedocommunion. I believe that very young covenant children may be faithfully admitted to the Table. And I differed with their last statement where they said that the Westminster Standards are “Biblical Christianity in its purest human expression.” I would prefer to say that the Westminster Standards are a faithful systematic statement of certain key biblical doctrines. Biblical Christianity in its purest human expression would have to be found in things like visiting widows and orphans in their affliction.*

Justification by Faith Alone

9. **What is justification?** *The justification of an individual occurs when God imputes to that individual the complete obedience of Jesus Christ. This imputation reckons to a sinful and imperfect individual all the perfections of Jesus Christ. The ground of this imputation is the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, both active and passive, and the instrument of receiving it is faith alone, a gift of God to the individual, given so that no one can boast.*
10. **How may a person be made right with God?** *By believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.*
11. **What is the nature of living faith?** *It contains the elements of notitia, assensus, and fiducia. We know the one who promises, we assent to what is said or done, and we trust.*
12. **What is the relationship of faith and works?** *Works are the necessary fruit of godly faith.*

- 13. Do you believe that justification is by faith plus works? What is the relationship between works and justification? How are justification and sanctification related?** *No, I do not believe that justification is by faith plus works. A man is justified by faith alone, and just in case someone might want to take credit for his faith (as though it were a work of his own), God even gives the gift of faith. Justification and sanctification are related in that faith is the instrument for receiving both. After a man has believed God to the saving of his soul, that same man believes God to the ongoing renewal of his soul. We are justified by grace through faith. We are sanctified by that same grace through that same faith. God does not ever give His elect the gift of momentary faith. The faith that He gives remains with us, and so we continue to believe God.*
- 14. Can someone who is justified become unjustified?** *No. Someone who is justified in the sense described in answer to question #9 cannot become unjustified.*
- 15. Does justification include the imputation of the good works of obedience to the law by Christ to the one who is justified? If so, is justification by works or faith?** *Justification is by works in the sense that Christ's obedience is the foundation for it. When I say we are not justified by obedience, I mean that we are not justified by our obedience. We are most certainly justified by the obedience of Jesus Christ.*
- 16. Have you read Westminster Seminary's "Our Testimony on Justification"? With which part do you disagree? Please explain the nature of your disagreement.** *Yes, I have read that document also, and my objections are two-fold. First, as a treatment of false doctrine that threatens the gospel, it was far too general. They lumped together and attacked ecumenism, the New Perspective, and certain unnamed persons within the Reformed world. They said the purpose of the testimony was primarily directed at this third group, and outlined nine distinctive features of this teaching, with no citations. Though I was obviously included by them as a member of this group (as is clear by listening to the Westminster conference tapes on this subject), I only recognized my position in one of the nine doctrines they identified. That one place where they accurately identified my position was #5, "that the idea of merit as a way of explaining the work of Christ for us is unbiblical." And as far as that goes, I agree with Calvin's statement in the Institutes, where he said, "I ask, what need was there to introduce the word merit, when the value of works might have been fully expressed by another term, and without offence?" (3.15.2)*
- 17. Do you accept the teaching of the imputation of the active righteousness of Christ? Why or why not?** *Yes, I accept it. All that Jesus is, has, and has done is reckoned to us.*
- 18. Define "imputation," "active obedience," and "passive obedience." Do you uphold these concepts? Is Christ's active and passive obedience imputed to believers?** *Imputation describes how God "reckons" within the confines of a covenant. He imputes the guilt of Adam's transgression to us. He imputes the guilt of the elect to Jesus Christ. He imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the elect. "Active obedience" refers to Christ's life of perfect obedience—His resistance to temptation, His obedience to the law and so on. His "passive obedience" refers to His passion, His suffering on the cross. Yes, I uphold these concepts as expressing the teaching of Scripture. Christ began to identify with His elect long before His suffering on the cross. This, in part, is the meaning of Him receiving the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance.*

19. **How is “union with Christ” related to “imputation”?** *For the elect, they amount to the same thing. For covenant members who are not elect, their union with Christ is distinct from the fruitful union enjoyed by the elect. One of the central reasons for their fruitlessness is that they do not enjoy the benefits of imputation.*
20. **Do you believe in the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as necessary for our acceptance in the Beloved?** **[Follow up questions, perhaps].** *Yes, I do.*
21. **At what point in their lives are covenant children justified? If they are elect, are they justified before birth? Are they justified at their baptism? Are they justified through faith alone, or on some other basis? Explain.** *It depends upon who they are individually, and not just what category they are in. Every person’s story is different. Some elect children are justified before birth. Some elect children grow up in a covenant home, but get converted at a youth camp when they are sixteen. Some may be justified at the moment of their baptism, but it is important to emphasize that the grace of baptism is not tied to the moment of administration. I believe that all justification is by grace through faith, but that God gives faith that is appropriate to the age and condition of the recipient. John the Baptist was capable of joy in the mother’s womb, and Scripture teaches that it is possible to trust in God from your mother’s breast. Not all saving faith is mature faith, thank God.*
22. **With which of the following statements do you agree?**
- a. **Justification is thus the declaration of God, the just judge, that someone is (a) in the right, that their sins are forgiven, and (b) a true member of the covenant family, the people belonging to Abraham” (N.T. Wright in “The Shape of Justification”).** *As this stands, I agree with it. But I have to say I do not agree with all of N.T. Wright’s teaching on justification.*
 - b. **In our relationship to God [justification] must mean that we are reckoned in his judgment as free from guilt and sustaining an upright relation in terms of the criterion of his judgment, that is to say, we are reckoned as sustaining a relation which meets the requirements of the law and justice, and pronounced to be such (Murray, Vol. 2: 205).** *I agree with this.*
 - c. **Adoption cannot be said to be a different act or grace from justification (Dabney, 627).** *I would have to differ with this. They are obviously related, but to make them absolute synonyms seems problematic to me. For example, St. Paul describes our adoption as sons as being the redemption of the body, which I take as including the resurrection.*
 - d. **Justification detaches man from sin which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin. Justification follows upon God’s merciful initiative of offering forgiveness. It reconciles man with God. It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals. (Catechism of the CC, 1990.).** *I differ with this. Justification never occurs apart from an infusion of righteousness, but it cannot be understood as an infusion of righteousness. God does give us a new heart, but that gift is not justification. It is the new heart that repents and believes, and that faith in turn is the instrument of justification.*

- 23. How does eschatology shape your understanding of justification? Are there past, present, future aspects of justification?** *When we are talking about the theological justification of an individual sinner, we are talking about a punctiliar event in the life of that individual. But this is a particular stipulated (theological) definition of the word justification. If we want to talk about justification more broadly, we would have to include the demonstrative sense that James uses, the justification of Jesus in His resurrection, the apostates falling away from the “way of righteousness,” and so on. I believe that Christ’s resurrection was His vindication, His justification. I believe that we will have such a vindication in our resurrection, and that a biblical way of describing this would be to say that it will be our justification, our manifestation as the sons of God. But this use of the word, while not disconnected from individual justification, is certainly to be distinguished from it.*
- 24. Is there any sense in which we are justified by works? Please explain.** *Yes, in the sense that James means. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. In James’ illustration, works is the animating principle and faith is the body. Without works, faith is just a corpse. But such a dead faith is not saving faith. Paul and James do not have an identical theological vocabulary. What James calls works, Paul calls fruit. I would call it life.*
- 25. Are non-elect members of the church justified? If so, how does their justification differ from the justification of the elect? Are there two kinds of justification?** *No, non-elect members of the church are not justified in the sense I have already described. They have not had the perfect obedience of Christ credited to them. But when they fall away, they do fall away from the “way of righteousness,” or rendered another way, the “way of justification.” Such individuals are unjustified members of a justified people. Some of the sons of Sarah turn out to be sons of Hagar. Are they sons of Sarah? Yes. Are they sons of Sarah? No.*
- 26. When are the elect justified? Is a person justified in his baptism? Is a person justified when he comes to faith? Is one “justified by faith alone”?** *The elect are justified in accordance with God’s purpose for them. Sally was justified when she was ten. Henry was forty-five, and they were both baptized in infancy. Each of them, however, are justified whenever God gives the gift of faith. And yes, they are all justified by faith alone.*
- 27. Was Jesus justified? How was he justified? What is the relationship between his justification and ours?** *Jesus was justified in the Spirit by His resurrection from the dead. But when Jesus was justified, God was not imputing the righteousness of someone else to Him. Rather, God was vindicating Him, and declaring Him to be the Son of God. Because all that Jesus is, has, and did is imputed to us, this glorious vindication is imputed to us as well. He was raised to life for our justification as St. Paul says in Romans. This means that His justification is the basis for our justification, although they are distinct.*

28. **What is the relationship between justification and adoption? Are these two distinct acts of God?** *I believe that they must be distinguished if we are talking about individual justification in the theological sense. And that is because of the role adoption has in the resurrection. According to St. Paul, “we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). This means that adoption certainly has an eschatological element. If adoption is simply equated with justification, then justification has that element also. I would want to carefully distinguish what happens during an individual’s justification and what happens at the “manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19)—although this latter manifestation is certainly a vindication and justification in another sense.*
29. **Do you take any exceptions the Westminster Confession’s statement on justification?** *No, I do not. I believe that the full-orbed teaching of the Bible on justification includes more than what is found in the Westminster Confession, but I believe the teaching of the Confession is accurate.*
30. **In WCF 11.2 when it speaks of imputing the “obedience and satisfaction of Christ” – how do you understand this?** *I understand this as saying that faith is not the ground of our justification, but rather that the ground of our justification is the obedience and satisfaction of Christ. It is possible to see obedience here as “active obedience” and satisfaction as “passive obedience.” And I agree with this distinction, although it is possible that the Confession is not referring to it. The Confession was a consensus document, and not all the delegates were agreed on this subject.*

11:2 Those whom God effectually calleth He also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone: nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness, by faith: which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

31. **Does our faithfulness keep us in the covenant of grace?** *No, the covenant of grace keeps us in our faithfulness.*
32. **Would you agree with the following statements?**
- a. **“We are not justified by faith by believing we are justified by faith.”** *I agree. Justification is by faith in Christ alone, not by faith alone in this particular sentence or that one.*
 - b. **“There is nothing we can say, do, or believe that makes us acceptable with God.”** *I agree. We can say, do, or believe nothing that “makes us” acceptable with God. However, when He offers to make us acceptable to Him in Christ, we can believe Him. When we do, He uses that as His instrument for applying the obedience of Jesus Christ to us.*
33. **Is there anything we can say, do, or believe that can make us unacceptable with God? (give examples from Scripture?)** *Everything we say, do, or believe outside of Christ continues our unacceptability with Him. It does not “make us” unacceptable to Him, for we were conceived this way. But it certainly is unacceptable to Him. From Scripture, the one who does not believe is condemned already (Jn. 3:18).*

- 34. How would you refer to a person who professes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, while, at the same time, confesses that the grace of justification is one and the same with the grace of sanctification and that the protestant distinction between them is incorrect?** *If he is baptized, I would describe him as a confused covenant member. If the fruit of the Spirit is evident in his life, I would describe him as a converted and confused covenant member. He would be like a toddler who knows how to turn on the lights, although I would never support such a toddler becoming a licensed electrician. In the same way, I would not support such a person's ordination. But the lights are still on.*
- 35. How would you refer to a person who professes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and, at the same time, clearly rejects the teaching of justification by faith alone; founded and grounded upon the perfect and completed work of Jesus Christ?** *If he is baptized, and he is not just ignorant, but obstinately teaches contrary to the truth, then I would describe him as a false brother. Such teachers afflicted the apostle Paul, and that is how he described them.*
- 36. Series of questions pertaining to the relationship of faith and works, their relationship, their source, and in what sense (if any) works are considered "indispensable" in our salvation.** *Works are the fruit of faith, God gives them both, and God never gives faith without also giving the resultant works. Therefore works are indispensable in the sense that they must be present. Apples must be present on an apple tree, but apples are never the trunk.*
- 37. Possibly some questions on the corporate aspects of justification...** *That would be fine with me. Christ is our corporate head, and He was justified in His resurrection. That resurrection, and everything else that He is and has done has been imputed to us.*
- 38. What is the relationship between grace and law? Is this a hermeneutical issue?** *Grace and law are not antithetical in the mind and heart of God. The Bible should not therefore be divided up into "law" portions and "grace" portions. The Word of God is not divided. The human race, however, is divided. That is why the unregenerate heart sees all of Scripture as condemnation, both law and gospel (2 Cor. 2:16). And that is why the obedient, regenerate heart sees Christ in the law, Christ in the gospel, and Christ throughout all Scripture (Rom. 10:4). I do reject one particular grace/law hermeneutic, where the Bible is divided up into different categories. At the same time, when a person is in transition between unbelief and belief, the law is added to increase transgression (Rom. 3:20; 5:20). This brings conviction of sin. Once the person is converted, he sees the grace of God in the gospel. Then after his conversion, he looks back and sees that the law which once terrified him is holy, precious, and full of grace. The preamble to the Ten Commandments put it this way—God is the one who delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, from the house of bondage. That is grace.*

The Covenant of Works

- 39. Define covenant. Is the covenant conditional or unconditional? Unilateral or Bilateral?** *A covenant is a bond of love, with mutual obligations of love. God Himself is a covenantal triune Being. When covenants are made with creatures who are fallen, or who are capable of falling, covenants are a bond of love, with mutual obligations of love, with stipulations and blood sanctions for covenant-breaking. Within the New Covenant, the covenant is unilateral for covenant keepers, and bilateral for covenant breakers. When we keep covenant with God, it is because we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling, because God is at work in us to will and to do for His good pleasure. In other words, He keeps covenant, and He works in us so that we keep covenant by the faith He gives to us. For covenant breakers, God graciously offers the terms of the covenant, and on his side the covenant breaking covenant member contributes all the unbelief and sin.*
- 40. Was the covenant of works a gracious covenant? How is it to be distinguished from the covenant of grace? What is your view of the “covenant of works”?** *Yes, the covenant of works was gracious in that Adam was surrounded by the goodness of a giving God. And if Adam had stood, even that standing would have been a gift from God, which he would have received by faith. But while all gifts are gifts, not all gifts are the same. The gift of preservation to an unfallen Adam is quite different than the gift of forgiveness to a rebellious and iniquitous race. The fact of giving is the same. The content of the gifts is different. I may give my wife a string of pearls one Christmas, and a coffee table the next. My desire and disposition to give is the same. But pearls are not a coffee table.*
- 41. Do you have any reservations or qualifications about the words of WCF 7.2, “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”** *Yes. At least in modern times, the phrase “covenant of works” is ambiguous and misleading. It calls Pharisees to mind, but their problem was covenant breaking, not covenant keeping. If by “covenant of works,” it is simply meant that Adam was obligated to obey God fully, and that we were represented in his obedience (or disobedience), then I have no problem with it. But if it is asserted (contrary to the historic development of this doctrine), that the covenant of works was grounded on the idea of autonomous merit, then I strongly differ with it. It is my assumption that my difference with the Confession here is a verbal one. However, my difference with certain modern writers is not merely semantic. I agree with Rowland Ward’s comments here: “Unhappily, even those who come from the Presbyterian and Reformed community often have a poor perception of the historic teaching on the covenant of works. One does not object to mere verbal differences, but it is very disturbing to see that quite a number of orthodox writers have the notion that the covenant of works is a merit-based arrangement, the reward being wages earned” (Rowland Ward, God and Adam, pp. 13-14)*

42. **What is the “Covenant of Works”? Does the Westminster Confession of Faith teach a “Covenant of Works”? Do you believe in the “Covenant of Works”?** *The covenant of works was God’s covenant with Adam, promising him perpetual access to the tree of life after he passed his probationary test. The Westminster Confession does teach it. I hold to it, but would prefer to call it a covenant of creation, and I would insist that the covenant of creation was not to be conducted on the basis of raw autonomous merit from Adam. Had Adam stood faithfully, he would have had occasion to thank God for preserving him from sin.*
43. **What is the relationship between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace? Is Moses a “Republication of the Covenant of Works”? Do you believe that the law-grace hermeneutic as defined by certain faculty members of Westminster Seminary (West) as essential to a proper understanding of the Westminster Confession? Why or why not?** *The covenant of grace in the second Adam was designed to restore and repair the damage caused by the first Adam in his rebellion against the covenant of creation. Christ paid the penalty required by that first covenant, and He also established a second covenant that enabled us to be brought back into fellowship with God through Him. The law of Moses is not a republication of the covenant of works. God heard the cry of the people in Egypt because He remembered His covenant with Abraham (Ex. 2:24-25). And the Westminster Confession clearly identifies the Mosaic economy as an administration of the covenant of grace (7/5). Those who see Moses as a republication of the covenant of works are therefore out of conformity with the Westminster Standards. Of course, worse things than that have happened. I do not see this particular law/grace hermeneutic as essential to a proper understanding of the Westminster Confession, and in fact I see it as a positive hindrance. Among other things I object to this approach because a hermeneutic ought to contain those things which are proper to us. In this case, I see that all Scripture can only be interpreted in one of two ways—either in faith or in unbelief. The division is therefore in the human heart, and never in the divine heart.*
44. **Define “merit.” Could Adam have “merited” our salvation? How did Christ “merit” our salvation?** *My skittishness about the word merit has to do with my rejection of certain medieval assumptions about merit, in which merit practically becomes a quasi-substance. But as a general term of praise, I have no problem with it (as in, “that argument has merit.”). I agree with John Frame in his foreword to The Backbone of the Bible, when he says that “although I prefer to speak of ‘desert’ or ‘justice’ to speaking of ‘merit,’ Shepherd has not convinced me that the last term is simply wrong.” Had Adam obeyed he would have obtained our salvation, and it would have been a fulfillment of the terms of the covenant, and therefore just and right. The same is true of Christ’s obedience. Christ purchased us, and it is just and right that this happen. My problem with merit is that it tends to drag autonomy behind it. Remove that, and I would not want to quibble over words.*

45. Please comment on the following quote by John Piper:

...I am hesitant to call Jesus' obedience in life and death the fulfillment of a "covenant of works." This term generally implies that "works" stand over against "grace," and are not the fulfillment of faith in grace. Thus works implies a relationship with God that is more like an employer receiving earned wages than like a Son trusting a Father's generosity.... I see God's grace as the basis of his relationship with Adam and Eve before the fall. I see this Christ, the Second Adam, fulfilling this covenant of grace (not works) perfectly by trusting his Father's provision at every moment and obeying all his commandments by faith. His relationship to the Father was one of constant trust. His obedience was the effect of this trust. "Grace" toward Jesus was not exactly the same as grace toward fallen sinners. He never sinned (Heb. 4:15). Yet, in his human life he was dependent upon God similar to the way we are. Not only that, he took our sin on himself (Is. 53:6). Thus God exerted a kind of "grace" in overcoming his curse on sin in order to exalt Christ (Future Grace, 413). *I agree with this fully.*

46. Please comment on Lee Iron's definition of merit:

The measure of merit is defined by the terms of the covenant, which itself is the only possible revelation and definition of divine justice. There is no such thing as non-covenantal, condign merit because merit is by definition constituted by fulfilling what is stipulated in the covenant. And there is no such thing as congruous merit which, since it is covenantal, is supposedly not based on strict justice, because the covenant is by definition the revelation of God's justice. Neither merit nor justice exists apart from covenant (Quoted in Ralph Smith, *Eternal Covenant* p. 64). *As much as I might be wary about doing so, I agree with this too. If merit is simply covenantal faithfulness, then let us all have far more merit than we currently do.*

The Church and the Objective Covenant

47. How do you understand the visible and invisible church? *I believe that such a division, if used in conjunction with other divisions, can be helpful. But in common usage, it has come to refer to two different churches. And then of course, the "true" church is the invisible one, and we are left with a disparagement of the visible church. I agree with John Murray's critique of this usage.*

48. Briefly define and distinguish between church militant, church triumphant, "historic church," "eschatological church," invisible church, and visible church. *The church militant is the church on earth. The church triumphant is in heaven. The historic church is the church on earth, in history. The eschatological church is that same church at the culmination of history, at the Eschaton. My terminology for this is historical/eschatological, but it answers to Augustine's division of pilgrim/eschatological. And if by invisible/visible you mean the church on earth, and the company of the elect, I can certainly live with that.*

49. **Do you agree with the Westminster standards that it is proper and correct to speak of both an Invisible Church and a Visible Church? Is it correct to say that baptized children of the Covenant are in either the Visible or Invisible Church? Explain.** *It is proper so long as the language is not absolutized. But at the same time, I would prefer to simply say that baptized children are in the Church. The problem lies in any particular application we might make. Imagine a church business meeting in which it is declared that only those who are members of the invisible church can vote. We have this same kind of problem in bringing our little ones to the Table. But this is the Church, we are the Church, this Table belongs to the Church. So come. Some baptized children (and adults) are not numbered among the elect. They will not be present in the visible Church as she appears at the great day. But they are in the visible Church now.*
50. **What is the “objectivity of the covenant?”** *This phrase simply means that membership in the covenant with Christ is objective and visible. We can know someone is covenantally bound to Christ the same way we know a certain man is married to a certain woman. We were at the baptism; we were at the wedding. This does not mean that we automatically know if the person will be objectively faithful to that covenant. Time will tell.*
51. **Are there subjective elements of the covenant? If so, what are some?** *Yes, certainly. The most important would be faith.*
52. **John Calvin, in the same section he calls Jesus Christ the “Author of election” also says that Jesus “numbers Judas among the elect, although he is a devil” (Institutes, III.22.7). Do you agree with this usage of the term “elect/election,” and if so, why?** *Yes, I do. Calvin refers to a temporal election, by which he shows that he is dealing with some of the same issues we are seeking to deal with. Someone who does not belong to the elect (decretally understood) may still be a member of an elect body. He is a partaker for a time.*
53. **Can you help us understand whether there are any distinctions in the Biblical usage of the word elect/election?** *The Bible refers to Jesus Christ as the Elect One, and to us as elect in Him. St. Paul tells the Colossians, as the elect of God, to put on tender mercies. This is not found to be false if one of those Colossians turned out to be reprobate. But Paul also uses election in the strong sense, the decretal sense. Who will lay a charge against the elect? It is God who justifies. The triumphalism of the latter portion of Romans 8 makes absolutely no sense if it is possible for the elect here to fall away.*
54. **It seems as if many of the problems that have surfaced regarding your teaching comes from a failure, by many, to strive to understand what you have been teaching, preaching, and writing. Furthermore, it seems as if some of the problems come from a failure to recognize the distinction between God’s eternal decree and the historical outworking of that decree. Do you recognize a distinction between God’s eternal decree and the historical outworking of that decree? If so, what difference does it make for Bible reading, pastoral care, & the responsibilities of the saints with one another?** *I agree with the first part of the question. I do not believe we have been read carefully. And I also agree that part of the problem is the tendency we have to try to harmonize everything at once. But the secret things belong to God, and the things revealed to us (Dt. 29:29). What this means is that the fact of decretal election is plainly taught in the Bible. But the roster of names is hidden from us, hidden in such a way as that we have to make our calling and election*

sure. In doing this, we are making it sure to us, not to God. It has been certain to Him from before the foundations of the world. One of the ways we make our calling and election sure is through covenantal faithfulness. It is in the life of the covenant people (historical outworking) that the decrees are worked out and manifested over time.

55. **If the lesbian, Eskimo bishop lady is a Christian, would you take communion from her hand?** *No, I would not. She is a false Christian.*
56. **Should we partake of the Eucharist while attending the Roman Catholic funeral of a departed friend?** *No, we should not. Nothing is more insulting to conservative Roman Catholics than this kind of Rodney King ecumenism. We should refrain in the first place because we want to be faithful to what we confess and believe. And, we should also refrain out of charitable respect for the requirements of the Roman church.*
57. **If the daughter of one of your parishioners desired to marry a committed Roman Catholic, would she be marrying “in the Lord?”** *She would be marrying inside the covenant. She would also be marrying unwisely and sinfully.*
58. **John Calvin recognized a distinction between the individual and the institution; would you say that the Roman Catholic Church is a true church? (elaborate).** *In the same way that an adulterous husband is a “true” husband, I would say that Rome is a “true” church. But in the same way that this same husband is being untrue, I would say that Rome is being untrue. Rome is still covenantally bound to Jesus Christ, and consequently she needs to stop cheating on Him. And incidentally, to acknowledge that a lying, cheating husband is still legally married is not to approve of the lying and cheating.*
59. **Would you list some areas of deficiency within the Roman Catholic Church?** *Let me state it more strongly. These are not areas of deficiency—they are areas of covenantal rebellion. I would include on this list the idolatry of the Mass, Mariolatry, the worship of images, the papacy, their system of works/righteousness, purgatory, and much more.*

Individual Salvation

60. **Define the word “Christian”?** **Are all the baptized “Christian”?** **Are all the elect “Christian”?** *I would want to use the word in at least two senses. In one sense, a Christian is someone who would go to heaven if he died. Just as a true Jew is one who is one inwardly, the same is true of a true Christian. In another covenantal sense, a Christian is someone who has received Trinitarian baptism, and who is therefore covenantally obligated to repent and believe. Unconverted people may be Christian in this second sense, but not in the first. And someone numbered among the elect may be still unconverted, and not be a Christian yet in either sense.*
61. **Do you believe in the necessity of the new birth?** *Only if you want to go to heaven.*
62. **If so, what is the new birth?** *The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He takes away the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh.*
63. **Would you please explain your understanding of John 3:1-11?** *I see Jesus admonishing Nicodemus on two levels. Jesus was teaching the absolute necessity of heart regeneration for individuals, and He was also talking about the coming rebirth of Israel, which happened at Pentecost, and which Ezekiel foretold.*

64. **Do all Christians go to heaven?** *In the first sense described earlier, yes. In the second sense given above, no.*
65. **Are all Christians saved from eternal damnation?** *In the first sense described earlier, yes. In the second sense given above, no.*
66. **Are all Christians regenerated?** *In the first sense described earlier, yes. In the second sense given above, no.*
67. **If someone has been born again, may they still end up in hell?** *Absolutely not.*
68. **Can the elect lose their salvation? Can a “Christian” lose his salvation? Can an un-baptized believer lose his salvation?** *No, the elect cannot. A covenant-member Christian can fall from grace, be cut out of the vine, and can apostatize. No, a regenerate person who is not baptized cannot lose his salvation.*
69. **If a person apostatizes, does he lose salvation – justification, sanctification, etc. – or does he demonstrate that he was never saved?** *He does not lose something that was never his personal possession to begin with. This means he does not lose the imputed obedience of Jesus Christ, which he never had. But he does lose something. The Scriptures speak of this with different metaphors, some emphasizing the discontinuity all the way back—wheat/tares, brothers/false brothers, washed pig/dirty pig. Others emphasize the covenant continuity all the way back—Vine/branches, olive tree branches, etc. So such a person was never individually justified, effectually called, etc. But he is falling away from grace in some way. He was enlightened. He tasted the heavenly gift. He trampled underfoot the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.*
70. **Do you believe it is proper and Biblical for the Church to evangelize baptized children of the Covenant, and seek their conversion?** *It is proper to do so if they are unconverted. But if we simply assume they are all unconverted, then what we are probably doing is teaching them to be unconverted. So we should nurture our children in the covenant, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6: 1-4). If any prove rebellious, we must bring the terms of the covenant to bear, and remind them that they have a solemn covenantal duty to love Jesus Christ. Children who do not grow up in a love for God and neighbor need to be evangelized, absolutely. He that loveth not, knoweth not God (1 Jn. 4:8).*
71. **Should the Church encourage children of the Covenant to repent and believe in Christ, or should the Church encourage Covenant children to simply be faithful to the Covenant they are already in? Explain.** *We must all repent and believe, and this includes our children. There is no such thing as covenantal faithfulness without repentance and belief. So from the youngest age, we are to teach our children to turn away from sin and to turn to Jesus. Children who cannot do this are showing (over time) that they never have. Children who do this may not be able to recall the first moment when they were born again to God (it may have happened in the womb). But you don't have to know the minute the sun rose to know that it is up.*
72. **How does the doctrine of Effectual Calling relate to Covenant children and infant baptism?** *Among covenant children, those who are elect are effectually called in accordance with God's good pleasure and will. This can happen at any point in that person's life, depending on God's purpose for him.*

73. **Is it strictly necessary for baptized Covenant children to be converted? Explain what you mean by the term “conversion.”** *Yes, it is necessary for all children of Adam to be converted. By nature they are objects of wrath. They are descended from Adam, and they need the forgiveness of Christ. At some point in their life, whether in the womb, at birth, at their baptism, when they are five, or when they are sixteen, they must be converted to God. They must be born again. They must receive a new heart. If they do not, then they are lost eternally.*
74. **Do baptized Covenant children have a right to be called “Christians” before they put their faith in Christ?** *Yes. They are federally holy, and therefore Christian, to use the language of the Westminster Directory. That is why we baptize them. If it becomes evident that one such child, growing up, does not believe in Christ, then he may be called Christian in one sense and not in another.*
75. **Is it possible for a Covenant child to be of the elect, yet eventually prove himself to be non-elect, and lose his salvation? How does your opinion about this relate to Jesus’ discussion of the vine and the branches in John 15:1-6?** *No, that is not possible. Such a covenant child was in the Vine, and was cut out as a fruitless branch. He was not numbered among the elect, by definition.*
76. **Is Christ’s atonement completely efficacious for all who are ever in Christ, including Covenant children, or are there some who are in Christ, but who will not persevere, and who will be damned? Explain.** *Christ’s atonement is completely efficacious for all the elect branches, but not for all the branches. There are some who are in Christ, if our Lord’s words have meaning, who will be cut out of the Vine and burned. They were in Christ, and now they are not. Those who are elect cannot be removed from the Vine.*
77. **Is anyone for whom Christ died in hell?** *No.*
78. **What is the relationship between corporate and individual election? Are all members of the church saved?** *Christ is Elect, and His bride is elect in Him. That elect bride is made up of both elect and non-elect individuals (at present). The bride is predestined to be presented at the end of history without spot or any other blemish. The spots and blemishes are foreordained to be gone by that time. At the Eschaton, we see a perfect and final harmonization between corporate and individual election. All the elect are in the Bride, and no one who is not elect remains.*

The Sacraments

79. **Do you believe that water baptism joins an infant to Christ, extending to him the benefits of union with Christ, including the remission of sins?** *Water baptism joins every infant to Christ by covenant, and to the elect infants, all the benefits of union with Christ are really exhibited and conferred (to use the language of Westminster), although not necessarily at the time the baptism was administered.*
80. **Is it your position that infant baptism joins the infant to Christ, and regenerates the infant?** *No. It is my position that infant baptism joins an infant to Christ covenantally. It should be noted that the infant in a believing home was already federally holy, and that is why he was baptized in the first place. Whether that infant is regenerate depends on God’s counsel and will concerning that individual. Some baptized infants are regenerated before, some during, some after, and some never.*

81. **Is a baptized person to be regarded as a Christian in the sense of being joined to Christ? Can such a person joined to Christ commit apostasy and end in hell?** *Yes, a person joined to Christ in the sense described in John 15 can wind up in Hell. But a person joined to Christ and all His benefits, which occurs through the instrumentality of God-given faith alone, cannot commit apostasy and cannot wind up in Hell.*
82. **The Westminster Confession of Faith, speaking of baptism and the Lord's Supper, says: "neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained" Do you think it's proper for the elders of the institution of the church to turn over to parents, and thus, the institution of the family, the right to either admit or not admit children to the Lord's Supper?** *I believe that the minister and elders of the church have the responsibility for the keys of the kingdom. I do not believe that family government (considered as such) has that responsibility at all. At the same time, I believe that wise pastors will always work with fathers and mothers in the shepherding of children. Pastors and elder boards who do not take into consideration the evaluation of the parents are guilty of hubris.*
83. **Are the only benefits of baptism sociological?** *No. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, both sacraments are salvific for worthy receivers. Worthy reception is on the basis of genuine faith. But for such worthy receivers the benefits of baptism are really exhibited and conferred through baptism, which is obviously the work of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, both sacraments are effectual in the work of salvation (WLC 161). In this sense, baptism is one of the "outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation" and so baptism (along with the Word, the Lord's Supper, and prayer) is "made effectual to the elect for their salvation" (WLC 154).*
84. **Does "baptism" save? If so, in what sense? Is there a sense in which baptism does not save?** *Yes, baptism saves in the sense described in Scripture. Peter tells his listeners to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and Ananias tells Paul to wash his sins away (Acts 22:16). At the same time, Paul tells us that God sent him to preach the gospel, and not to baptize (1 Cor. 1:17). Baptism does not save (but rather increases covenantal condemnation) when it is not found in concert with the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet. 3:21).*
85. **What is the difference between "water" and "Spirit" baptism?** *The separation is created by unbelief. So a person who receives the water but not the Spirit is separating what ought never to be separated.*
86. **Does baptism graft us into Jesus Christ or is it sign of being grafted into Christ?** *It depends upon who we are. For worthy receivers, the benefits of baptism are really exhibited and conferred at the moment of their effectual calling.*
87. **Please define Baptismal Regeneration? Do you believe in Baptismal Regeneration?** *Baptismal regeneration, as popularly understood, means that the grace goes in when the water goes on. No, I do not believe in baptismal regeneration. As understood and embraced by the superstitious, it is a damnable doctrine. And as opposed by the superstitious, it is almost infinitely murky.*

- 88. What is the Lord's Supper? Who may partake of the Lord's Supper? How to we partake of Christ in the Supper?** *The Lord's Supper is a memorial to God of Christ's death, a renewal of our covenant with God, and a partaking of the Lord's body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16). That body of the Lord is totus Christus, head and body together, which is why St. Paul says that we are one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17). All who are bread, therefore, should get bread. Faithful partaking of the Supper involves receiving all that God teaches us on the subject, in faith, and discerning the body of Christ around us in the sanctuary in a demeanor of love. We must not reject from the Supper any whom Christ has received, otherwise we are not discerning the body.*
- 89. Is it your position that little children who have not yet been examined by the Session for a credible profession of faith should be welcomed to the Lord's Table? Does their admittance to the Lord's Table have any relationship to whether or not they received infant baptism? Explain.** *Yes. That is my position. But at the same time, children who have not been baptized must be held back from partaking of the Supper until they have been baptized.*
- 90. Do you believe the Passover practices of the Old Testament, or other meal observances in the annual celebrations or sacrifices, justify baptized Covenant children partaking of the Lord's Supper prior to a formal reception as communicant members by the Session? Would 1 Corinthians 11:29 forbid this? /** *I do not believe that the Passover practices by themselves require this because the Passover was one of the festivals of obligation in which the head of the household went to Jerusalem, and it was lawful for him to go there alone. At the same time, the Passover celebration, taken in conjunction with the rest of the Old Testament, including the promises of God for our children, do justify such an inclusion. 1 Corinthians 11:29 does not forbid this. St. Paul tells us that the church is the one loaf, and when we are called to discern the body, we are being called to discern the Lord's body in one another. All who are bread should therefore get bread. This means that elders who hold back true Christians from communion because of their height are not discerning the body as they ought.*
- 91. Do you believe the officer officiating at the Lord's Supper should fence the table in such a way to exclude persons of any age (including Covenant children and persons with Alzheimers and other such age-related complications) who cannot mentally discern the Lord's body and blood? Why or why not?** *Discerning the body is a matter of being with the body, being identified with the body, and not disrupting the unity of the body through sinful attitudes and behavior, which such persons can certainly do. As they do it, they should be included in the life of the congregation. And for the elderly, if the Supper is withheld from them, the session should formalize their stand by excommunicating them.*
- 92. Do you believe Covenant children should be required to make a formal public profession of faith prior to being received by the Session as communicant members in our churches? Why or why not?** *No, I do not. Such an approach with young children is almost guaranteed to tell the session almost nothing about the spiritual health and condition of such a child. Further, partaking of the Lord's Supper is a profession of faith.*
- 93. Do the sacraments communicate grace? Yes, they do, to worthy receivers. They exhibit and confer saving grace to worthy receivers.**

94. **Richard D. Phillips, as he contends with the Federal Vision, offers a distinction within grace, referring to the grace of the sacraments as “sanctificational grace” (“Covenant and Salvation, or What is a Christian?” in *the Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros and Cons*, p. 82). What do you think of this distinction? *I do not know how to make sense of it theologically. What is the sense in applying the grace of the sacrament of initiation to everything except that moment of initiation? And such a distinction is certainly not in keeping with the language of the Westminster Standards (WLC 154, 161).***
95. **If the sacraments do not communicate grace in the way that a “hot iron burns,” how do they communicate grace? *They communicate grace through the instrumentality of faith. Worthy receivers have that faith because it was given to them by God, lest any should boast. Unworthy receivers do not have faith, and hence they are under the weight of a greater condemnation.***
96. **Please explain 1 Peter 3:21 with particular attention to the phrase, “which now saves us, baptism,” and how your interpretation aligns with historic Christian doctrine. *I take it as meaning that there is some sense in which baptism saves us. Peter conjoins it with an appeal of a clear conscience to God. And thus you have both elements insisted upon in the Westminster Standards. Baptism saves worthy receivers, and worthy receivers only.***
97. **Is there any Scriptural precedent for appealing to (pointing to) the signs and seals of the covenant of grace in order to encourage obedience among the people of God (exhortation, reproof, rebuke, etc.)? *Yes. Paul does this when he tells the Galatians that they do not have to be circumcised as the false teachers were saying. And why? “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . .” (Gal. 3:27). His ethical exhortations in Romans 6 follow the same basic pattern.***
98. **Does your church also subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity? *We are in the process of adopting a Book of Confessions that will include the Three Forms. It is not yet done, but it is likely to happen.***
99. **Please explain how you understand the following quotations from the Belgic Confession:**
- We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it, be content to be by himself, no matter what his status may be (BC 28). *I believe this is a faithful statement of the scriptural teaching that God does not save His people in isolation. At the same time, I prefer the Westminster qualification—no ordinary possibility of salvation.***
-He has commanded all those who are His to be baptized with plain water, into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. By this He signifies to us that as water washes away the dirt of the body when poured on us, and as water is seen on the body of the baptized when sprinkled on him, so the blood of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, does the same thing internally to the soul. It washes and cleanses our soul from sin and regenerates us from children of wrath into children of God (BC 34). *I believe this is presupposing a faithful use of the sacrament, and encourages us to look at what is happening with***

the eyes of faith. If we do, then all this is true. If we do not, then we are guilty of awful sacrilege.

We believe and confess that our Saviour Jesus Christ has instituted the sacraments of the holy supper to nourish and sustain those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His church (BC 35). [In context, who are the regenerated?] *In context, the regenerated are the baptized, again assuming a faithful use of this sacrament.*

100. **Please comment on the “Form for the Baptism of Infants” used in the Reformed Churches (appendix attached)** I believe that this is a glorious and orthodox statement of baptismal doctrine. Those who make baptismal vows when these words have been spoken have a solemn and delightful obligation to believe what is said. If they do, then the Lord is gracious to them according to their faith. If they reject the gospel spoken here through unbelief, then let God be true and every man a liar. But it is more than a little odd that ministers who use such a form of baptism would attack other ministers for believing these words.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

[NOTE: these questions were asked for the sake of clarity after the verbal exam and were not part of the original written answers]

101. **If you say that covenant members are members of a justified community, and one becomes a member through baptism, do you agree that justification in some sense occurs at baptism?**
I believe that a child in a believing home is federally holy before baptism, and that is the reason he is to be baptized. When he is baptized, his organic inclusion among the covenant people is being ratified in some sense. He is formally and sacramentally joined to "the way of righteousness." When an adult convert comes in by means of baptism, he is also being joined to the way of righteousness, or, if you like, the way of justification. Peter speaks of the apostates departing from this way. So yes, in some sense, the word justification could legitimately be used to describe what occurs at baptism. But such a use of the word is likely to be confused with the sense of justification as it applies to men who are actually being declared right with God. Consequently, I would generally want to avoid talking this way unless there was some pressing reason for it (like having to exegete 2 Pet. 2:21). I have no problem with the same word having different uses and definitions, but we do have an obligation to keep the various uses from getting all jumbled up. That is why, when I address things like this, I speak of "an unjustified member of a justified community." I would rather speak in paradox than in equivocation or confusion. Not all the sons of Sarah are sons of Sarah.
102. **You seem to be using "imputation" in a broader sense that is normal in Reformed theology. Is that correct?**
Not exactly. Strictly speaking, imputation is one thing, and God's declaration of righteousness based on that imputation is distinct from it.
103. **Does justification equal imputation? Or is justification based on imputation?**

This refers to the distinction in the previous question. I believe that properly speaking, justification is based on the imputation, and is not identical to it. But I have no problem with saying that "justification is the imputation of the righteousness of Christ," which is just a synecdoche for "justification is a declaration of righteousness, based on the imputation of the righteousness of Christ."

104. **What spiritual benefits belong to the non-elect member of the covenant? Does Hebrews 6 speak of the experience of all covenant members? Some?**
All covenant members are enlightened, all taste the heavenly gift, and the powers of the age to come. The non-elect members of the covenant share in these experiences, along with the elect, but they do so under the cloud of an approaching doom. Oedipus gets to be king through the whole play, but no one who knows the end of the play envies him this. To whom much is given, much is required, and all the blessings received by non-elect covenant members serve only to increase their condemnation. So all the spiritual benefits they share with the elect are actually despised benefits, and when sinners despise God's goodness this way, they soon come to regret it. Elect covenant members and non-elect covenant members share the privileges of the covenant the same way Judas and John shared the privileges of discipleship, and it would have been better for Judas had he never been born. I think the same is true of all non-elect covenant members, and while we can speak of "benefits" for anyone in this class, we have to keep it all in perspective. Because they receive these "benefits" in unbelief, hell is that much hotter. This is why Capernaum was going to catch it worse than Sodom did.

105. **When speaking of regeneration you used the phrase "infused righteousness." This is not customary "regeneration" phraseology, though in the light of John Murray's "definitive sanctification" it seems legitimate. What do you mean by the expression "infused righteousness" and how that relates to justification. Does God justify because in regeneration a new heart has been given to us and we have been changed? Does the "infused righteousness" have anything to do with the judicial declaration of righteousness that constitutes justification?**

My use of infused righteousness as descriptive of regeneration was a deliberate tweaking of some who ignore the implications of the traditional categories. Regeneration is certainly not imputed righteousness, and it certainly is an internal change of the sinner's heart. So "infused" seem accurate enough, and it does line up with Murray's definitive sanctification. But this highlights a problem with the way many among the Reformed have understood all this. Our faith is imperfect, even though it is genuine and God-given. This means that God can use the imperfect instrument of faith to enable us to receive the perfect gift of Christ's righteousness. The new heart is not the ground of justification any more than faith was, which we have to understand as the instrument of justification. Instead of saying "faith is the instrument (not ground) of justification," we may now say "the regenerate heart believing is the instrument (not ground) of justification." But the reason it tweaks us at all is that we are accustomed to give pride of place to imputed righteousness, all the while not recognizing that in the traditional Reformed ordo salutis, the pride of place actually goes to a type of infused righteousness (regeneration). There is nothing new here. I am saying nothing that cannot be derived (by good and necessary consequence) from the traditional ordo.

APPENDIX: Form for the Baptism of Infants

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ

The doctrine of holy baptism is summarized as follows:

First, we and our children are conceived and born in sin and are therefore by nature children of wrath, so that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again. This is what the immersion in or sprinkling with water teaches us. It signifies the impurity of our souls, so that we may detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves.

Second, baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that He establishes an eternal covenant of grace with us. He adopts us for His children and heirs, and promises to provide us with all good and avert all evil or turn it to our benefit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, God the Son promises us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins and unites us with Him in His death and resurrection. Thus we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit assures us by this sacrament that He will dwell in us and make us living members of Christ, imparting to us what we have in Christ, namely, the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without blemish among the assembly of God's elect in life eternal.

Third, since every covenant contains two parts, a promise and an obligation, we are, through baptism, called and obliged by the Lord to a new obedience. We are to cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to trust Him, and to love Him with our whole heart, soul, and mind, and with all our strength. We must not love the world but put off our old nature and lead a God-fearing life. And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sins, we must not despair of God's mercy nor continue in sin, for baptism is a seal and trustworthy testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

Although our children do not understand all this, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism. Just as they share without their knowledge in the condemnation of Adam, so are they, without their knowledge, received into grace in Christ. For the LORD spoke to Abraham, the father of all believers, and thus also speaks to us and our children, saying, *I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.* Peter also testifies to this when he says, *For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him.* Therefore, in the old dispensation God commanded that infants be circumcised. This circumcision was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith. Christ also *took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them.* In the new dispensation

baptism has replaced circumcision. Therefore, infants must be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and of His covenant; and as they grow up, their parents have the duty to instruct them in these things.