

**Overture to the 71<sup>st</sup> (2004) General Assembly  
Regarding the  
70<sup>th</sup> (2003) General Assembly's  
Decision Concerning the Doctrine of Justification**

To the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The undersigned respectfully petition the Presbytery to overture the 71<sup>st</sup> General Assembly as follows:

**I. PREAMBLE**

The vows that officers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church take for ordination and installation into office include the vow to maintain the truths of the gospel and the purity, peace, and unity of the church. Commitment to that vow lay behind the origins of the OPC and its founding in 1936. We trust that it will be recognized that we who support this overture seek to pursue that commitment not only to the doctrinal purity of the Church, but to its peace and unity as well. We also trust that it will be recognized that there can be no true peace and unity without doctrinal purity.

When there is a difference in essential doctrines, adversarial attitudes may develop which endanger the purity, peace, and unity of the Church. At such times we need to exercise brotherly love, even as we earnestly contend for the faith with respect to purity of doctrine. We need also to entreat our Lord to enable His people to do, with forthrightness and objectivity, that which is necessary to maintain the truths of the gospel and the purity, peace, and unity of the church.

Who is sufficient for these things? Only God. May He help us.

**II. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Overture is to rectify the present confusion that has compromised the doctrinal witness of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, resulting from the 70<sup>th</sup> (2003) General Assembly's decision in a judicial case involving the doctrine of justification. We believe that the actions outlined in this Overture are necessary to accomplish that end, and thus to restore the purity, peace, and unity of the Church.

### III. REMEDIAL ACTION

We therefore petition the 71<sup>st</sup> (2004) General Assembly to adopt the following resolution:

#### BE IT THEREFORE NOW RESOLVED THAT

The 71<sup>st</sup> (2004) General Assembly of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church declares its continued commitment to the teaching of the Word of God, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with regard to the doctrine of justification,

AND,

Inasmuch as an action of the 70<sup>th</sup> (2003) General Assembly in a judicial case involving the doctrine of justification tolerates views contrary to the teaching of the Standards,

#### THIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. Affirms:
  - a. That the action of the 70<sup>th</sup> (2003) General Assembly does not and cannot change the constitutional commitment of the Church to the Word of God and the subordinate Westminster Standards;
  - b. That the action of the Assembly nevertheless led to confusion both within and without the Church, and compromise of its witness, by allowing certain doctrinal statements brought into evidence in the trial to stand without comment, clarification or correction, and therefore
  - c. This confusion needs to be corrected.
2. Declares unequivocally the following beliefs:
  - a. Justification is not by works of any kind on man's part, nor do our works provide any contribution to that justification. Rather, justification is the irreversible declarative judicial act of God's free grace at conversion, wherein he freely pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only on account of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone. God's justification of the ungodly is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
  - b. No one will be justified at the Day of Judgment because of his own obedience to the law. The judgment according to works at the Day of Judgment is not a second or further justification. Rather, justification at conversion is perfect and final through the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us, so that all believers will be openly acknowledged and acquitted at that Day as righteous, because of Christ's perfect obedience and imputed righteousness alone.
  - c. Justification is distinct from sanctification. Sanctification by the Holy Spirit is a blessing that all believers enjoy, to renew us in holiness, and in sanctified obedience to the law of God, which is holy, just, and good. But this sanctified obedience

does not attain perfection in this life and cannot justify us before God. It is, rather, the outward evidence that we have been justified by the Lord our Righteousness alone.

3. Declares that it is impermissible within the Constitution of the Church:
  - a. To teach explicitly, or by way of implication, that entrance into Heaven is on any basis other than the work of Jesus Christ, and
  - b. To teach anything that states or implies that sanctification contributes anything to God's judicial acceptance of the believer either in this life or at the final judgment and, thus confuses justification and sanctification.
4. And therefore:
  - a. Calls upon all officers to examine their beliefs and teachings, especially with respect to the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and the Day of Judgment, to make certain that their beliefs and teachings are in accord with the Word of God and our subordinate standards.
  - b. Urges any who may hold contrary doctrines to repent and retract them.
  - c. Warns all officers to be aggressively on guard against the onslaught of the erroneous teachings of our day, which lead to confusion and compromise on these doctrines.
  - d. Urges all officers and members to pray diligently for one another to these ends.
  - e. Urges all officers to give careful attention to instructing their congregations on these matters of doctrine, in accord with the Word of God and our subordinate standards.
  - f. Directs the Clerk of the Assembly to send this Resolution, within two weeks of the adjournment of the Assembly, to all ministers and sessions of the Church, and to all churches with which the OPC is in ecclesiastical relationship, and to the two ecumenical bodies of which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a member, namely, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).
  - g. Calls upon the Committees on Christian Education, Foreign Missions, and Home Missions and Church Extension to take action at their respective next regular meetings to explicitly assure the Church publicly that their representatives and their publications will teach, clearly and consistently, in accord with the declarations and affirmations in this Resolution.
  - h. Directs that this Resolution be displayed prominently on the OPC web site ([www.opc.org](http://www.opc.org)) at the earliest possible time.
  - i. Directs that this Resolution be displayed prominently in *New Horizons* at the earliest possible time.

## IV. GROUNDS

### A. The (2003) General Assembly's Decision and Its Effects

#### 1. How the Decision Produced Confusion

Some, perhaps many, may believe that the vote in deciding the judicial case was not an endorsement of the specific language appearing in the record of the case, nor even an endorsement of its general course, but only a refusal to find these views worthy of the severity of the censure imposed by the trial judicatory. Yet to sustain the appeal *in toto*, as was done, is liable to give the impression that those teachings are acceptable in our Church; in harmony with the Bible and the Westminster Standards; and therefore, to be regarded as the *de facto* teachings of the OPC. However, these teachings are in conflict with the historic Protestant gospel doctrines of justification and sanctification.

It is not acceptable that a General Assembly of the OPC should bring about confusion as to the Church's position on the doctrines of justification and sanctification, which were the crux of the case, not only among members of our own denomination, but also elsewhere in the Reformed community and beyond. Such confusion on basic doctrines not only compromises the clarity of our Church's testimony to the gospel of Christ, but also endangers the purity, peace and unity of the Church, and indeed endangers the souls of men.

#### 2. Teachings presented as evidence in the case that have led to confusion about the witness of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

- a. "It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous on that Day of Judgement".<sup>1</sup>
- b. "It is not possible that any could be a brother to Jesus Christ and enjoy with Christ, in the Kingdom of Heaven, the presence of God the Father except that one be fully conformed to the image of Christ in true and personal righteousness and holiness...[T]he imputation of the righteousness of Christ, which all Christians receive at justification...can[not] suffice for that purpose. Christ does not have an imputed righteousness; His righteousness is real and personal. If we are to be conformed to his image, we too must have a real and personal righteousness."<sup>2</sup>
- c. "Whereas in justification we receive credit for the righteousness of Christ, here [in sanctification] we receive, through the work of the Holy Spirit, a righteousness that is really and personally our very own, not just that of another credited to us, but our very personal own."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John O. Kinnaird, "A Proposal for the Session", October 25, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> John O. Kinnaird, message number 7846 entitled "Justification", posted on the Presbyterians-OPC Yahoo® Internet forum December 24, 2001, p. 2; evidence received by the trial judicatory at its first meeting, and discussed in two papers supplied to the judicatory and read aloud at its

- d. “Thus we rightly conclude that those inside the city [of Revelation 22] are those who have kept the law of God and those only. So, a pretty simple answer to our last two questions. Inside the city are those who do righteousness and outside are those who do evil.”<sup>4</sup>
- e. “Romans 2 puts it this way. ‘God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger.’ Now by this we know the decision, the judgement as to who enters the city and who stays outside for eternity will be made on that great day of judgement in accordance with what you have done in this life.”<sup>5</sup>
- f. “God has provided not only justification from the guilt of sin, he has also, for all those begotten from above by the seed of God, provided that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14. These good works are a required condition if we would stand in the Day of Judgement and they are supplied by God to all His people.
- “Every description of the Judgement events speak of these good works. Without them, no one will see God. Our God is not unjust. His judgements are always righteous and in accordance with the facts of the case. On the past two Lord’s Days I shared over 25 texts and passages of Scripture with my Sunday School class on just these two concepts. They were about evenly divided between the concept that our God’s judgements are always righteous and in accord with the facts of the case and the concept that the final judgement will be in accord with what we have done in this life.”<sup>6</sup>
- g. “There will be glory, honor, and peace on the Day of Judgement for everyone who does good. [Romans 2] v.10. Who are these people who thus benefit – who stand on the Day of Judgement? They are those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. [Romans 2] v.13. When God declares them righteous that is a forensic declaration of righteousness...This is a judicial scene, the Day of Judgement. It is an act of God sitting as Judge. It is justification – a forensic act of God whereby he declares a person righteous. God is able to make this declaration on That Day because it is a truth. Something has happened to change those who were once sinful. What is it?...Paul says, [Romans 2] v. 14 and 15, these are those who by nature, a new nature, do the things required by the law.”<sup>7</sup>

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second meeting, November 23, 2002.

4 John O. Kinnaird, “Though the Waters Roar and the Mountains Quake”, sermon preached September 22, 2000.

5 Ibid.

6 John O. Kinnaird, message number 8014 entitled “justification” (*sic*) posted on the Presbyterians-OPC Yahoo® Internet forum January 6, 2002

7 Ibid.

B. Errors may creep into the church when unguarded or erroneous teachings are allowed to circulate unchecked.

1. The Nature of the Errors

- a. That the obedience of believers (which the Westminster Confession calls “evangelical obedience”) is not only the fruit and evidence of justification, but also the instrument, ground or component of justification (or any other grace that may be imagined as necessary to the obtaining of acquittal at the last judgment.)
- b. That justification is not one act but two.
- c. That the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone is not sufficient to gain for the true believer acceptance with God or entrance into the eternal kingdom
- d. That God's reward of evangelical obedience, of which the Bible and our Confession speak, is eternal life.
- e. That justification is progressive.
- f. That anything less than “personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience” (WCF XIX:1) can obtain God's favor.

2. The truths that these errors ignore or confuse:

- a. The absolute obedience required by God’s moral law
- b. The utter inadequacy of our own obedience for justification
- c. The sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ
- d. The essential principles of imputation and substitution
- e. Christ our righteousness, and Perfect Substitute
- f. Complete and perfect justification through the righteousness and obedience of Christ alone, received by faith alone, apart from works of any kind on our part
- g. Salvation by grace alone
- h. Sanctification and justification clearly distinguished from each other
- i. Sanctification as the believer’s deliverance from the dominion of sin, but not yet in this life from the presence of indwelling sin

C. Error in Essential Doctrine Must Be Corrected

It is important that the Church understand that under our Constitution judicial decisions

are final with reference only to that particular judicial decision; they do not establish a binding precedent. However, when a General Assembly becomes convinced that a judicial action of a prior Assembly tolerates serious doctrinal error, even if such a result was unintended, the General Assembly must act to remedy that situation. In a case of confusion arising from error on basic doctrine, such action is the more imperative.

D. The Scriptures clearly teach, and our secondary Westminster Standards likewise affirm, the following truths:

1. Nothing less than perfect obedience of the law of God can save.
2. No man can keep the requirements of the law perfectly.
3. Therefore, the keeping of the law by man is excluded from justification.
4. The sole basis of our justification, the only basis on which we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven, is the real and personal righteousness of Christ our perfect substitute, imputed to sinners by grace through faith, apart from the law.
5. God declares the sinner righteous at conversion, imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to him. Our justification is complete and final at conversion.
6. On the Day of Judgment, God will openly acknowledge and acquit His elect, affirming the forensic declaration of their justification that took place once and for all at conversion. At the Judgment we shall stand at Christ's right hand on the basis of His righteousness alone.
7. Obedience is required of believers, and the grace of sanctification does work obedience in us. But that obedience cannot qualify us for any further justification at the Day of Judgment. In sanctification sin is subdued, but not perfectly in this life because the remnants of it abide in every part of us until we are glorified. Our good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, though imperfect in this life, are the fruits and evidences of saving faith

E. The Scriptures and the Standards directly and explicitly address each of these points.

1. Nothing less than perfect obedience of the law of God can save.
  - a. Thus the Scriptures<sup>8</sup> teach:
    - i. "And He said to him, 'You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.'"  
(Luke 10:28)
    - ii. "For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13)

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<sup>8</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Bible unless otherwise noted

- iii. "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)
  - iv. "Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law. And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' " (Deuteronomy 27:26)
- b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:
- i. "God gave to Adam a 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 XIX:1)
  - ii. "This law, after the 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: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man." (WCF XIX:2)
  - iii. "The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (WCF XIX:5)
2. No man can keep the requirements of the law perfectly.
- a. Thus the Scriptures teach:
- i. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' " (Galatians 3:10)
  - ii. "Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Ephesians 2:3) "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound." (Romans 5:20)
  - iii. "They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3:12)
  - iv. "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Romans 3:19)
  - v. "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. <sup>13</sup> Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might

appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. <sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. <sup>16</sup> If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. <sup>17</sup> But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. <sup>19</sup> For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” (Romans 7:12-19)

- b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:
  - i. “From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.” (WCF VI:4)
  - ii. “This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.” (WCF VI:5)
  - iii. “Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.” (WCF VI:6)
3. Therefore, the keeping of the law by man is excluded from justification.
  - a. Thus the Scriptures teach:
    - i. “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)
    - ii. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:27-28)
    - iii. “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” <sup>4</sup> Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. <sup>5</sup> But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the

LORD shall not impute sin.' ” (Romans 4:1-8)

- iv. “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, <sup>15</sup> because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup> Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Romans 4:13-16)
  - v. “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. <sup>5</sup> For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” ’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) <sup>7</sup> or, ‘ “Who will descend into the abyss?” ’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:3-9)
  - vi. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)
  - vii. “Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them.’ ” (Galatians 3:11)
- b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:
- i. “Those whom God effectually calls, 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 any thing 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.” (WCF XI:1)
  - ii. “...true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned...” (WCF XIX:6)

4. The sole basis of our justification, the only basis on which we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven, is the real and personal righteousness of Christ our perfect substitute, imputed to sinners by grace through faith, apart from the law.

a. Thus the Scriptures teach:

- i. "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53:11)
- ii. "In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jeremiah 23:6)
- iii. "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. <sup>19</sup> For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:17-19)
- iv. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- v. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (II Corinthians 5:19-21)
- vi. "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:9)
- vii. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7)

b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:

- i. "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever

accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.” (WCF XI:2)

ii. “Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father’s justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as He was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for any thing in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.” (WCF XI:3)

iii. “Q: What is Justification? A: Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” (WSC 33)

5. God declares the sinner righteous at conversion, imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to him. Our justification is complete and final at conversion.

a. Thus the Scriptures teach:

i. “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; <sup>39</sup> and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38-39)

ii. “That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’ <sup>23</sup> But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 4:22-5:2, ESV)

iii. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:31-35)

iv. “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone

should boast.” (Ephesians 2:7-9)

- b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:
  - i. “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.” (WCF XI:4)
6. On the Day of Judgment, God will openly acknowledge and acquit His elect, affirming the forensic declaration of their justification that took place once and for all at conversion. At the Judgment we shall stand at Christ’s right hand on the basis of His righteousness alone.
  - a. Thus the Scriptures teach:
    - i. “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)
    - ii. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24)
    - iii. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:24-25)
    - iv. “And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.<sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ ...And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matthew 25:33-34, 46)
  - b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:
    - i. “Q: What shall be done to the righteous at the Day of Judgment? A: At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and for ever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the

resurrection and day of judgment.” (WLC 90)

7. Obedience is required of believers, and the grace of sanctification does work obedience in us. But that obedience cannot, and need not, qualify us for any further justification at the Day of Judgment. In sanctification sin is subdued, but not perfectly in this life because the remnants of it abide in every part of us until we are glorified. Our good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, though imperfect in this life, are the fruits and evidences of saving faith.

a. Thus the Scriptures teach:

- i. “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (Romans 6:6)
- ii. “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)
- iii. “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:16-17)
- iv. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.<sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,<sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14)
- v. “For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” (II Timothy 1:12)
- vi. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)
- vii. “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23)
- viii. “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...<sup>22</sup> Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made

perfect? <sup>23</sup> And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' ” (James 2:18, 22-23)

ix. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. <sup>1</sup> My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” (I John 1:8-2:2)

b. Thus the Westminster Standards affirm:

i. “Q: Wherein do justification and sanctification differ? A: Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.” (WLC 77)

ii. “Q: Whence ariseth the imperfection of sanctification in believers? A: The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the spirit; whereby they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins, are hindered in all their spiritual services, and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God.” (WLC 78)

iii. “These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith” (WCF XVI:2)

iv. “The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.” (WCF XXXII:1)

#### F. The Dangers of an “Unclear Call”

The Advisory Committee which considered the case in question admitted, in every one of their four “Concluding Observations”, that the teaching embodied in the documents before them had been deficient. They stated that the “words are not as clear and helpful as they

should be”<sup>9</sup> and the “teaching has not been as clear as should be expected”.<sup>10</sup>

The Advisory Committee also noted the confusing use of the word *justification*, which our standards use only for God’s act “when a sinner first believes”, and the phrase “*openly acknowledged and acquitted*” to refer to the result of the judgment of the last day for the righteous. The teachings before them, the Committee pointed out, occasionally use “the word justified to refer to what happens to the righteous at the last judgment.”<sup>11</sup> They mildly observed also that “it is highly desirable ordinarily to use the words of our standards in speaking of these matters. Clarity in the defense of the essential Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone *requires* [emphasis ours] that we use different words for different things.”<sup>12</sup> The Committee further stated that the “teaching *taken as a whole* [emphasis ours] is less clear in this respect than is desirable for effective instruction.”<sup>13</sup> Whatever may be the reasons for the failure to observe this necessity, the result is utter confusion concerning the place of works in one’s entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

These admissions by the Advisory Committee, and the later implicit acceptance of them by the General Assembly in its decision, fly in the face of God’s own stern warning to those who speak in any language: “If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?” (1 Corinthians 14:8-9, NIV) [The ESV has “give an indistinct sound”; the KJV has “makes an uncertain sound”.]

By sustaining the appeal without any exceptions whatsoever, the 70<sup>th</sup> General Assembly gave implicit approval to the entire position of the appeal. It should be noted that even the Advisory Committee’s mild reservations noted above were not actions of the Assembly.

The overall position of the appeal having been fully cleared, other persons may assume, at least for the present, that they may expound freely the teachings set forth in the original statements from which the judicial case resulted.

The confused statements contained in the evidence, the Advisory Committee’s confusing approval of the appeal despite their admissions that the statements are deficient, and the sustaining of the appeal by the General Assembly without comment upon or correction of those teachings, have proved to be confusing to many observers both within and outside the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is always incumbent on the Church to protect itself from misunderstandings or mistaken judgments and to clear its good name and its witness to the faith. That is especially so when the matter is such a basic doctrine as justification

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9 Advisory Committee, “Concluding Observations”, item 1

10 Advisory Committee, “Concluding Observations”, item 2

11 Advisory Committee, “Concluding Observations”, item 3

12 Ibid.

13 Advisory Committee, “Concluding Observations”, item 4

by faith alone.

The 70<sup>th</sup> (2003) General Assembly has sounded an unclear call regarding the doctrine of justification. The 71<sup>st</sup> (2004) General Assembly should state to the Church and the public clearly, in unmistakable language, its position that entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is completely and solely on the basis of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ, received by faith alone, works having no place in God's judicial act of justification. At the same time the Church should take steps to prevent recurrence of the error.

## V. CONCLUSION

Given the fact that confusion on the doctrine of justification has arisen in the Church, and given the fact that the doctrine of justification is one upon which the Church stands or falls, it is now the responsibility of this 71<sup>st</sup> General Assembly to both clarify the witness of the Church, and to comfort, protect, and edify the sheep of the flock, by adopting this overture.

Respectfully submitted,

(signed)

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