

The Reformed pedigree of my views

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The elders' accusations involve complex and specialized theological issues that most people know little about. I do not *expect* you to become fluent in these issues, but if you are not, how can you judge with right judgment? **If you are committed to learning my views in order to judge them, I welcome your effort. Please be warned: this is quite a technical document.**

What follows is the document originally called "Summary of Theological Disagreements with Ryan," which I shared with David Marshall, Euan Alderton, and Sam Hight in 2019. I have updated it since then with the section on gendered piety, but it is otherwise substantially the same. This document proves my Reformed *bona fides* beyond any shadow of doubt, by quoting Reformers and other post-Reformation theologians saying exactly what I say. Ryan has never even acknowledged the existence of these quotes to me, let alone addressed them.

Summary



The key disagreement between Ryan and myself is over the nature of saving faith, and whether works are necessary to salvation (not justification). He asserts that faith is entirely passive, consisting only in receiving and resting on the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus. I say that faith is both passive in receiving the righteousness of Jesus, and active in living out that received righteousness through good works prepared beforehand for us: a faith "that works," as our confession puts it (1.1.2). Ryan considers this view unreformed, unorthodox, and unchristian—a kind of works righteousness that denies justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). His rejection is characteristic of antinomianism. By contrast, I extensively document the Reformed pedigree of my view below, quoting many respected Reformed theologians throughout history.

Preamble

For a number of years Ryan and I have been involved in occasional disputes over a number of doctrines. The most significant of these, to my mind, are:

1. The necessity of good works for salvation
2. The role of the church in discipling the nations
3. Gender duties as grounded in nature ("gendered piety")

I have made serious and concerted efforts to discuss these issues with him, in the hopes that by explaining and arguing for them I could perhaps persuade him that they are correct—or at least that they are well within the bounds of orthodoxy. On the role of the church, I gave him a copy of my book (*The Spine of Scripture* (2019)), which develops an argument for construing the *telos* of the gospel as necessarily postmillennial and "theonomic" (i.e., following Westminsterian general equity; the [Establishment Principle](#)). On gender roles, I have shared with him some key arguments developed both on my own blog, and in conjunction with my brother Michael Foster (e.g., [Five clear reasons Christians should oppose female heads of state](#) (November 2018); ["Got a verse for that?"](#) (June 2019); [Head coverings #1: the logic of glory and veiling](#) (August 2019)). Ryan has rarely responded even so far as to acknowledge receipt.

Gendered piety

This is the term I use to refer to the idea that men and women have unique duties on account of their sex. It includes the idea that men are to rule on behalf of God (patriarchy). **Note that, as with any doctrine, I do not agree with everything previous Reformed theologians have said on this issue.** My views are in *continuity* with our forefathers, but they are also often much *milder*. Even if you disagree with these views, even if you deny that the Spirit of Christ guided his church on this matter for 1900 years, even if you believe that it took the spirit of our age to guide us into the truth, it cannot be reasonable to excommunicate the broad historic Reformed position.

As part of my work with It's Good To Be A Man, I am compiling a library of quotes on gendered piety from pre-modern theologians. It is a work in progress, but you are welcome to peruse it below; it very adequately proves the Reformed *bona fides* of my position.

▼ Click the arrow to expand the database of quotes from Reformed theologians

Pre-feminism theologians on gendered piety

Aa Name	▼ Author	▼ Century	☰ Notes	☰ Passage	☑ Reformed	☰ Source	☰ Tags
Quite past sense and reason when they want to rule over men	John Calvin	16th			☑	Men, Women, and Order in the Church	civil duties
Government of women a monstrous thing	John Calvin	16th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:12	☑	Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 Timothy 2:12	civil duties
Calvin's agreement with John Knox	John Calvin	16th			☑	Letter CCCXLVIII from John Calvin to Heinrich Bullinger; Geneva, 28 April 1554	civil duties
Calvin's agreement with John Knox, cont.	John Calvin	16th			☑	Letter DXXXVIII to William Cecil in <i>Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters</i> , ed. Henry Beveridge & Jules Bonnet, vol. 7, (Philadelphia, 1860), p. 46	civil duties
Extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government	John Calvin	16th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:12	☑	Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 Timothy 2:12	religious duties
Shameful and indecorous for women to appear in public without veils	John Calvin	16th		Leviticus 18:6	☑	Harmony of the Law, vol. 3, "Political Supplements," Leviticus 18:6	natural hierarchy religious duties
God's eternal law has made the female sex subject to the authority of men	John Calvin	16th	"Superior" is not a synonym for "better" in pre-modern times; it refers to hierarchy, not dignity.	1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:10	☑	Commentary on Corinthians, vol i, 11:10	natural hierarchy

Aa Name	Author	Century	Notes	Passage	Reformed	Source	Tags
<u>Constructed differently in terms of religion, intellect, morality.</u>	Herman Bavinck	20th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>The Christian Family</i>	ontological di
<u>The true order of nature bears that women shall be subject</u>	John Calvin	16th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:13	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 Timothy 2:13</i>	natural hierar
<u>Condition of obeying natural from the beginning</u>	John Calvin	16th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:14	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 Timothy 2:14</i>	natural hierar
<u>More suspicious and timid</u>	John Calvin	16th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 Timothy 2:15</i>	ontological di
<u>A great display of heroic virtues valued less than the religious and holy work of child-rearing</u>	John Calvin	16th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 Timothy 2:15</i>	religious dutie
<u>Precisely what the apostle is doing is forbidding women to speak at all in the church</u>	B.B. Warfield	20th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paul on Women Speaking in Church, excerpted from <i>The Presbyterian</i> , October 30, 1919	religious dutie
<u>To Paul, mankind is made up of families with natural relations between the sexes; to feminists, it is made up of generic individuals</u>	B.B. Warfield	20th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paul on Women Speaking in Church, excerpted from <i>The Presbyterian</i> , October 30, 1919	natural hierar ontological di
<u>For a woman can represent God as a priest does is to embark on a different religion</u>	C.S. Lewis	20th			<input type="checkbox"/>	"Priestesses in the Church?" in <i>God in the Dock</i> , William B. Erdmanns, Grand Rapids, MI	ontological di religious dutie
<u>Wives must fear their husbands as the church fears Christ</u>	John Dod	17th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandements</i> , 1603	natural hierar religious dutie

Aa Name	Author	Century	Notes	Passage	Reformed	Source	Tags
<u>Men should not sit and listen to a woman</u>	Origen	3rd	If this quote is accurate, Origen's view has more in common with the rabbis of his day than with biblical gendered piety.		<input type="checkbox"/>	Fragments on 1 Corinthians	huh
<u>God assigned the inferior business of life to the woman</u>	Chrysostom	4th			<input type="checkbox"/>	Homily on the kind of women who ought to be taken as wives, <i>Women in the Early Church</i> , trans. Elizabeth A. Clark (Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983)	domestic duties natural hierar
<u>Women should be seen and not heard is Turkish barbarity.</u>	John Wesley	18th			<input type="checkbox"/>	Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," III. 7	religious duties
<u>The household as constitutive of the nation</u>	Herman Bavinck	20th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession</i> , trans. Henry Zylstra (Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 71	civil duties domestic duties natural hierar
<u>She should do nothing which looked like a claim of being equal</u>	Matthew Henry	17th		1 Corinthians 11	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible</i> , 1 Corinthians 11:2-16	natural hierar religious duties
<u>The woman should not assume or usurp the man's place</u>	Matthew Henry	17th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Unabridged</i> , vol. vi, 1 Corinthians 11:3	natural hierar religious duties
<u>A woman might not from her own abilities pretend to teach, or so much as question and debate any thing in the church</u>	Matthew Henry	17th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Unabridged</i> , vol. vi, 1 Corinthians 11:3	natural hierar religious duties

Aa Name	Author	Century	Notes	Passage	Reformed	Source	Tags
<u>To such a degree should women be silent, that they are not allowed to speak not only about worldly matters, but not even about spiritual things, in the church</u>	Chrysostom	4th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:11	<input type="checkbox"/>	Homily 9 on First Timothy	religious duties
<u>It is a pity that we cannot persuade all ministers to be men</u>	C.H. Spurgeon	19th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Lectures To My Students, Vol 1-4 (Illustrated)</i> (Kindle Edition), Lecture 20: Posture, Action, Gesture, Etc, loc. 6051	ontological duties religious duties
<u>Men must not be effeminate, nor must women be viragos</u>	Matthew Henry	17th		Deuteronomy 22:5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Commentary on the Whole Bible, Unabridged</i> , Vol. I, Deuteronomy 22:5	domestic duties ontological duties
<u>Putting on that which pertaineth to a man very unseemly and impudent, and contrary to the modesty of her sex</u>	John Gill	18th		Deuteronomy 22:5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , Deuteronomy 22:5	civil duties ontological duties
<u>Everyone knows how dishonourable and scandalous it is for a woman to have her head shaved</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Corinthians 11:5	ontological duties
<u>Woman is the image and glory of God only secondarily and mediately through man</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:7	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Corinthians 11:7	natural hierarchy ontological duties
<u>To lose subjection is to lose womanhood</u>	Thomas Taylor	17th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Christ's Victory over the Dragon</i>	natural hierarchy ontological duties
<u>The woman of sanctified ambition does the noblest work that is done on earth</u>	R.L. Dabney	19th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Southern Presbyterian Review for October, 1879	religious duties
<u>The main duty of a wife is subjection</u>	Daniel Cawdrey	17th	Cawdrey was a Westminster divine		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Family Reformation Promoted, and Other Works</i> , 53-55	domestic duties natural hierarchy

Aa Name	Author	Century	Notes	Passage	Reformed	Source	Tags
<u>Yet she may join in prayer, hear the word preached, sing praises, and enjoy all ordinances</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:11	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Corinthians 11:11	natural hierar religious dutie
<u>It is very probable that armor is here intended</u>	Adam Clarke	18th	Adam Clarke was a British Methodist theologian	Deuteronomy 22:5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>The Adam Clarke Commentary</i> , Deuteronomy 22:5	civil duties
<u>It is disgraceful for men to become effeminate, and also for women to affect manliness</u>	John Calvin	16th			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Harmony of the Law</i> , vol. 3, "Political Supplement," Deuteronomy 22:5	civil duties ontological di
<u>The woman taught once, and ruined all, for the sex is weak and fickle</u>	Chrysostom	4th	Chrysostom seems to hold here that Eve was not subject to Adam before the fall; this is certainly wrong, since Adam named her as well as the animals.	1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:15 1 Timothy 2:14 1 Timothy 2:15	<input type="checkbox"/>	Homily 9 on First Timothy	huh natural hierar religious dutie
<u>There is no reason why the woman should be despised, or the man should be lifted up</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:12	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Corinthians 11:12	natural hierar religious dutie
<u>"So clear" that it is an uncomely thing for a woman to appear in public service with her head uncovered</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 11:13	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Corinthians 11:13	natural hierar religious dutie
<u>Public prayer in the church only belongs to men</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:8	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Timothy 2:8	natural hierar religious dutie
<u>Worship in attire not immodest and impudent, and more like the attire of an harlot than of a woman professing godliness</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:9	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Timothy 2:9	religious dutie
<u>Good works do not make men and women Christians, but adorn them as such</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:10	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Exposition of the Bible</i> , 1 Timothy 2:10	ontological di religious dutie

Aa Name	Author	Century	Notes	Passage	Reformed	Source	Tags
<u>He would have them be learners and not teachers, and not offer to speak under a pretence of having a word from the Lord as some frantic women have done</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:11	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exposition of the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:11	ontological di religious dutie
<u>As not in civil and political things, and in things domestic, so not in things ecclesiastical</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:12	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exposition of the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:12	civil duties domestic duti religious dutie
<u>The woman's subjection to the man is according to the laws of nature and creation and was antecedent to the fall</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:13	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exposition of the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:13	natural hierar ontological di
<u>Adam being stronger and more knowing, less capable of being managed and seduced, it appears the man is the more proper to bear rule and authority; and it is right for the woman to learn, and the man to teach</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:14	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exposition of the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:14	natural hierar ontological di
<u>Notwithstanding the fall of man by the means of the woman, yet there is salvation for both men and women through the birth of Immanuel</u>	John Gill	18th		1 Timothy 2 1 Timothy 2:15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exposition of the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:15	natural hierar ontological di
<u>She was filling the highest church duty that could fall upon a woman, in training those children at home</u>	P.D. Stephenson	19th	"On Stephenson's view of rights (as he understands them from Scripture), rights and duties are inextricably connected. If		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Presbyterian Quarterly 13.4 (1899)	civil duties domestic duti religious dutie

Aa Name	● Author	▼ Century	☰ Notes	☰ Passage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reformed	☰ Source	☰ Tags
			<p>there is a duty, there is a corresponding right. If there is a right, there is a corresponding duty. He argues that, according to Scripture, women, in general, are designed to discharge certain domestic duties. For example, Paul commands young women to marry and have children (1 Tim. 5:14) and to keep the home (Titus 2:5). These duties only make sense in the context of domestic life, with a husband and children. Therefore, since there is a duty, there is a corresponding right. There is a general duty to marry and keep the home; therefore, there is a right to marriage and domestic life. Of course, there will be exceptions, as with all sorts of rights and duties." (Michael Jeffrey Hunter)</p>				

The main issue: necessity of good works for salvation

The only significant discussion between Ryan and me has revolved around the necessity of good works for salvation. This is what I will confine myself to explaining from here on.

The disagreement between came to a head when I invited him over in the hopes of understanding why he had been avoiding me rather than interacting with my views (October 18, 2019). It seemed to Sarah and myself that the role of the pastor would minimally involve discipling members, especially those with views he considers aberrant. Surely the pastoral role includes seeking to understand such people, and engaging their arguments to refute and correct them.

Ryan indicated that he did not see the point in pastoring us, as he didn't detect any willingness in me to be taught by him on the points of disagreement. This was discouraging, as I had earlier in the year invited him over specifically to acknowledge my respect for his pastoral role, to ask if there was anything I could do to help him in it (while recognizing that our disagreements made my teaching in the church impossible), and to encourage him, as a young man appointed as a father in the church, to make himself a son to older fathers like David Marshall, in view of the principle that you cannot be a father until you learn to be a son. (Nothing came of this earlier meeting.)

However, what was more disappointing was Ryan's repeated assertions that I was in substantive disagreement with the 1689 confession on the issue of justification. This was followed by oblique observations, again repeated many times, that "someone" who finds themselves out of step with "a church's" confession should do the "ethical thing" and find a new church. This was the refrain of the evening, amounting to a circumlocutory excommunication.

I will use three specific points of disagreement with Ryan to establish the general basis for his claim about me being out of step with the confession, and to show that it is unreasonable. These points all arose during our Friday meeting—however, I had previously spent serious effort in explaining and defending my views, first in person, and then culminating in an exchange of five emails dated December 2017. Ryan seemed to radically misunderstand me in these emails, despite my careful statements of what I deny, and my direct arguments from Scripture. If you wish to understand my position better, and see Ryan's responses in his own words, please refer to the PDF of the email chain, embedded below. Ryan did not respond to the last email in this chain:

<https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/secure.notion-static.com/42c71067-2202-4ffa-80bb-9c4d474deb75/ryan-bnon-n-email-exchange-justification.pdf>

Now, the points of contention that arose in our Friday meeting:

1. Whether good works cause/attain salvation

This arose from a piece I wrote on final justification (Faith across time: is final justification unchristian? (February 2018)), in which I primarily interact with Dr. Dewey Roberts on the issue of final justification. In the course of doing so, I also anonymously quote a comment that Ryan made in a sermon on Galatians (bolded):

It bothers me that so many Reformed theologians are so spooked by the specter of works-righteousness that they aren't able to accurately assess or truthfully represent a position that the Bible perspicuously teaches. Is what I've articulated above *anything like* the view of unregenerate people about how they will "enter heaven," as Dewey puts it? Of course not. Is it *anything like* works righteousness? Of course not. Indeed, it is not *this* view that is dangerous to people's souls—it is the view that says (and again, I quote), **"If works are necessary in order to attain or even maintain salvation, then you're not really saved."**

To which Paul, having just explained how he counts everything *skubalon* [filth, garbage] in order to receive the righteousness of Jesus by faith, nonetheless replies that he *attains* to the resurrection of the dead by any means possible (Philippians 3:11). He has not yet obtained it, but presses on to *make it* his own, *straining* forward, *pressing* toward the goal for the prize, since Anointed Jesus has made Paul his own (Philippians 3:12–14).

Ryan brought up this article, quoting from memory my comment that his view is "dangerous to people's souls," and then claimed that in saying this I was calling him a heretic. His accusation took me aback, as I certainly never intended to convey such a thing. I therefore assured him that I did *not* mean this. What kind of man would bring his family to sit under the preaching of a heretic week in and week out? He rebuffed this clarification, saying that no other meaning was possible. Somewhat nonplussed, but sure that I could still convince him that when I speak of "dangerous" teachings I really do *not*

mean heresies, I pointed to a similar example in my series on the atonement, where I argue that John Owen's understanding of limited atonement (in contrast to, e.g., Charles Hodge's view) is "a pastorally dangerous position that leaves assurance essentially impotent against the attacks of the devil" ([On the atonement, part 3: the objective grounds for faith](#) (January 2009)). Since I clearly do not believe that Owen, or any of the other *many* great Reformed theologians who held and hold to his view, are heretics, I truly cannot mean that a view is heresy when I call it dangerous. I further clarified that I understand a heresy to be a view which entails denying a key tenet of the gospel; i.e., a damnable error. Ryan simply reiterated that he could not see any other way to understand my remark!

Whereas I have merely argued that Ryan's view is "dangerous," he has asserted that if anyone believes that works are necessary in order to attain salvation, then he is not really saved. In other words, he is *unequivocally* calling anyone who holds this view a heretic, a non-Christian. But consider the following statements by great Reformed thinkers (click the triangles to expand them):

▼ A. A. Hodge, Commentary on Ch. 16, 'Of Good Works', p. 301 in *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith: with questions for theological students and Bible classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1901)

(6) They [good works] are **necessary to the attainment of salvation**, not in any sense as a prerequisite to justification, nor in any stage of the believer's progress meriting the divine favor, but as essential elements of that salvation, the consubstantial fruits and means of sanctification and glorification.

A saved soul is a holy soul, and a holy soul is one whose faculties are all engaged in works of loving obedience. Grace in the heart cannot exist without good works as their consequent. Good works cannot exist without the increase of the graces which are exercised in them. Heaven could not exist except as a society of holy souls mutually obeying the law of love in all the good works that law requires. Eph. v. 25 — 27; 1 Thess. iv. 6, 7; Rev. xxi. 27.

▼ Samuel Rutherford, p. 532 of '10. Whether good works are necessary as causes of justification, and therefore also of salvation?' in Ch. 12, 'On the Justification of Sinners' in *Examination of Arminianism* (Utrecht, 1668)

[good works] may have an inferior and **causal instrumental power** conferred upon them by the grace of God, as Gisbertus Voetius says in *Thersite Heautontemerumeno*, section. 1, ch. 2, just as running is the cause of the **attaining** of a crown which is received, contending the **cause** of the victory, and diet is a cause of health [1 Cor. 9:24-25; Heb. 12:1].

▼ Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Wipf & Stock, 2007), ch. 22, 'Sanctification', section 27, p. 580

But **of course good works are necessary** as the God-appointed road, on which by grace we are to **attain to the possession of eternal life**. This naturally can hold not for those elect who die at an age of minority or at the beginning of their rebirth, but only for those who have time and opportunity for good works.

▼ Thomas Manton, commenting on Phil. 3:9 in *Works*, Vol. 20, p. 44-45

The righteousness [in Christ/of new covenant] is twofold—

(1.) Supreme, prime, and chief, and that is the righteousness of Christ;

(2.) Secondary and subordinate, and that is the righteousness of faith and obedience.

As to our first right, faith; as to our continued right new obedience. These things must be a little cleared, that we may not mistake.

1. For the supreme principal righteousness, by virtue of which we are reconciled to God. It is Christ's obedience unto the death. So it is said, Rom. 5:18, 19, 'As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. As by one man's disobedience many were made

sinner; so by the obedience of one, many shall be made righteous;’ that is, our great righteousness before God, by which his justice is satisfied, and by the merit of which all the blessings of the new covenant are procured for us.

2. The subordinate righteousness, or the way, and means, and condition by which we get an interest in and right to this supreme righteousness, is faith and new obedience. As to our first entrance into the covenant of God, faith is required: Rom. 4:3, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.’ **As to our continuance in this blessed privilege, new obedience is required** with respect to which it is said, 1 John 3:7, ‘Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.’ And hereby his interest in Christ is confirmed: 1 John 2:29, ‘If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of God.’ These scriptures are plain and express; and new obedience has respect to that which is the result of the final judgment: Mat. 25:46, ‘And these shall go away into ever-lasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.’ And the righteous there are such as are fruitful in good works. Now from this exposition we may learn how we are justified by faith only, without works, which Paul asserteth; and by works, and not by faith only, which is the assertion of the apostle James.

Justification hath respect to some accusation. Now as there is a twofold law, so there is a twofold accusation and justification—the law of works and the law of grace. Now when we are accused as breakers of the law of works, that is, as sinners, obnoxious to the wrath of God, we plead Christ’s satisfaction as our righteousness, no works of our own.

But when we are accused as non-performers of the conditions of the covenant of grace, as being rejecters or neglecters of Christ the mediator, we are justified by producing our faith or sincere obedience. So that our righteousness by the new covenant is subordinate to our universal righteousness with respect to the great love of God, and that we have only by Christ. If we are charged that we have broken the first covenant, the covenant of works, we allege Christ’s satisfaction and merit; if charged not to have performed the conditions of the law of grace, we answer it by producing our faith, repentance, and new obedience, and so show it to be a false charge.

Our first and supreme righteousness consisteth in the pardon of our sins, and in our acceptance in the Beloved, and our right to impunity and glory. Our second and subordinate righteousness, in having the true condition of pardon and life. In the first sense Christ’s righteousness is only our justification and righteousness. Faith and repentance, or new obedience, is not the least part of it. But in the second, believing, repenting, and obeying is our righteousness in their several respective ways; namely, that the righteousness of Christ may be ours, and continue ours.

▼ Martin Bucer, *Disputata Ratisbonae, in altero colloqui, Anno XLVI. Et Collocutorum Augustanae Confessionis Responsa ... De Justificatione, et locis doctrinae Evangelicae omnibus, quos doctrina de Justificatione complectitur...* (1548) as translated in Forbes, *Justification*, p. 311

Of what then does our Lord in this place [Mt. 25:35,42] say that the good works of the holy are the **cause**; for they are added with the causal conjunction ‘for I was an hungered.’ etc.? They are the cause of the full **attainment to and enjoyment of this kingdom**, not of the right to it...

This last quote brings us to the second issue:

2. Whether there is a classic Reformed distinction between the right/grounds of salvation, and the necessary means/way/condition of possessing it

In an email to the elders dated Monday, October 14, 2019, responding to a draft of our proposed church covenant, I said:

The purpose of the opening statement seems to be to rightly emphasize the critical nature of our works in our salvation. I.e., we promise to do the things set out in the covenant, because they are integral to sanctification, without which no one will see God [here I am paraphrasing Hebrews 12:14]. This being so, I think the historic Reformed expression of grounds and means ties these ideas together much more tightly than the current wording. I.e., something like this:

As a church we believe two things: Firstly, that we are saved now and forever on the grounds of Jesus' work, not our own, by which we have the right of salvation (John 1:12-13; 3:16; Romans 4:5). Secondly, that possessing this salvation is achieved by means of our own works, which God prepared beforehand for us (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 3:12-14). Therefore, by God's grace, together we will...

Ryan specifically raised this in our Friday meeting as further proof that my position is heretical and unconfessional. He stated bluntly that the distinction I drew is not Reformed, that Reformed theologians would never express the relation between works and salvation in this way as it is unbiblical and heterodox, and that I therefore must be in substantial disagreement with our confession on this matter—regardless of what I claim.

But I did not make up this language; I was paraphrasing Calvin, along with many, many others!

▼ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.21

Those whom in mercy he has destined for the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary administration, introduces to the **possession of it by means of good works**. What precedes in the order of administration is called the cause of what follows. For this reason, he sometimes makes eternal life a consequent of works; not because it is to be ascribed to them, but because those whom he has elected he justifies, that he may at length glorify (Rom 8:30); he makes the prior grace to be a kind of cause, because it is a kind of step to that which follows. But whenever the true cause is to be assigned, he enjoins us not to take refuge in works, but to keep our thoughts entirely fixed on the mercy of God.

▼ Herman Witsius, *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain: under the unhappy names of Antinomians and Neonomians* (Glasgow, 1807), pp. 161-163

We must accurately **distinguish between a right to life, and the possession of life**. The former must so be assigned to the obedience of Christ, that all the value of our holiness may be entirely excluded. But certainly our works, or rather these, which the Spirit of Christ worketh in us, and by us, contribute something to the latter...

III. 1st, Scripture teacheth that man must do something, that he may obtain the possession of the salvation purchased by Christ. "Labour, (said he) for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life," which indeed he interprets afterwards of faith, but so, that there he plainly reduces it to the catalogue of works; for justification is not the subject, John 6:27-29. And Paul expressly says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," Phil. 2:12. And again, "Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. 15:58

IV. Neither because Christ is the way to life, is the practice of Christian piety therefore not the way to life. Christ is the way to life, because he purchased us a right to life. The practice of Christian piety is the way to life, because thereby we go to the possession of the right obtained by Christ. For it is more than a hundred times designed by the name of life: again *the way of*

righteousness, the good way, the way of peace; yea, that nothing might be wanting, it is called *the way of life and salvation*. Prov. 6:23, “The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.” And 10:17, “He is in the way unto life who keepeth instruction.” 15:24, “The way of life is above to the wise.” Ps. 50:23, “Whoso ordereth his way, I will cause him to enjoy the salvation of God.” And what does Christ himself understand by that narrow way which leadeth unto life, Mt. 7:14, but the strict practice of Christian religion? which is called the way of salvation, Acts 16:17.

▼ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 2, 17th Topic, Third Question: ‘The Necessity of Good Works; Are good works necessary to salvation? We affirm.’, p. 703

II. There are three principal opinions about the necessity of good works...; The third is that of those who (holding the middle ground between these two extremes) neither simply deny, nor simply assert; yet they recognize **a certain necessity for them** against the Libertines, but uniformly reject the necessity of merit against the Romanists. **This is the opinion of the orthodox.**

III. Hence it is evident that the question here does not concern the necessity of merit, causality, and efficiency—whether good works are necessary to effect salvation or to **acquire it by right**. (For this belongs to another controversy, of which hereafter). Rather the question concerns the **necessity of means**, of presence and of connection or order—Are they required as the **means and way for possessing salvation? This we hold...**

VII. And as to the covenant, everyone knows that it consists of two parts: on the one hand the promise on the part of God; on the other the stipulation of obedience on the part of man...

▼ Thomas Goodwin on Eph. 2:8-10 in *An Exposition of the Second Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, Verses 1-11 in Works*, vol. 2, p. 336

Upon believing, or with believing (I shall explain it by and by) the whole right of salvation is given us; but all the holiness and works we have do not serve for the right, but only we are led through them to the possession of it. You have it said in 2 Thess. 2:13 that we are saved through faith and sanctification. But the Apostle here [in Eph. 2:8-10] orders them, how through faith, and how through sanctification. He speaks in common of both there; here, so through faith as not through sanctification. ‘Not of works,’ saith he. How shall we solve that?

This is the clear distinction of it. We are saved through faith, as that which gives us the present right, or that which God doth then give as a judge, when we believe, before faith hath done a whit of work else; but we are led through sanctification and good works to the possession of salvation. Distinguish the right and the possession, and you have clearly the Apostle’s meaning; for, saith he, ‘he hath ordained good works, that we should walk in them,’ as being already ‘saved through faith,’ which he speaks before that.

▼ Samuel Rutherford, ‘10. Whether good works are necessary as causes of justification, and therefore also of salvation? We deny against the Remonstrants and Papists,’ pp. 530-535 in Ch. 12, ‘On the Justification of Sinners’ in *Examination of Arminianism* (Utrecht, 1668)

Mt. 3:10

‘Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.’

Hence of good works, if we desire to be saved, it is necessary that these are added. But:

It is asked whether good works are necessary as a cause of justification, and therefore to salvation? The Arminians Affirm; we deny. But to clearer determination of the question, these three things are distinguished: 1. A right to life eternal; 2. the application of that particular right to determined and certain persons; 3. the actual possession of life eternal.

▼ Edward Veal, ‘Whether the Good Works of Believers be Meritorious of Salvation: Negatum Est [It is Denied]’, p. 193 in *Puritan Sermons, 1659-1689*, vol. 6

We acknowledge that obedience is required in a son before he come to possess his inheritance; yet that obedience, though antecedent to his possessing that inheritance, is only the way in which he is to come to it, and the means whereby he is to be fitted for it; but is not meritorious of it. There is no right to the inheritance acquired by his obedience which before he had not; though farther fitness for, and suitableness to, it there may be. The Israelites were to fight, and subdue their enemies, ere they possessed the promised land; but their right to the possession of it they had before by the promise. And who can say that they were worthy of it merely because they fought for it?

▼ Johannes Piscator on Mt. 25:35 in *A Logical Analysis of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 3rd ed. (Herborne, 1606), pp. 609-610p. 609, as trans. in Forbes, *Justification*, p. 313

This thing may here be illustrate by an analogy; As if a treasure hid at the top of a mountain were given to some one, but on this condition, that if he wished to possess it, he must ascend the mountain and dig it out; here certainly the climbing the mountain and digging up the treasure have the nature of an efficient cause in respect of the possession and enjoyment of the treasure; but they have not the nature of merit, inasmuch as the treasure had been freely given to him.

▼ Jerome Zanchi, ‘Whether Good Works are the Cause of Eternal Salvation?’ in *Of the Nature of God, or of the Divine Attributes* (Neustadt, 1593), Book 5, ch. 2, p. 67

Good works are an instrumental cause of the possession of life eternal, for by these as by media and by the legitimate path God leads us into the possession of eternal life... The same truly are rightly able to be said to be an instrumental cause of eternal life, insofar as God leads us by them into eternal life.

▼ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol 2, Ch. 3

Therefore, we say that the covenant of grace is conditional with respect to its completion and final benefits, not as concerns its actual beginning. Without sanctification, no one will see the Lord [Heb 12:14]...If we consider the initial inclusion of members of the covenant into the fellowship of the covenant, then faith is the condition. If we consider the completion of the covenant, then the condition is not only faith, but also sanctification.

▼ Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical and Practical Theology* (Utrecht, 1724), Book 6, ch. 8, section 27, pp. 844-845 as translated by Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Wipf & Stock, 2007), ch. 22, ‘Sanctification’, section 27, p. 580

The Reformed—deny the necessity of good works for obtaining the right to eternal life. Indeed if done with this intention they say that in consequence they are actually evil and pernicious. But they declare that they are necessary by divine prescript for receiving possession of life, as conditions without which God refuses to bestow salvation upon us.

Ryan did admit that there were some theologians who might have said something like what I had written—naming Richard Baxter, who was *not* orthodox on this point—but that this didn't mean they were within the bounds of the Reformed confessions. Essentially, he implied that anyone who disagrees with his particular understanding of this issue is aberrant and not really Reformed. But the list of theologians above is an extraordinarily great cloud of witnesses to dismiss from the fold of Reformed catholicity.

3. Whether works are a part of faith

Circling back to my article on final justification, the one point where I freely admit to differ—at least in wording—with the historic Reformed position, is in my view that the good works of sanctification may themselves be considered proper parts of faith. This, too, was something Ryan specifically mentioned in our meeting.

Yet I hold this view because it is the logical outworking of the understanding of works documented above, and because Scripture forces me to it by good and necessary consequence, as follows:

1. Justification is by (a living) faith alone (Rom 3:28)
2. A man is justified by (some) works (Jas 2:24)
3. Therefore, (some) works are a part of (a living) faith

Obviously these "some" works are the works of faith itself, as our own confession states:

Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is **no dead faith, but works by love.** (LBC, chapter 11, paragraph 2)

If living faith works, there must be specific acts of love that it produces as fruit. And I have already documented above that these fruit are not merely the *evidences* of salvation, but also the subordinate *causes* of it. If they are subordinate causes, it is hardly incongruent to treat them as proper parts of faith, which is itself the instrumental cause of our salvation.

Another way of framing or augmenting the argument is as follows:

1. That which completes a thing is part of the thing
2. Works complete faith (James 2:22)
3. Therefore, works are part of faith

This argument *could* suffer a category error, since premise 1 admits of many exceptions. However, the other examples James uses militate against such a reading; in my email exchange with Ryan, I also appealed to James' analogy of body and spirit:

The analogy James uses is between living faith and living bodies (James 2:26). Just as a body is completed by its spirit, so faith is completed by its works (James 2:22). But if living faith is analagous to a living body (i.e., a person), then while the body and the spirit can be distinguished, they are both proper parts of the whole. Just as the material and immaterial are not separable in the whole person, so I am not sympathetic to any effort to separate internal and external with regard to faith.

I'd actually go so far as to say that separating works and faith leads inevitably to either mangling important parts of Scripture, or being forced to accept works righteousness. If you don't see works as a proper part of faith, passages like Luke 10:28; 13:23-24; 19:8-9; Mark 10:20-21; Matthew 7:13-14, 21; Romans 2:6; etc require intense gymnastics to avoid the obvious implication of works-righteousness.

My point was that James explicitly describes Genesis 22 as a *fulfillment* of Genesis 15:6; i.e., sacrificing Isaac was *an example* of believing God unto justification. Faith is a verb in James' vocabulary, and that verb looks like acts of loyal trust. So sacrificing Isaac, James says, *just was* "faithing" God.

⚠ Note that even if I have made an error in my logic—in which case, why not simply point it out?—I am clearly not advocating works-righteousness. That conclusion is both hasty and unreasonable. On the complete contrary, I am saying that *because* our works can have no merit whatever before God, we therefore must, if we wish to be imputed righteous, be united to, found in, the only One whose work *is* righteous, the Lord Jesus—and to be so imputed righteous, we must not only passively receive his righteousness, but also actively cleave to and abide in it. I am speaking, in other words, of the *obedience* of faith that Paul was commissioned to bring about (Rom 1:5). I am speaking of a *working* faith (Gal 5:6; cf. 1 Thess 1:3—and again, I am not making this language up; I am self-consciously repeating both our confession and William Shedd's words in Sermon 19, Connection Between Faith & Works (*Sermons to the Spiritual Man* (New York, 1884), 286-301)). Indeed, given my own description of works as part of faith, **the only way I could be saying that these works merit us anything before God, is if I take faith itself to be meritorious.** For me to say that our works earn us something with God would be to say that part of our *faith* earns us something with God. But not only have I never said such a thing, I in fact strongly deny it. The Reformed view—the biblical view—is that faith is *not* meritorious. We do not deserve salvation because of our faith, since every part of that faith, both belief and works, is itself received as a gift (Eph 2:8-10). **How can I be accused of works-righteousness when my view specifically entails that our works do not merit us righteousness?**

Now, having acknowledged that my language of works as a "part" of faith is unusual—and, going further, that it may well have been used by *other* unorthodox theologians to mean something *other* than what I myself mean—let me demonstrate that the actual *concept* I am presenting is nonetheless of a thoroughly Reformed pedigree. Robert Dabney's discussion in his systematic theology is helpful here:

But we now approach an inquiry concerning faith, on which our own divines are more divided. Is faith a perfectly simple exercise of the soul, by its single faculty of intellect; or is it a complex act of both intellect and active moral powers, when stripped of all antecedent or consequent elements, which do not properly belong to it? The older divines, with the confession, evidently make it a complex act of soul, **consisting of an intellectual, and a voluntary element.** Turretin, indeed, discriminates seven elements in the direct and reflex actings of faith: 1. Cognition; 2. Intellectual assent; 3. Trust; 4. Fleeing for refuge; 5. Embracing; and (reflex) 6. Self-consciousness of true actings of faith, with 7. Consolation and assurance of hope. (R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, Chapter 11: Faith, "4. Is faith simple of complex?")

In summing up his own view, he argues for a twofold distinction in faith, namely the *receptive* and *obediential*—corresponding to my own understanding—and rebuffs the accusation that this entails justification by works:

True faith is obediential, it involves the will; it has moral quality, but its receptive nature is what fits it to be the organ of our justification. Hence it does not follow that we introduce justification by our own moral merit. (Ibid, "Answers")

Dabney, in refuting the arguments made by A. Alexander for a simplicity to faith that seems to mimic Ryan's view, gives a warning that I would like to echo: "in examining this subject, let us remember that the resort must be to the Bible alone, to learn what it means by *pistis* [faith]. And this Bible was not written for metaphysicians, but for the popular mind; and its statements about exercises of the soul are not intended to be analytical, but practical." In practical or phenomenological terms, fruit is certainly a part of the tree; so if works are a fruit of faith, then works are a part of faith. It seems to me that Ryan is imposing narrow, analytical categories and terms of art from systematic theology onto the text of Scripture in order to set the bounds of what it can and cannot say—along with the bounds of what anyone *reading* it, and preferring to speak in its own categories and language, can and cannot say. But why should we require the members of our church to hold to systematic theological categories and ways of thinking, rather than allowing them to conform their thinking to the kind of, e.g., Semitic Totality that James uses? Which one of these is breathed out by God, after all?

By way of closing, I believe that Turretin, in part VII of his answer quoted above, states my concern well:

Although the proposition concerning the necessity of good works to salvation...was rejected by various Lutheran theologians as less suitable and dangerous; nay, even by some of our theologians; still we think with others that it can be retained without danger if properly explained. We also hold that it should be pressed against the license of the Epicureans so that although works may be said to contribute nothing to the acquisition of our salvation, still they should be considered necessary to the obtainment of it, so that no one can be saved without them—that thus our religion may be freed from those most foul calumnies everywhere cast most unjustly upon it by the Romanists (as if it were the mistress of impiety and the cushion of carnal licentiousness and security)...

Conclusion

Ryan has claimed that my beliefs on these three issues are unreformed, and indeed unchristian. He has said that if anyone believes that works are necessary to attain salvation, he is not really saved. I have shown that many of the greatest Reformed theologians use precisely this language. He has said that the distinction between the right of salvation, and the necessary means of possessing it, is unreformed and unconfessional. I have quoted some of the greatest Reformed theologians expressing exactly this distinction. And he has said that if anyone holds that faith works, let alone that it includes works, then he is teaching works-righteousness. I have quoted our own confession, along with Robert Dabney, I have cited William Shedd, and I have given clear argumentation to prove that this is specifically what biblical, Reformed theology actually entails.

The only way I can see to construe any of these views as unorthodox is to conflate justification with salvation—which, needless to say, would be a very serious error to make. That is a dominant feature of antinomianism.

At this point, the critical question to ask is:

!? Are Turretin, Dabney, Vos, Rutherford, Goodwin, Calvin, and the other renowned Reformed theologians I have cited, in substantial disagreement with our confession on these important issues? Are these men all unreformed, unconfessional, unorthodox, unchristian heretics, as they would have to be according to their own words if Ryan's claims about my views are valid?

See also

[My personal statement of faith](#)

[What people actually say about It's Good To Be A Man](#)

[Quotes from me that contradict how I've been presented](#)

[Proof that Ryan's presentation of people can't be trusted](#)