

January 4, 1995

Dr. Charles C. Ryrie
3310 Fairmount, 5-D
Dallas, TX 75201

Dear Dr. Ryrie:

Thank you for your gracious letter of December 29. Let me begin by offering a heartfelt apology for any and all misrepresentations of your positions made either by me or by Mr. Barolet. I have not yet read Mr. Barolet's response to Rev. Andrus' letter, but I shall certainly do so. I know how frustrating such misrepresentations can be as I often don't recognize concepts attributed to me.

This all started with a message I gave on justification wherein I made passing reference to you. I said that I appreciated, in the Lordship debate, that you did not shrink from regarding the Lordship position as being "another Gospel." We both know that any other Gospel than the Biblical Gospel is under the anathema of God. My guess is that you would perceive my understanding of the Gospel to include a degree of legalism, and I perceive yours to be a variety of antinomianism.

I am aware that you have stated that every Christian will bear spiritual fruit at some point. I have quoted that very passage in a book on justification I have recently completed for Baker.

The statement is a bit puzzling to me, however, and this may be a good time to clarify it. I hear you saying that fruit is inevitable but not necessarily immediate. Do I hear you correctly or am I missing something?

As I mentioned to the faculty at DTS, I see the most crucial issue between Reformed thought and classical dispensational thought is the understanding of what happens to the person at regeneration. We believe that a real change is wrought in the constituent nature of a person at regeneration. The change is immediate and consequently the beginning of sanctification is also immediate. We all agree that faith and regeneration are simultaneous with respect to time, but we ask which has *logical priority* in the *ordo salutis*? The Reformed view is that regeneration precedes faith logically in that regeneration is the necessary condition for faith, not faith for regeneration. I don't know what your view of this is, or why Mr. Barolet said that you believe faith precedes regeneration.

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We are zealous to maintain that believers are changed people and never in a pure state of carnality. Neither are they, in this world, free entirely of carnality. We say on the one hand that no Christian is a carnal Christian in the sense that he is unchanged and without any fruit, and that all Christians are carnal in the sense that they struggle with the flesh until glorification.

My concern with your view of saving faith has to do with repentance. You summarize your view on p. 99 of *So Great Salvation*:

Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one's mind about Jesus Christ. No, if it means to be sorry for sin or even resolve to turn from sin, for these things will not save. Is repentance a precondition to faith? No, though a sense of sin and the desire to turn from it may be used by the Spirit to direct someone to the Savior....

It is this statement about repentance that concerns me greatly and sounds to me like pure antinomianism. I hear you saying that repentance, in the sense of godly sorrow for sin or resolve to turn from sin, is not a condition for eternal life. This would mean that a person could have true saving faith and not have repentance in this sense. Do I read you correctly?

I quite agree that repentance without faith will not save. But is it also true that faith without repentance will save?

Calvin argued that:

The shortest transition, however, will be from faith to repentance; for repentance being properly understood, it will better appear how a man is justified freely by faith alone, and yet that holiness of life, real holiness, as it is called, is inseparable from the free imputation of righteousness. That repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it, ought to be without controversy. (III/III/1)

...It is certain that no man can embrace the grace of the Gospel without betaking himself from the errors of his former life into the right

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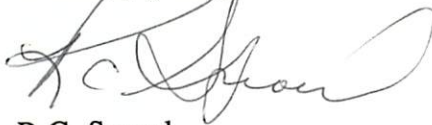
path and making it his whole study to practice
repentance.

I am not entirely clear about your view. Surely we do not want to make repentance the grounds of our justification. We don't even say that about faith. Only the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith is the grounds of justification. The question is, though we must distinguish between faith and repentance, can we separate them? In other words, is it possible to have saving faith and be impenitent in the sense of repentance of sorrow for sin and resolve to turn from it?

I hear you saying that not only is such repentance not a condition for salvation, but that it is possible to have saving faith without it.

Again, I am sorry for any misrepresentation of your views. As you can see from my questions, I am not altogether clear what you mean. Again, Reformed theology distinguishes between faith and repentance but sees repentance as a necessary fruit of faith. Just as works are fruits of true faith, so is repentance. If the fruit doesn't follow, that would indicate that saving faith was not ever present.

Sincerely yours,



R.C. Sproul

RCS:dm