

To: Louisiana Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America, in care of TE Stanley Pace, Moderator (StanleyPace@hotmail.com) and RE Dale Peacock, Stated Clerk (mdpeacock@netzero.net) and the Presbytery's Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Vision Theology, in care of TE Howard Davis, Chairman (HQDavis@yahoo.com)

From: Dr. E. Calvin Beisner, RE; Rev. Christopher A. Hutchinson, TE; Rev. Richard D. Phillips, TE; Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, TE; Rev. Carl D. Robbins, TE; Dr. Morton H. Smith, TE; Dr. R. Fowler White, TE

Subject: Your Final Report and Recommendations on Federal Vision Theology and Rev. Steve Wilkins

Date: July 27, 2005

1 Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We and the whole Presbyterian Church in America,
2 along with the larger Reformed community, owe you thanks for your hard work in addressing
3 concerns about Federal Vision Theology and, particularly, TE Steve Wilkins's teaching as one of its
4 principal advocates. Your Report is an important step toward clarifying issues and repairing some
5 harm and breaches that have occurred in the last two years or more surrounding this issue. We hope
6 that the adoption of your report by Louisiana Presbytery indicates that Mr. Wilkins embraced it and
7 plans to act on its recommendations.
8

9 Both as those who met two years ago with Mr. Wilkins and other proponents of the FV, and as those
10 who have communicated our concerns regarding his teaching not only to him but also to your
11 presbytery, we thought it appropriate to correspond with you in light of your Report.
12

13 I. We gladly embrace many of your statements.

14 A. We agree that the FV helpfully challenges sectarianism, individualism, and a low view of
15 the sacraments.

16 B. We agree that the courts of the church should take the lead in adjudicating doctrinal
17 controversy and must not be replaced by other forums or media, that both proponents and
18 opponents sometimes have adopted language not conducive to understanding and peace,
19 and that the church must always be receptive to continuing refinement of doctrine in light
20 of Scripture, the supreme judge in all controversies.

21 C. We embrace the concerns you listed, e.g., that

22 1. no teaching on water baptism should exclude personal faith as the instrument of
23 justification and union with Christ;

24 2. no teaching on water baptism should make conversion and heart change absolute and
25 infallible upon baptism;

26 3. no formulation of the doctrine of perseverance should state that the elect (in the
27 Westminster Standards' sense) can fall away from grace;

28 4. no teaching on justification should contradict the Standards' doctrine that justification
29 is a forensic act based solely on Christ's meritorious life and death; and

30 5. the FV's teachings on justification, adoption (especially regarding the certainty of
31 perseverance), and perseverance are in some instances apparently and in others really
32 different from—we would specify contrary to—the Standards.

33 D. We agree that the Standards allow for the views that

34 1. God can regenerate at the moment of water baptism;

- 35 2. God brings a person into the visible church at water baptism;
36 3. the Bible sometimes uses *elect* to denote the visible church, while the Confession uses
37 it only of those unchangeably chosen by God for eternal salvation; and
38 4. justification and sanctification, while distinct, are never separate.
39 E. We agree that
40 1. the Bible uses *justify* in broader ways than the Confession;
41 2. the Confession requires acknowledging that when someone passes from death to life
42 (1 John 3:14) he cannot fall away or lose the faith God has given him;
43 3. the Confession acknowledges the reality of apostasy, i.e., that a member of the visible
44 church can fall away, and if he does so he loses real but external benefits¹ of
45 membership in the visible church through baptism.
46 F. We agree that the Confession does not allow for the views that
47 1. God always regenerates someone who is baptized in water;
48 2. a person can be elect and later “unelect” in the Confession’s sense of the term;
49 3. any works but Christ’s are an instrument in, or rather (since the Confession calls faith
50 the “alone instrument” of justification) ground for a person’s justification in the sense
51 of the term used in the Confession; and
52 4. an individual can have a vital, internalized relationship with the Lord and lose it.
53
54 II. Nonetheless we request clarification of or disagree with some of your other statements.
55 A. We request clarification of two statements in which you pronounce a view “problematic.”
56 Specifically, the report says:
57 1. “Any formulation of a doctrine of baptismal regeneration which makes an individual’s
58 conversion and heart change absolute and infallible upon baptism is problematic.”
59 2. “A formulation of the doctrine of perseverance which states one who is elect
60 (according to the WCF’s understanding of this term) can fall away from grace is
61 problematic.”
62 Are we to take these as your judgments that such formulations are false, or contrary to
63 the Standards, or unusual and thus likely to trouble some people but consistent with the
64 Standards, or what?
65 B. We request clarification of your statement that the Standards allow for the view that we
66 should consider persons baptized in water who have not been excommunicated as
67 regenerated. Do you mean that we should charitably consider them such until evidence
68 shows otherwise? That is the best face we can put on it. But since *Larger Catechism* 171
69 requires all recipients of the Lord’s Supper (hence persons baptized in water and not
70 excommunicated) “to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their
71 being in Christ,” it follows that no one should consider even himself regenerated solely
72 on the grounds that he has been baptized and not excommunicated. And if no one should
73 consider himself regenerate on those grounds alone, neither should others consider him

¹We believe a more helpful way of making this distinction would be to describe these benefits as “earthly, temporal, and revocable,” for indeed the emotional comfort and joy that many non-elect receive from participation in the visible church can hardly be described as “external.”

74 so on those grounds alone. Further, since *Westminster Confession* 25 teaches that
75 particular “Churches . . . are more or less pure” and “subject both to mixture and error;
76 and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of
77 Satan,” it follows that the *Confession*, too, envisions the visible church as including
78 many—and in some churches that have become synagogues of Satan surely the vast
79 majority—who, though baptized in water and not excommunicated, are unregenerate.
80 Finally, WCF 18.1 contrasts “unregenerate men” who “vainly deceive themselves with
81 false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God” with “such as truly
82 believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good
83 conscience before Him.” In other words the opposite of “unregenerate” are those giving
84 a credible profession of faith. Surely among those the Confession warns against vain
85 presumption are baptized persons. It follows that the Confession denies that one’s water
86 baptism justifies a presumption of regeneration.

87 C. We are not sure what to make of the list following your statement, “We would like to
88 note some differences (whether real or apparent) between some FV teachings and the”
89 Standards. The list names “justification,” “adoption,” and “perseverance,” and it cites the
90 Confession and Catechisms after each, but it does not specify what the committee
91 considered to be the differences (real or apparent) between what the Standards teach
92 about those subjects and what the FV teaches. Without knowing what the committee
93 considers the differences to be, and which ones it considers real and which only apparent,
94 we find the list of little assistance. Can you clarify for us, please?

95 D. Neither are we sure what to make of your following that list of “differences (whether real
96 or apparent)” with “As a guard against departures from the Confession, we would set the
97 following boundaries of acceptability in four critical areas.”

- 98 1. What distinguishes a “difference” from a “departure”?
- 99 2. If “difference” and “departure” are synonymous in this context (and they seem to
100 function that way), does the document indicate that within the FV or, more
101 specifically, in Mr. Wilkins’s teaching, the differences—or departures—have already
102 occurred?
- 103 3. How, specifically, would you say that Mr. Wilkins has departed from the Standards
104 with regard to the four subjects enumerated immediately afterward, if at all?

105 E. We are puzzled by your language in the second of your enumerated “concerns.” You
106 wrote, “Any teaching on baptism as the visible (and invisible) means of union with Christ
107 should not exclude the teaching that baptism assumes faith as the instrument of that
108 union.” What is the difference, in the committee’s mind, between a “means” and an
109 “instrument” in this context? The Standards speak of faith as the “alone instrument of
110 justification” (WCF 11.2), and they speak of “the principal acts of saving faith” as
111 “accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and
112 eternal life” (WCF 14.2). They speak of water baptism as “a sign and seal of” the
113 baptizand’s “ingraving into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, of his giving up
114 unto God” (WCF 28.1), but they do not speak of baptism as either the means or the
115 instrument of our union with Christ. We wonder, in light of its language, whether the
116 committee would endorse a notion that we have observed to be common in the FV that
117 equates union with the visible church with union with Christ. While water baptism

118 certainly is a means or instrument of our union with the visible church, since some in the
119 visible church are not in fact united to Christ so as to be forgiven of their sins and clothed
120 with the righteousness of Christ and thus destined for heaven, it should not be seen as a
121 means or instrument of our union with Christ in that sense. Can you clarify for us?
122

123 III. Specifically with regard to Mr. Wilkins, we would raise the following matters:

124 A. We were surprised to find no reference in your report to Mr. Wilkins’s teaching on
125 assurance, a doctrine on which we believe there is a strong contrast between his public
126 teaching and the Standards. In his 2003 Auburn Avenue Pastors’ Conference lecture,
127 “Covenant and Baptism,” Mr. Wilkins said: “when we say . . . ‘Look to your baptism,’
128 we’re talking about looking to Christ in the covenant, and realizing what you can know
129 for certain. You cannot know if you were ever sincere. You cannot know if you really
130 meant it when you asked Jesus into your heart and threw the pine cone into the fire. You
131 can’t know those. Those questions are unanswerable. Were you really given a new heart?
132 Well, you can’t answer that question. God knows. You don’t know. What you can know
133 is that you have been baptized and you have the Lord’s Supper.” Shortly he added that
134 this view helps pastorally in that “It makes our standing before God and that of our
135 children plain, and yet it prevents presumption. . . . We belong to Christ. Baptism is the
136 infallible sign and seal of this And in regard to our assurance, we are pointed away
137 from ourselves and what we think we perceive to be true of us inwardly, *which no one*
138 *can know*, and pointed to Christ, the only ground of our assurance.”²

139 1. Three things appear clearly from these statements:

- 140 a. Mr. Wilkins said that “no one can know” if he was sincere, if he meant it when he
141 asked Jesus into his heart, if he was given a new heart, or generally “what [is] true
142 of us inwardly.”
- 143 b. Mr. Wilkins said that one can know that he has been baptized and has the Lord’s
144 Supper.
- 145 c. Mr. Wilkins said that this view of baptism “makes our standing before God and
146 that of our children plain.”

147 2. The first and third of these teachings is contrary to the Standards.

- 148 a. Contrary to the doctrine that “no one can know” if he was sincere, meant it when
149 he asked Jesus into his heart, was given a new heart, or “what [is] true of [him]
150 inwardly,” the Confession teaches that “such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus,
151 and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before
152 Him, may, in this life, be **certainly assured that they are in the state of grace**”
153 (WCF 18.1). “This certainty is . . . an infallible assurance of faith founded upon
154 the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the **inward evidence of those graces**
155 **unto which these promises are made**, [and] the testimony of the Spirit of
156 adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God” (WCF 18.2).
157 The “true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be

²Steve Wilkins, “Covenant and Baptism,” taped lecture at the 2003 Auburn Avenue Pastors’ Conference, transcript, 11-12.

158 partaker of” this “infallible assurance,” “yet, being enabled by the Spirit **to know**
159 **the things which are freely given him of God**, he may, without extraordinary
160 revelation in the right use of the ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore
161 it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to **make his calling and election**
162 **sure . . .**” (WCF 18.3). “True believers may have the assurance of their salvation
163 divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; . . . yet are they never utterly
164 destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren,
165 and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance
166 may, in due time, be revived” (WCF 18.4). Further contrary to Mr. Wilkins’s
167 doctrine, LC 171 requires participants in the Lord’s Supper to examine
168 themselves “of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, [and]
169 repentance”—which would be useless if no one could know such inward things.

170 b. Contrary to Mr. Wilkins’s doctrine of baptism’s making our and our children’s
171 standing before God plain, LC 171 requires partakers of the Lord’s Supper,
172 before partaking, “to prepare themselves . . . by examining themselves of their
173 being in Christ,” which would be unnecessary if none who were baptized in water
174 (and not excommunicated) were nonetheless outside Christ.

175 3. We find it very significant that when the Standards set out to name the grounds of
176 assurance, they never once mention the sacraments but do mention “belie[f] in the
177 Lord Jesus, and love [for] Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good
178 conscience before Him,” “an infallible assurance of faith,” “the inward evidence of
179 those graces unto which [the gospel] promises are made,” and “the testimony of the
180 Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits,” but that when Mr. Wilkins sets out to
181 name the grounds of assurance, he explicitly points people away from those very
182 things, saying, “You cannot know if you were ever sincere. You cannot know if you
183 really meant it when you asked Jesus into your heart You can’t know those. . . .
184 Were you really given a new heart? Well, you can’t answer that question. . . . You
185 don’t know. What you can know is that you have been baptized and you have the
186 Lord’s Supper,” and “in regard to our assurance, we are pointed away from ourselves
187 and what we think we perceive to be true of us inwardly, *which no one can know*, and
188 pointed to Christ, the only ground of our assurance.” This is in clear contradiction to
189 the Standards.

190 4. We recognize that in that same talk Mr. Wilkins also said, “The covenant requires
191 faith, and thus the gift of the covenant, *which is Christ*, not something less, but Christ
192 *Himself*, is given to us by His Word, by Baptism, and by the Supper, and they must
193 be—He must be embraced by faith, or you forfeit all the blessings and benefits of the
194 covenant of grace.” However, if “You cannot know if you were ever sincere,” you
195 cannot know “if you really meant it when you asked Jesus into your heart,” you
196 cannot know if “you were really given a new heart,” and you cannot know what is
197 “true of [you] inwardly,” what role can embracing Christ by faith play *not in*
198 *justification* (for presumably it would be consistent with Mr. Wilkins’s view to say
199 that one is justified by faith if he has that faith, even if he doesn’t *know* that he has that
200 faith) but *in assurance*?

201 B. We were surprised also to find no reference in your report to Mr. Wilkins’s statements

202 about the relationship of baptism, being in covenant, being united to Christ, and having
203 all spiritual blessings in Christ.

- 204 1. Mr. Wilkins wrote,
- 205 a. “If [someone] has been baptized, he is in covenant with God.”³
 - 206 b. “. . . covenant *is* union with Christ.”
 - 207 c. “. . . covenant *is* union with Christ. Thus, being in covenant gives all the blessings
208 of being united to Christ. . . . Because being in covenant with God means being
209 in Christ, those who are in covenant have all spiritual blessings in the heavenly
210 places.”⁴
- 211 2. From these statements it follows that if someone has been baptized he has all spiritual
212 blessings in the heavenly places. The phrase “all spiritual blessings in the heavenly
213 places” originated in Ephesians 1:3, and in that context Paul includes among such
214 “spiritual blessings” election to holiness and blamelessness before God, predestination
215 for adoption and to be to the praise of God’s glory, redemption through Christ’s
216 blood, forgiveness of trespasses, an inheritance in Christ, and reception of the Holy
217 Spirit as seal and guarantee of inheritance “until we acquire the possession of it”
218 (Ephesians 1:3-14). Mr. Wilkins explicitly acknowledged this as the context for the
219 phrase in his 2003 AAPC lecture.⁵ These blessings are certainly salvific, and they
220 reach all the way from election before creation to final salvation at the end of history.
- 221 3. That Mr. Wilkins had such in mind in his own use of the phrase “all spiritual blessings
222 in the heavenly places” is clear from his list drawn from 1 Corinthians—a list that
223 included
- 224 a. sanctification in Christ,
 - 225 b. calling to be saints,
 - 226 c. the grace of God,
 - 227 d. enrichment in everything by Christ in all utterance and knowledge,
 - 228 e. assurance that they will be confirmed to the end blameless,
 - 229 f. calling into the fellowship of Jesus,
 - 230 g. being “in Christ” and sharing in His wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and
231 redemption,
 - 232 h. receiving the Spirit so that they might know the things given them by God, things
233 the natural man cannot know,
 - 234 i. being made the temple of God,,
 - 235 j. having all things belong to them because they are Christ’s and Christ is God’s,
 - 236 k. being born through the gospel,
 - 237 l. Christ’s having been sacrificed for them,
 - 238 m. having been washed (or baptized) and thus sanctified and justified,
 - 239 n. the destiny of being raised up just as God raised Jesus,

³Steve Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 1994), 254-69, at 267.

⁴*Ibid.*, 262.

⁵Wilkins, “Covenant and Baptism,” transcript p. 4.

- 240 o. having been bought with a price,
241 p. having communion with the body and blood of Christ and thus being one body
242 with Him,
243 q. being the body of Christ and individually members of it, and
244 r. having had Christ die for their sins.
- 245 4. We assert that Mr. Wilkins’s statements cited here entail by good and necessary
246 consequence that all who are baptized in water will be eternally saved. We know and
247 are grateful that Mr. Wilkins denies that consequence. But the fact remains that he
248 wrote as he did, and we believe the Committee and Presbytery should call on Mr.
249 Wilkins to retract some of what he wrote in light of its necessary consequence.
- 250 5. We also believe the Report should have included a fifth point in its list under
251 baptismal efficacy saying that the Standards do not “allow for the view that all who
252 are baptized are in covenant, all who are in covenant are united to Christ, and all who
253 are united to Christ have all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.”
- 254 6. We believe that the reason Mr. Wilkins can have written as he did and yet can in all
255 honesty and sincerity deny the necessary consequence of it is that in doing so he
256 inadvertently equivocated on the terms *covenant* and *in Christ*. Because his
257 statements occur in a context in which he is discussing salvation and assurance of
258 salvation, the primary sense of *covenant* and *in Christ* that appears to have been in his
259 mind was of being in the covenant of grace made “with Christ as the second Adam,
260 and in Him with all the elect as His seed” (LC 31) and of being in Christ in the sense
261 in which Paul used the term in Ephesians to denote a saving relationship. But when
262 he then denies the consequence of his statements—that consequence being that
263 therefore all who are baptized are eternally saved—the primary sense of *covenant* and
264 *in Christ* in his mind has changed to the earthly, temporal covenant and that union
265 with Christ that entails nothing more than membership in the *visible* church. We
266 suggest that this insight might help Mr. Wilkins to clarify his intentions and compose
267 new public statements to correct the mistaken impressions fostered by his earlier
268 statements.
- 269 C. While the Report rightly says that the Bible uses the word *elect* in several different ways,
270 not only in the Westminsterian sense and not all of which are finally salvific, it neglects
271 to note that the Bible uses *predestine* (προορίζω; Ephesians 1:5, 11; Romans 8:29) only
272 of the elect in the Westminsterian sense of those who will spend eternity in heaven. The
273 use of this term by FV proponents to denote those elect only to membership in the visible
274 church and not in the Westminsterian sense⁶ is contrary to Biblical usage and prone to

⁶Wilkins, “Covenant and Baptism,” transcript p. 4: “listen again to how [Paul] speaks to the church at Ephesus, this is of course very familiar to us: They have been blessed ‘with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,’ they have been chosen in Christ Jesus ‘before the foundation of the world,’ so that they would be ‘holy and without blame before him, in love,’ they have been ‘predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,’ that by God’s grace they’ve been ‘accepted in the Beloved,’ that in Christ they ‘have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins,’ that God has made known to them ‘the mystery of His will,’ which, of course, is the gathering up of all things, Jew and Gentile, into Christ. All things that are in Heaven and earth. And that in Christ, they have ‘obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all

275 lead to error.

276 D. While the Report

- 277 1. rightly says that the Confession acknowledges “the reality of apostasy, that a person
278 can be a member of the visible church and fall away and thus loose [sic] the real
279 benefits of belonging to God’s people, the real loss of external, Covenant blessings
280 claimed through being a member of the visible church through baptism,” and
281 2. while it rightly asserts that the Confession “[d]oes not accommodate a view that an
282 individual can have a vital, internalized relationship with the Lord and lose it,”
283 3. it does not notice that what Mr. Wilkins affirms belongs to every baptized person–“all
284 spiritual blessings in the heavenly places,” with Mr. Wilkins’s own enumeration of
285 such based on Ephesians 1 and 1 Corinthians–is nothing if it is not precisely that: “a
286 vital, internalized relationship with the Lord.”
287 4. Yet it is just this that Mr. Wilkins wrote can be lost. In “Covenant, Baptism, and
288 Salvation,” after enumerating “all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places” that
289 belonged to all who were baptized and therefore in covenant and therefore in Christ,
290 he wrote: “Paul declares these things to be true of the members of the Church in
291 Corinth All this was true of each of the members, but . . . [i]f they departed from
292 Christ, they would perish like Israel of old. All their privileges and blessings would
293 become like so many anchors to sink them into the lake of fire. . . . The apostles did
294 not view the covenant as a place of potential blessing or a place of fantastic
295 opportunity–they viewed it as salvation, because it means fellowship and communion
296 with the triune God. It is union with Christ in His obedient life, sacrificial,
297 substitutionary death, triumphant resurrection, and glorious ascension and session at
298 the right hand of the Father. [para] All in covenant are given all that is true of Christ.
299 If they persevere in faith to the end, they enjoy these mercies eternally. If they fall
300 away in unbelief, they lose these blessings and receive a greater condemnation than
301 Sodom and Gomorrah. Covenant can be broken by unbelief and rebellion, but until
302 it is, those in covenant with God belong to Him and are His. If they do not persevere,
303 they lose the blessings that were given to them Thus, when one breaks covenant,
304 it can be truly said that he has turned away from grace and forfeited life, forgiveness,
305 and salvation.”⁷
306 5. Mr. Wilkins’s statements about the apostasy of those who have received “all spiritual
307 blessings in the heavenly places” contradict, therefore, the Confession’s teaching on
308 perseverance as described in the Report. Or would the Committee not include “a vital,
309 internalized relationship with the Lord” among “all spiritual blessings in the heavenly
310 places”?

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312 IV. Finally, we were disappointed in the Report’s recommendations.

313 A. As is clear from some of our comments above, we believe that Mr. Wilkins has said and
314 written some things that are clearly outside the bounds of the Confession, whatever he

things according to the counsel of His will.”

⁷Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” 363.

- 315 might believe “at this time.”
316 B. While we were pleased that the Report exhorted Mr. Wilkins to “clarify/reformulate his
317 teachings . . . and to take more care when communicating these things in the future,” it
318 1. badly disserved him by failing to list specific quotations from his writings or speeches
319 that are the basis for the exhortation and that need retraction, clarification, or
320 reformulation,
321 2. said nothing of how and in what forums it ought to be done,
322 3. gave him no time frame within which to get it done, and
323 4. said nothing of what sanctions might follow if it were not done.
324

325 In light of all the foregoing, we believe, despite the Report’s assertion to the contrary, that Mr.
326 Wilkins has taught or written contrary to the Westminster Standards on at least the following matters:

- 327 1. the doctrine of assurance,
328 2. the relations of water baptism, covenant, union with Christ, and eternal salvation,
329 3. the Biblical use of *proorizw*, and
330 4. apostasy.
331

332 For the preservation of the purity of the gospel and of the Presbyterian Church in America, we
333 therefore call upon the Committee and the Presbytery to

- 334 1. reconsider their findings, identifying specific statements (such as those quoted above)
335 by which Mr. Wilkins has in the past contradicted the Standards,
336 2. instruct Mr. Wilkins that he must clearly, publicly, and in forums likely to reach
337 audiences similar to those exposed to the statements quoted above, retract those
338 statements and correct them with Confessionally sound teaching on the same subjects,
339 3. set deadlines by which he is to have fulfilled those requirements, and
340 4. inform him clearly of sanctions that will be imposed if he fails to comply with those
341 instructions.
342

343 Humbly and for the guarding of the flock of God entrusted to your care and ours,
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Appendix
Clarification of Paragraph III.C
by E. Calvin Beisner

Dr. Matt Colvin, having read our response to your report, pointed out what he considered an error on our part in paragraph III.C., which reads as follows:

While the Report rightly says that the Bible uses the word *elect* in several different ways, not only in the Westminsterian sense and not all of which are finally salvific, it neglects to note that the Bible uses *predestine* (pr00riZW; Ephesians 1:5, 11; Romans 8:29) only of the elect in the Westminsterian sense of those who will spend eternity in heaven. The use of this term by FV proponents to denote those elect only to membership in the visible church and not in the Westminsterian sense is contrary to Biblical usage and prone to lead to error.

Dr. Colvin understood us to be claiming that pr00riZW is used only in those two contexts, which of course is not true. It was perfectly understandable for Dr. Colvin to think, when he read “the Bible uses *predestine* (pr00riZW; Ephesians 1:5, 11; Romans 8:29) only of the elect in the Westminsterian sense” that we intended to say that the Bible never used *proorizo* otherwise. Taken by themselves, those words readily bear that sense. I take the blame for it, since I drafted that paragraph. I wrote ambiguously, indeed, misleadingly. I *should* have written instead, “the Bible uses *predestine* (pr00riZW; Ephesians 1:5, 11; Romans 8:29) of the elect only in the Westminsterian sense.” That would more clearly have limited the scope of the assertion to those places in which the Bible uses *proorizo* of the elect, and that was in fact my intent. Indeed, I could and should have eliminated all ambiguity by writing, “*When the Bible uses proorizo with the elect as its object, it uses it only in the Westminsterian sense of those who will spend eternity in heaven.*”

Many months ago we had discussed the restricted use of pr00riZW with words designating the elect:

ekl ego (Ephesians 1:4-5) and kl htoj (Romans 8:28-29). I had that discussion in mind while drafting the sentence, as did the others when they read it, and we all understood what we intended. But quite naturally Dr. Colvin, unaware of the prior discussion, thought us mistaken. A more precise reading of the paragraph might, however, have prevented the misunderstanding. The controlling topic of both the sub clause and the main clause in the paragraph is the use of the word *elect*. The import of the sub clause is the use of the word *elect* in its varied relations; the import of the main clause is the use of the word *predestine* in relation to the word *elect*; in other words, the use of the word *elect* in its specific relation to the word *predestine*. The point of the Response is that the verb *predestine* is used of the elect only in the Westminsterian sense and is not used of the elect in any of the other ways that the word *elect* is used in the Bible.

In short: Our intent was not to say that Scripture uses *proorizo* only of those elect to eternity in heaven but to say that when Scripture uses *proorizo* of the *elect* it has in mind only those elect to eternity in heaven, i.e., those elect in the sense the Westminster Standards give to that word. Our argument is not philological but exegetico/theological, focusing on the theological content of the relevant passages. The blame for the confusion is mine as the one who drafted the suspect paragraph.

I apologize to you and to my co-signers for writing so ambiguously as to make Dr. Colvin's interpretation of that point of our letter so plausible. The case against Mr. Wilkins's usage as contrary to the Confession is that when Scripture uses *proorizo* of the *elect* it has in mind only those elect to eternity in heaven, i.e., those elect in the sense the Westminster Standards give to that word—not also, as Mr. Wilkins uses it *of the elect*, those elect only to membership in the visible church with its earthly, temporal, revocable benefits as contrasted with its heavenly, eternal, irrevocable benefits.