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# The Cornerstone of Society

God established the family in the dawn of human history when He made Eve out of Adam's rib to be his wife. Since then, the family has become the foundation of human society, the cornerstone of all of our institutions. There is no other place where children can be properly taught the virtues of truthfulness, faithfulness, obedience, love, self-denial, and kindness. These virtues must be learned in one's youth. They can be honed and refined in school and society, but if they are to be learned at all, they are to be inculcated in those tender years when a child's training is still entirely in the hands of its parents.

The deadliest perils that face both

society and culture are those evils which undermine our domestic life: the breakdown of parental authority, feminism, divorce, abortion, sexual perversion, and the like. All of these undermine the very foundations of our social structure and "if the foundation is destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

The establishment of the family antedates the entrance of sin into the world. Before sin entered the world, Adam and Ever were told to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth and subduing it. Even if sin had never blighted this world, there would have been families and homes. The fundamental relationships implied in the existence of

fathers, mothers, and children would have formed the groundwork of all human civilization.

But the family, as well as the individual, was exposed to the ruinous effects of sin as soon as it entered the human heart. Through God's providential care over His creation, the process of corruption was checked to such an extent that marriage and the home continued throughout the generations. It still exists today among the ungodly as well as those who seek after God. The instincts of mother-love, paternal diligence, and paternal self-denial have not wholly disappeared from the scene even in homes that do not seek to praise God's holy name nor seek His will for their children.



Volume 55, No.2 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

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The Christian home is one where the clear light of special grace is added to the glimmerings of God-given instincts. Here regenerated hearts perform parental duties which God requires with earnestness and joy. The virtues of love, obedience, self-denial, without which society cannot flourish, are rooted in the fear of God. Christian morals are taught. Such morality can only be founded on true religion. Unless Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the home, it cannot be the cornerstone of our public institutions.

Mere membership in a church does not transform a home into a Christian home. Regular contributions to a church can be made by a family, but will not make that family a Christian family. Adorning the walls of one's house with Scripture texts is no proof that a Christian family dwells within those walls.

A Christian home is a place where Jesus Christ is worshipped and served. Such worship implies that He is confessed as the eternal Son of God, the Incarnate Word, very God of very God, and that He is worthy of all praise and adoration. The Christian home is a home whose members believe the Gospel and hold fast to the orthodox faith.

Worship of the Lord Jesus Christ in the home is to be both personal and collective. Each member must bend the knee before God in the inner chamber of their own room. At the same time, they must also call upon Him at the family table.

A Christian family in the real sense of the word is one where the family, *as a family*, worships and serves God. For this reason, it is

important that the family spend time in prayer in each other's presence. The family is a unit. Each individual in the family has his/her own personal needs and must be given opportunity to express those needs in prayer to God. Members of the family also have needs that they share in common. For this, the head of the house must lead the family in prayer, lifting up to God words of thanksgiving and intercession on behalf of the entire family.

The family whose members never unite in humble and fervent prayer unto the heavenly Father cannot truthfully be called a Christian family. The members may individually breathe a silent prayer to God before they partake of the meal. They may even be a family composed of Christians, but they are hardly a Christian *family*. How can the children in such a family be expected to grow up in the fear of God when God's name is never mentioned in prayer? How can they be expected to learn what daily needs to pray for if they do not learn by example in the home? Children must be taught to pray from the heart, but also to pray with understanding.

Family worship consists of Bible Study as well as prayer. Christ cannot be the Head of any house unless His Word, which is the law of the home, is diligently searched. True religion is communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We commune with Him not only by pouring out our hearts before Him, but also by letting Him speak to us through His Word. If that Word is to be our light and our path for our own lives and for the lives of all within our family, then it

stands to reason that the family, as well as the individual, should study that Word.

A Christian home is one where Jesus Christ is not only worshiped, but He is also served. Christianity is practical as well as doctrinal and spiritual. It consists of obedience to God as well as faith and adoration.

God has revealed abiding fundamental principles concerning the proper conduct of family life. These touch the mutual relations and obligations of husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Even though prayers can be recited, Scripture passages read, and hymns sung at the family table, the home is not a Christian home in the full sense of the word unless its members consciously endeavor to build their home life according to the divine pattern set by God in His Word. Where husbands neglect or abuse their wives; where wives scorn the wishes of their husbands; where children disobey and refuse to revere their parents; religious exercise is a mockery.

Is your home a Christian home? If it has grave defects in one respect or another, why not bend all your energies toward the improvement and purification of your family? Fill it with prayer, worship, and obedience to God.

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# Sing Psalms Along With the Suffering Church

*“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also.”*

(Hebrews 13:3)

Every Christian will suffer persecution to some extent. For most of us in North America, whatever persecution we presently face is likely quite mild in comparison to what so many Christians are suffering in other places. We must remember them in Christian love. As in the case of remembering the poor, this is not a matter of giving them a passing thought. It means trying to relieve their suffering and meet their needs. Down through the centuries, identifying with persecuted brothers and sisters and trying to help them has been a crucial, and often dangerous, exercise of true faith: “I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:36).

Organizations like “The Voice of the Martyrs” inform concerned Christians of ways they may actually become involved in helping mistreated believers. However, because we are generally so far removed in proximity and personal knowledge from these suffering Christians, the most we can do is pray for them. This kind of remembering must also be taken seriously. Ministries such as the Bible League have designated international days of prayer for the persecuted. We do well to observe such times. However, the call to pray for the persecuted is not seasonal. Just as elders will remind the minister if he neglects to pray for the sick or for civil government, they must ensure

that the persecuted are regularly remembered in congregational prayers. Family prayers should include them as well. It is important for children to grow up hearing such prayers.

We must remember the persecuted with sympathetic feeling “*as if chained with them*”. It is natural for us to feel for a suffering brother or sister when they are close to us. We are moved by the sights and sounds of their anguish. That is how it should be in the church: “*If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it*” (I Corinthians 12:26).

Often the very circumstances which make it difficult to become directly involved in helping persecuted Christians make it difficult to pray for them with real sympathy. They are far away. We do not know them personally. Christian publications sometimes give names and describe the circumstances of our suffering brothers and sisters. We should read them with interest.

Likewise, the knowledge and experience of our own weakness and vulnerability as those who are “*in the body*” should help us sympathize with the persecuted. In any case, we must endeavor to ‘put ourselves in their shoes’. We must give thought and use means to stir our hearts so that we might remem-

ber and pray for them with the fervency of faith and love.

In this connection, the Psalms serve as a powerful, God-given means of fellowship with the persecuted church. Sadly, the Psalms have fallen into neglect in much of the modern church. Even in many Reformed churches with a history of commitment to their priority in congregational singing, they have become less popular than hymns.

Among the Psalms that are sung, the many ‘darker’ Psalms are passed over, or those heavy verses of lament and cries to God in the midst of trouble and anguish are skipped. Why is this? Is it because “These Psalms do not express my feelings, fears or troubles? I can not relate to them and their constant references to enemies?”

Such a response may indicate spiritual inexperience and shallowness. Even more to the point, it expresses a kind of individualism and selfishness. When we approach the Psalms this way, we fail to think and feel beyond our present, personal interests. That means we will fail to recognize Christ where the Psalms give us insight into His sufferings and holy endurance in the face of all opposition. We will fail to hear His cries of anguish and unwavering devotion as He suffered and conquered as our Mediator. We will fail to sing with hearts uplifted in the worship of our Savior.

Furthermore, this approach will hinder us from truly singing as members of the body of Christ. We will not join in spirit with that brother or sister passing through a

dark time of conviction for sin, or facing a tragic loss, or finding themselves in the midst of a great spiritual struggle. We will not think of those sick members of the congregation whose needs, fears, and praise are so wonderfully expressed in these less popular songs. We will likewise fail to appreciate one of the most powerful means that God has given to help us feel our unity with our brothers and sisters facing arrest, or shut up in the darkness of prisons, cut off from the means of grace, isolated from loved ones, wrestling with confusion and fears, suffering physical pain inflicted by their oppressors.

The next time you find yourself singing like a captive, or like one “doomed to die”, or one surrounded by cruel enemies, do not selfishly say, “This is negative, this does not apply to me in my situation, nor does it reflect my state of mind—let’s sing a peppy tune instead.” Rather, sing as a member of the body of Christ. In your heart and mind, join in sympathy with the desolate and afflicted, the imprisoned and mistreated. Cry to God with them and for them. Sing Psalms along with the suffering Church.

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# We Confess

## *An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession*

### **Article 20: Of the Means of the Redemption Through the Declaration of Justice and Mercy of God in Christ**

Article 20 of the Belgic Confession begins with a sweeping statement that summarizes Articles 14-19 of our Confession:

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same, and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death.

The promise that the Father made of a Savior in the Garden of Eden now takes on flesh and bone in our Lord. The heart of God as Father is revealed here as we confess Him to have loved us so much that He was willing to send His eternal, only-begotten Son, to satisfy His justice while at the same time revealing the mercy of God. In traditional terms this means that by the obedience and passion of our Savior, the penalty of the broken covenant of works was satisfied while the overflowing grace and mercy of God in the covenant of grace was manifested.

In saying that God is both merciful *and* just, we are rejecting the sentimental view of God that many professing believers have. The view that the God of the Old Testament is “just” while that of the New is “love” is as old as the arch-heretic

Marcion, from the early third century of the Christian Church.

We confess with Scripture that God is “simple” (cf. BC, Art. 1). This means that God is not divided up into parts (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, II,1). He is not part merciful and loving and part just and righteous; He is both equally, all the time. The God who elects also reprobrates. He who punishes a broken covenant of works, also establishes a covenant of grace.

#### **The Justice of God**

This “perfectly just” God, in sending his Son, “manifested His justice against His Son when He laid our iniquities upon Him.” What is His justice? Very simply, we can say that justice is getting what we deserve. For example, God gave a law to Adam which had a curse attached to it if it was broken. Adam broke the law and God punished him, and us, for doing so. The underlying question for us, though, is why did God need to send His Son in order to “satisfy” His justice? This touches the essence of who God is. His justice is an eternal justice. It had no beginning and it will have no end. His justice is an infinite justice. God will not simply forget about our sin.

We have a fuller explanation of the justice of God and the necessity of its satisfaction in our Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism teaches

## *Study/Application Questions for Article 20*

1. How do we experience God's mercy and justice? How do these two come together, for example, in our worship when we hear the law, confess our sins, and receive forgiveness? How do we hear these two in preaching?
2. In the death of Christ, how was God just in killing his only Son?
3. In the death of Christ, how was God merciful in killing his only Son?
4. How do God's justice and mercy equip us for evangelism?

us that God will not allow disobedience to His law to go unpunished, because He is "terribly displeased" with our sins and will therefore punish them in just judgment (Q&A 10). Then, question 11 asks, "But is not God also merciful?" The answer is

God is indeed merciful, but He is likewise just; His justice therefore requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment both of body and soul (cf. Canons of Dort, II,1).

Since God requires that His justice be satisfied, because of who He is, and, as the Catechism continues, we deserve punishment according to His justice, the only way we may escape and receive His favor is by a full satisfaction of justice, either by ourselves or by another (Q&A 12). The tragedy is that we who are already sinful cannot make this satisfaction because we continue daily

to increase our guilt (Q&A 13 cf. CD, II, 2). As well, no other creature (i.e., Old Covenant sacrifices) can satisfy for us because that very same justice of God will not punish a creature for our sin - besides, no creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin (Q&A 14).

Thus, the Son was sent to do what the blood of bulls and goats could not do and that which we were unable to do, either.

### **The Mercy of God**

In the sending of His Son, God was showing Himself to be "perfectly merciful." The Confession continues, saying that God

poured forth His mercy and goodness on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation, out of mere and perfect love, giving His Son unto death for us, and raising Him for our justification, that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.

Here is mercy perfected! Mercy, in common terms, is not getting what we deserve. Notice that the Confession says that we "were guilty and worthy of damnation." God did not give us what we deserve. He did not send his Son to execute eternal punishment on us. Instead, in sending His Son, God mercifully became our shield and protector from *His own justice!*

The incarnation and work of Christ were only the culmination of an entire history of mercy. We see this exemplified in Genesis 3, where Adam broke the covenant law, and thereby was guilty and worthy of damnation. He deserved the threatened curse: death, not just physical, but spiritual, not just temporal, but eternal. Yet God in His mercy did not give him what he deserved in His justice; instead, in His mercy animals were slain in order to clothe and to shield Adam and Eve from divine justice. We see this most clearly in Christ who had to be cut off that we might be grafted in, to be cursed that we might be blessed, to be bound that we might be loosed! Our Canons of Dort summarize all this, saying,

Since, therefore, we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, He has been pleased of His infinite mercy to give His only begotten Son for our Surety, who was made sin, and became a curse for us and in our stead, that He might make satisfaction to divine justice on our behalf. (II, 2)

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## The Happy Exchange

Our Confession teaches us that the God who is perfectly just and merciful showed Himself to be so in Christ. Notice the language our Confession uses in Article 20 in this light. How did God pour out His justice on His sinless Son? By laying, that is, imputing, “our iniquities upon Him.” Because our sins were imputed to Christ, the abundance of the Father’s mercy - justification and eternal life - was poured upon us, even though we were guilty and worthy of damnation! This is what Martin Luther called “the happy/delightful exchange” (froehliche Wechsel). This “exchange” is most beautifully and poetically described by Paul in II Corinthians 5:2: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

In the one side of this “happy exchange” stands Christ. He “knew no sin,” meaning, He was, and remains, “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). Like the Old Covenant sacrifices, He was required to be an unblemished sacrificial Lamb, “a lamb without blemish or spot” (I Peter 1:19 cf. Exodus 12:5; Isaiah 53:7, 9; I Corinthians 5:7). The ceremonial sacrificial animals in the Old Testament had to be spotless and untainted in order to teach the people of God the necessity of freedom from all sin and in order to stand before God. They were taught that One would come who would bear the sins of the world, Himself without sin.

Christ was not simply innocent; He was also the Righteous Servant. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with

our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). We need more than a spotless lamb, we need more than a humble and innocently condemned man. We need one who has actually obeyed perfectly for us the Law of God. We need a mediator who is one with us, yet far greater than us. We need Him who is Righteousness-Itself! We need a representative who hears God’s just Law, “do this and live,” loves that Law and obeys it perfectly.

We stand on the other side of this exchange, sinners, “guilty and worthy of damnation,” who sing,

*Nothing in my hand I  
bring, simply to Thy cross  
I cling;*

*Naked come to Thee for  
dress, Helpless, look to  
Thee for grace; Foul, I to  
the fountain fly; wash me  
 Savior, or I die.*

Herein lies the happiness of this exchange: that God made Christ to be sin for us. This means that our guilty and damnable sins were imputed to Christ. God “laid” them upon Him just as the high priest would lay his hands upon the scapegoat and confess the sins of the people, whereby their sins were transferred, imputed to the goat. In exchange for our sins we receive His righteousness! He endured the penal sanctions of the law’s justice, perfectly satisfying justice, that we might be freed. Orphans are made sons; the filthy are made clean; the guilty are acquitted. He did this “for us.” And if God is for us, who can be against us? Christ redeemed “us” from the curse of the law, be-

coming a curse Himself (Galatians 3:13). Christ did what the law could not do for “us” (Romans 8:3).

This blessed substitution is our joy and our salvation. We have a new standing before God: “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Just as our sins were the judicial ground for the sufferings of Christ, His righteousness is the judicial ground for our acceptance with God. We are righteous, beloved, and therefore we have peace (Romans 5:1) and pardon (Romans 8:1).

Thus it is in Christ that God was “reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (II Corinthians 5:20), because in Christ “righteousness and peace have kissed” (Psalm 85:10). And this was no wrathful God who was persuaded by a merciful Jesus to do this; no, it was the same God who created, who punished, and already began to save “in the beginning” who has come in Christ, punishing Him for us, and loving us on account of Him. Amazing love! How can it be?

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# Looking Above

*A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*

*Revelation 3:20*

*“Behold, I stand at the door...”*

In the middle of Christ’s letter to the Church in Laodicea we have the words of verse 20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Many have taken these words as an evangelistic text in which Christ is standing at the door of the sinner. They see Him as pleading and weeping that the sinner will just open the door so that Christ may come in and save him. But that misses the point altogether! In the first place this verse is not addressed to the unbeliever, it is addressed to the church. And then we must notice that it is not even so much addressed to the church in general, but specifically to God’s elect within the church. It is important to note that the verse follows on the heels of verse 19. To whom is Jesus is speaking? He is speaking to those whom He loves; those whom He rebukes out of that love; those whom He chastens out of that love; and those whom He seeks to bring back to Himself.

Jesus says, “If *anyone* hears My voice and opens the door...” True enough. But who are the ones that hear Jesus’ voice? Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John, “My sheep hear My voice!” Who are the ones then that hear the voice of Jesus and actually open the door? They are the elect of God, the sheep of the Good Shepherd, those whose hearts

have been regenerated - those in whom God has created not only the ability to believe, but the belief itself.

## An Old Testament Picture

Far from being an evangelistic text which pictures a weak, powerless, and weeping Savior, these words are a profound statement of the communion that exists between Christ and His own, between the Good Shepherd and His sheep. The words are taken from the Song of Solomon 5:2, where we read, “I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, ‘Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’”

Though the Song of Solomon is a celebration of love between a husband and wife, it is also a picture of the wedding of God and His people, the Bride and the Lamb. What do we find, then, in the fifth chapter of this beautiful love poem?

In verse 1 of chapter 5, we find the consummation of the wedding: the bridegroom has possessed his bride; the bridegroom and bride are completed by each other; they are exclusively for each other; the bridegroom delights in the bride, and the bride delights in the bridegroom. The bridegroom says of the bride, “she is mine, and I am hers.” The bride says of the bridegroom, “he is

mine, and I am his.” And God looks down upon this marriage and places His benediction upon it: “Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!” God looks down upon this marriage and says, “Behold, it is very good!”

The marriage has been consummated. God has pronounced His benediction upon the bridegroom and bride. But then the scene changes. It is night, and the bridegroom comes to the bride. He knocks on the door and calls his bride, “Open for me, my sister, my love...”

The bride hesitates. She hears the knocking; she hears the voice; but she hesitates. “I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?” (v. 3). Finally, after much hesitancy, she arises to open the door, “My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone” (3:4-6a).

The bridegroom withdrew because his bride hesitated. He withdrew from his bride when his bride “stiff-armed” him, as it were. Why did he withdraw? Why was he gone when she finally opened the door? Because his bride had become apathetic; she had taken him for granted; she had broken the harmony between them; she had become indifferent. Consequently, he withdrew.

Realizing her mistake, she quickly

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goes out to seek him. “I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer” (3:6). And now as she seeks him, she is wounded by the watchmen. “The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me” (3:7).

Having temporarily lost her bridegroom, having become apathetic, and now receiving pain due to her indifference, she charges the daughters of Jerusalem, “If you find my beloved, tell him that I am lovesick!” (3:8). Do you see what has happened? Out of her apathy, her love is strengthened. She finally realizes what she is without him. She realizes that she needs him desperately. She realizes that her life is found in him.

As the passage continues on, we find that the love of the bridegroom for his bride is a strong love, a love that cannot be conquered. She will be his exclusively. He is jealous for her. She belongs to him, and he will not let her go. As the passage continues, the bridegroom allows himself to be found, and the book concludes with the beautiful consummation of their love.

### **A New Testament Reality**

Here is the background of Revelation 3:20. Christ, the great Bridegroom, has purchased His Bride the Church with His own blood. But the Church has become apathetic, indifferent; she has taken her Bridegroom for granted! Now Christ stands at the door of the church, in which there are many who belong not to the Bridegroom. He calls His own in the midst of a

lukewarm situation. He says, “Have you not yet learned? Even as you are surrounded by false religion, by pretence, by sham, by hypocrisy, have you not yet learned the emptiness of any so-called faith that leaves Me out of the picture?! Have you not yet learned what you are without Me and how desperately you need Me?! Have you not yet learned that your life is found in Me, and in Me alone?! Have you become so apathetic? Have you become so indifferent?!”

These words are the words of Christ to His Bride - to His chosen - to His elect - to those whom He bought with His own blood. He loves His Bride with an everlasting love! A love that will not be conquered! A love that will not be defeated! A love that will not be denied! These are words of rebuke and, at the same time, these words speak of love and are meant to bring His own back to Him! He will dine with His own, and His own will dine with Him.

### **A Future Promise**

And then verse 21, “to him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” What an incredible picture! What a beautiful picture! Those beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ will sit with their Savior on the throne! It is not coincidental that we read in 3:21 of the promise of sitting on the throne with Christ, and then read in 4:2 of the throne set in heaven. There is a connection. “To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.” Read Revelation 4 and 5, and read of your inheritance in Christ!!

Indeed, the most sobering picture is reserved for the last of the seven letters. But in this letter we hear not only the most sobering warning, but also the most comforting promise. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

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## The Psalter Hymnals Through the Years

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* (Colossians 3:16-17)

Our churches have been molded throughout the centuries by many different factors. Our churches have been shaped by their geographic locations, their place in history, and their surrounding culture. The Word of God has molded our churches by the theology taught by her clergy, and by the generations of members that have come and gone.

As our churches have been shaped and changed throughout the ages, so too has her worship been shaped by these and many other factors. In fact, if we were to look closely, we would see that as our understanding of the Bible and our confessions changes, so to does the very nature of our worship. This is played out in the liturgies that we accept, and especially in the songs that we sing together, songs that become our own.

We, as Reformed believers, have also been shaped not only by our theology, but also through our own worship and our songs. This is vividly illustrated in our songbook, the Psalter Hymnal. As the foundations of Dutch Reformed Churches were being laid, the foundations of Reformed worship were also being laid. Those who had come off the boats held their *kerkboeks*, their church books, close to their hearts. Here they not only had the Word of God, but they also had their confessions, their creeds, their order, and

their Psalter. These immigrants, without any knowledge of a new land and language, knew that they had come to worship their God in a land of opportunity and in a land where their children could be raised up in the promises of the covenant.

Time passed and the next generation began speaking English. New modes of worship needed to be created. No longer could the church remain stagnant in her ethnic heritage. Instead she had to reach a new generation and its new culture. This meant the creation of an English language Psalter, a songbook that would be used unto the worship and adoration of the Lord.

This article is a look at the development of what we have come to know as the Psalter Hymnal. By no means is this article exhaustive in its look, for that would create the need for a volume beyond the scope of this present work, going back all the way to the time of David himself. Here we will begin by looking at the Psalters accepted for use in worship in the Christian Reformed Church of North America, and subsequently the United Reformed Churches in North America. A synopsis of each hymnal will be given, along with comment on the changes that have been made from revision to revision, as well as my own editorial comments, with the purpose of examining and reflecting on the rich heritage of Psalmody that we

enjoy as Reformed believers.

### **1914: The Psalter (Black 1)**

- *Number of Psalm Selections: 413*
- *Number of Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Doxologies: 205*
- *Publisher: Eerdmans-Sevensma Company*

The 1914 Psalter, or the Black Psalter (often hymnals are identified by their color, especially in our Reformed context for ease in reference) was not an invention of the Christian Reformed Church at all. In 1912, the United Presbyterian Church of North America published the Psalter that the Christian Reformed Church would adopt in June 1914.

This hymnal facilitated the young Dutch Reformed Church's need for an English Psalter. It gave the denomination a place to start in their desire to continue the development of this book into the best possible Psalter for worship. “May the book also receive the approbation of the God of all grace, and be blessed by Him to the furtherance of His praise in Zion.” As the people entered into a new land, it was their prayer that this book would receive God's blessings as they sought to bless Him.

This Psalter also included the Songs of Mary, Simeon, and Zechariah, eight doxologies, the song “America”, and “52” hymns that were submitted by Classis Hackensack. These songs were submitted for use with the congregations' study through the catechism. Thus, there was a part of the hymn for each divided part of

each question and answer, which meant that there were far more than fifty-two hymns. These hymns were all listed after the Psalter section, and a meter was attached to each hymn so that a suitable tune could be placed with the hymn. The Psalter book also contained the Heidelberg Catechism, A Compendium of the Christian Religion, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordrecht, and the accepted liturgical formulas.

All told, this was a valiant first attempt at a denominational hymnal. The church had been provided with an abundant collection of Psalter selections. The tunes were written in large font underneath the titles of the selections for aiding the memory not only of particular songs, but also of their tunes.

In short, the Christian Reformed Church had been given a good body of material with which to work. They needed to work with it. The Psalter was far from its desired usefulness. Many tunes were either musically inferior or un-singable. The format of the pages allowed for only one stanza to be displayed within the staff thus making the singing of parts difficult to follow. Multiple songs were printed on the same page, and some songs overlapped on to the following page, again detracting from the hymnal's usefulness. Weaker still was the hymn section, for the sole reason that tunes were not assigned, and the use of hymns was frankly nonexistent in the majority of Christian Reformed Churches at this time. Revision needed to occur.

### **1927: The Psalter (Black 2)**

- *Number of Psalm Selections: 413*
- *Number of Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Doxologies: 12*
- *Publisher: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. ("The Reformed Press")*

"Psalms are to be used in public worship as the chief manual of praise." This was the confident tone set up for this hymnal in its

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***After this tremendous setting out of the superiority of the Psalms, one would have expected a hymnal worthy of such an introduction.***

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explanation given by the stated clerk of the CRC, Henry Beets. In the introduction to this Psalter, Beets gave four principles for why the Psalms were to be used as this "manual". These were, in summary, the divine authority for the use of Psalms; the use of the Psalms for praise among Christ and His apostles; the hymns, songs and psalms of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 do not refer to New Testament songs, but rather to the Old Testament Psalms; and the Psalms meet the great requirements of praise.

After this tremendous setting out of the superiority of the Psalms, one would have expected a hymnal

worthy of such an introduction. Surely this hymnal would be the best attempt at reviving interest in the Psalms, and showing their excellence in our worship services. But this "new" hymnal, was not a new hymnal at all. Nothing had changed in this hymnal from the 1914 manifestation except for the fact that the hymns had been eliminated, except for the Songs of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, and the doxologies. No lyrical or musical changes had been made to the Psalter of the United Presbyterian Church in that thirteen-year span to make the hymnal a "Christian Reformed" hymnal.

There were, however, many needed format changes. As many stanzas as possible were now placed within the staves. This by itself might have been enough reason to publish and distribute another hymnal. Also, the standards, liturgies (including 'Consolation of the Sick and Instruction in Faith and the Way of Salvation, to Prepare Believers to Die Willingly), and the Church Order approved in 1920 in the back of the hymnal were also given a "face-lift" and made more readable from a format perspective. Still, many songs were still forced onto the same page as other songs or forced to "spill over" onto the next page, again causing difficulty in the hymnal's use. Surely more could have been done to affect the "usability" of this book.

This was surely a disappointing occurrence in the life of the churches, but there were positives to this release to go along with those of format that I have already mentioned. First, Beets introduction is very strong, especially in at-

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*Where the second Black Psalter had fallen short, the red Psalter surged ahead as an example of excellence and dedication to the production of a better songbook.*

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tempting to lay out principles defending Psalm singing, and the belief in the written creed. Beets gave a wonderful overview in his introduction of each of the creeds and confessions, as well as of the liturgical forms and the church order. Still, more could have been done to make this a Psalter of excellence in the time span between the releases of these black hymnals. This lack of excellence may have prompted the Synod of 1928 to approve the appointment of a committee to select hymns for inclusion in the Psalter. This approval assured the members of the CRC that their next hymnal would be significantly changed.

**1934-5: Psalter Hymnal (Red)**

- *Number of Psalm Selections: 327*
- *Number of Hymns, Spiritual songs, and Doxologies: 141*
- *Publisher: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church*

Six years after Synod 1928 approved their hymn selection committee, the Christian Reformed Church was presented with yet another Psalter, the Red Psalter. The Psalter changed the way that the church would receive and change her Psalter Hymnal forever. This was the first time that the

Psalter had been selected by and published by the CRC, thus making it their songbook for the first time in their existence as a denomination. “The committee was instructed to publish the new book of praise together with the doctrinal standards and the liturgical forms, in such a manner that the right of the Church to have full command over the contents would be maintained.” No longer would their copyright be in the hands of a company, the songbook was now theirs to change and develop as they saw fit.

Where the second Black Psalter had fallen short, the red Psalter surged ahead as an example of excellence and dedication to the production of a better songbook. Not only were hymns to be added, but also the Psalm selections were thoroughly scanned for improvement, correction, and sometimes, even removal. Some of the tunes of the Psalm selections were changed as well, since many members of the congregation desired to sing the Psalms as they used to be sung in their old *kerkboeken*. Many changes in the choral arrangements were made using the *Dutch Koraalboek for Organists*. Other changes were made to eliminate tunes that were too high in register or that were poor in quality. These tunes were replaced by other tunes, and often the same tune was used several times, because other high quality tunes were not available at

the time. (A list of the changes made in text and tune are listed in the Acts of the Synod of 1936.)

The hymns were not capriciously selected based on song popularity. The hymns that were eventually added also had to pass the requirements set up by the committee. These were doctrinal soundness, New Testament character, dignity and depth of devotional spirit, and clearness and beauty of expression. With these criteria in mind, the committee presented 197 hymns for review and acceptance, and out of these selections, about 140 were selected and approved for use in the churches. However, it is interesting to note that some hymns were selected not because of these criteria, but because some of the songs had “already endeared themselves to the hearts of our people.”

This hymnal had already far surpassed the work of the 1927 Black Hymnal. But the work had only just begun. At the time when the Psalter Hymnal was ready for production, the liturgical forms were being re-evaluated and revised. This pushed back the release date until 1935. Other major changes in this hymnal were again changes of format. Greater effort was put forth to place one song on each page. Some songs because of length still needed the use of two pages, but again effort was made at placing as many lines within the staff as possible. The pastors and congregations were also guided in their singing through the use of more musical notation, such as fermatas and a large comma that stood for one-half a fermata and a short breath. The confessions, creeds, and Church Order once again were

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given a format “face-lift” for readability and usefulness.

Of the hymnals we have looked at thus far, this clearly is the most advanced Psalter Hymnal that the churches had ever seen. This hymnal may have been the pinnacle of the advancement of the Psalter in the CRC. From this time forth in the history of the denomination, Psalm singing would begin to decline among the churches in the denomination. People felt more drawn to the hymns. They convinced themselves that they could resonate more with the meaning and wording of the contemporary hymns. The Red Hymnal truly may have been the greatest attempt by the denomination at a hymnbook truly reflective of the desire to remain faithful to the singing of Psalms, while at the same time being faithful to living a out a contemporary faith. In 1956, a second edition of the Red Hymnal was published for use within the churches, again with minor corrections and revisions.

#### **1959: Psalter Hymnal Centennial Edition (Blue 1)**

- *Number of Psalm Selections: 310*
- *Number of Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Doxologies: 183*
- *Publisher: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, Inc.*

The Synod of the CRC in 1951 approved appointing a committee to set forth the principles of good church music, and in so doing to improve the Psalter Hymnal. This committee then formulated such principles and their implications.

The principles were twofold. First, the music of the church should be liturgical, that is, should serve the ministry of the church. Second, the music of the church should be beautiful, both in form and substance as art. With these two tenets as their guiding principles, the committee went on to revise the 1934-5 Psalter Hymnal by giving metrical settings to all 150 Psalms in a concise manner (a.k.a. less Psalm selections). They also added a number of hymns, changed tunes and texts as submitted by members of the denomination, and the indices were expanded and completed. These changes were then to be released in a hymnal to be distributed in the year of the birthday of the denomination, as the “Centennial Edition”.

There are some interesting similarities, differences, and circumstances when it comes to comparing the Centennial Edition and the Red Hymnal. First, the introductions are identical until the rationale for the Centennial Edition is given. This hymnal committee also renewed their effort to have every song on its own page or pages, and this time succeeded on every page except page 568.

The same doctrinal standards and liturgical forms are found in both hymnals. The differences are seen once again, as in most hymnals, in their format. The title of the tune of each song, which is especially significant in the Psalter section, con-

tinued getting smaller. Also, the font has been updated throughout the song portion of the book.

The interesting circumstance of the release of this Psalter is its timing. This Psalter was in the works, at least in principle, already in 1951. Yet the CRC released a second edition of the Red Psalter Hymnal just three years before the release of this new Centennial Edition. Why did they need another hymnal if they had just released a “perfectly good” edition of their own Psalter? To this question I have been given no answer. A revision at the time of the next hymnal would have been in better form, rather than publishing an entirely new hymnal simply to celebrate the centennial of the denomination (which turned out to be an expensive one for some churches).

#### **1976: Psalter Hymnal (Blue 2)**

- *Number of Psalm Selections: 310*
- *Number of Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Doxologies: 183*
- *Publisher: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church*

Here we are presented with another “new” hymnal. It had been seventeen years since the release of the Centennial Edition. Many people were looking forward to the

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*From this time forth in the history of the denomination, Psalm singing would begin to decline among the churches.*

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release of another hymnal that would continue in the line of Psalter Hymnal improvements. Yet, as those in 1927 were disappointed with the release of the second Black Psalter, so too, were those in 1976 disappointed with the second Blue Psalter. The Preface was the same as were all of the Psalms and Hymns. Nothing had been changed since the 1959 edition when it came to the song portion.

There were other very important reasons for releasing this Hymnal at this time in the life of the CRC. First, the new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism that was approved by the Synod of 1975, and some new Synodically approved liturgical forms needed to be distributed for use in study and worship services. Also, changes were made to the order of the forms in the back of the Hymnal bringing the creeds to the front, then the confessions, and then the liturgical forms. Also, the church order once again appeared in the back of the Hymnal after its first absence from the hymnal in the Centennial Edition (although in later reprints it was added). These were the main reasons for the release of this edition.

In retrospect, as I alluded to in my discussion of the Centennial Edition, the timing for another Hymnal makes much more sense in 1976 than in 1959. Significant research and study could have been put into a better edition of the Psalter that could have been released in 1976 along with all of the revisions to the confessions. But as the second Black Hymnal was a prelude to major changes in the next Hymnal, so too was the second Blue Psalter a prelude to massive change.

### **1987: Psalter Hymnal (Grey)**

- *Number of Psalm Selections: 150 (Officially)*
- *Number of Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Doxologies: 491*
- *Publisher: CRC Publications*

Never before in the history of the CRC did the release of a Psalter Hymnal come with such mixed emotion. There were those in the churches who were just getting comfortable with the Psalter that

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***Never before in the history of the CRC did the release of a Psalter Hymnal come with such mixed emotion.***

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they had received in 1976. They had just become familiar with some of the tunes and hymns. There were others in the denomination who were ready for a change. They wanted more diversity of song, more song choice as they crafted worship services. Still others did not want another hymnbook because they did not use the old one. They certainly were not going to use this one.

But the mixed emotions were not just caused by the release of yet another Psalter. Issues were swirling and making their way around the denomination. From women in office, to homosexuality, to churches becoming concerned as to the direction of the denomination.

These factors also contributed to some of the emotions and questions. Will the Hymnal be gender inclusive? Will the Hymnal have my favorite songs? Will the Hymnal become liberal?

And so the new Grey Psalter Hymnal was distributed in 1987. It was touted as the salvation of Psalm singing. It was to be a hymnal that was not only musically and artistically sound, but it would also be a hymnal that would reunite the denomination under one book of worship, under one song of unity, that would bring solidarity once again to a denomination that was full of turmoil. The hymnal, which weighed almost twice what the Blue Hymnal weighed, was filled to the brim with newness, not only with new songs, but with new liturgical forms, responsive readings, a contemporary statement of belief, inclusive forms, and other resources.

The 1987 Psalter was conceived at the Synod of 1977 where a committee was formed to “revise and improve the psalm and hymn sections of the 1959 edition of the hymnal” and to make it a book of worship that would “help God’s people move into the twenty-first century.” This goal evolved into the Grey Psalter. The Psalter itself has a massive amount of hymns, which reflect a number of songs being written today, as well as the diversity found within the denomination and the worldwide church. This said, the Psalter, for the first time, was divided into three parts, Psalms, Bible Songs, and Hymns.

To accomplish their objective, the Revision Committee set up this statement as their guiding principle,

The music of the church should be appropriate for worship- that is, it should be liturgical and have aesthetic integrity. The music of worship should serve the dialogue between God and his people. It must be true to the full message of the Scriptures and reflective of biblical Christian experience. Along with the biblical motif, the music of worship should give expression to the other motifs of liturgy: the catholic, the confessional, and the pastoral. The music of worship should satisfy the aesthetic laws that are conditions of good art, such as imaginative craftsmanship and seriousness of expression. It should reflect the church at worship today and throughout the ages in ways that are relevant, enduring, festive, and dignified.

Thus, the four motifs are set up to complement each other and to be used together, not one without the others or to the neglect of others. These once again are the biblical, catholic, confessional, and pastoral. These categories are what are at the heart of the Grey Psalter.

In terms of the Psalm selections, the committee returned to what they felt was a “long-standing reformed tradition” (Page 7) of presenting each psalm in its full versification (even though this had not yet been done in a CRC, or reformed tradition for over 100 years). Each psalm was then given its own tune, a majority of which are new tunes (even Psalter number one was changed, after having the same

tune since 1912). The versification was also looked at for its content and its poetry by learned members of the Calvin College faculty. All of these things went into revamping the Psalm section for the first time since 1934-5. Bible songs were also added to the hymnal to express the song writing of passages outside of the Psalms, from Genesis to Revelation, and scrutinized in similar fashion.

What is perhaps the most astounding about the Grey Psalter is the number of hymns. “The number of

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***We have lost psalm  
singing because we  
have lost a sense of  
who we are.***

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hymn texts has more than doubled from previous editions.” The hymns not only reflect our North American context, but there are selections in different languages, and with different tunes and rhythms. There has even been a shift, in some songs, back to Genevan tunes. All of these factors have led to a diverse songbook, an organized songbook, and a fulsome songbook.

The Grey Psalter was also released at this time with updated and gender-inclusive forms of the Creeds and Confessions of the CRC. Also, new baptismal and professions of faith forms were added, as well as a section of responsive readings for the Law and for the Sacrament, and a Contemporary Declaration of

Faith entitled “*Our World Belongs to God.*”

These all were major revisions, and the scope of this article does not include dissecting each and every change. In looking at the history of such a recently released hymnal, it is hard to take an “unbiased approach” to critiquing and praising this hymnal simply because of the influence I have listened to and read about on both sides of the like/dislike debate.

If we are to look at the positives together, it is easy to see that there is a lot of variety. There are songs that it would be hard to get to, even if you sang all different songs at every service. There is a variety and newness that can be refreshing and invigorating. This is what the committee desired. They have also shown a commitment to musical and literary excellence throughout the Psalm section. This Hymnal project is a tribute to the work of the committee, and the talent that is to be found within the CRC.

But as I sit and look at this hymnal before me, and as I reflect on the other hymnals that we have looked at, there is something missing. With all of our songbooks up until the Grey, there was a shared core of songs that had remained since the 1914 Psalter. We have grown up with these songs, and they have saturated our lives from our very earliest remembering. These songs have been in our families for generations, teaching us the promises of God, and reminding us of our dependence on Him. But with the release of the Grey Psalter, that was lost. Too

many of the songs that we had shared with our great-grandfathers and grandfathers, shared in our catholicity with the worldwide church, have been discarded as old, poor quality, too high, too low, not who we are today.

Granted, the intentions of the committee in charge of the Grey Psalter were good and much of what is sung in our churches today is of poor quality lyrically and musically. But as Rev J.D. Eppinga wrote, "As for the psalms, the good intentions expressed in [the introduction of] the gray book are not working out. Average lay people consider many of its psalm tunes too difficult. I'm afraid that our psalm-singing days are mostly over."

We have lost psalm singing because we have lost a sense of who we are. We are not African, or Spanish, or Russian. We are what we are. We are either Dutch, or implants into that tradition. And our songs must remember that heritage; we must remember that heritage, for this is what gives songs lasting quality. We must be able to rejoice with the saints past, present, and future, and one way we do this is through our songs. That is what gives people unity through a Psalter, when young and old, boy or girl, indeed all Christians can sing their songs together and praise the Living God. This is what will revive our psalm singing, a remembrance, of who we are, what we have come from, and what we have been saved from.

I pray that we will see the development of another Psalter in our

day. I pray that we will see a Psalter that will unite all of us in love for God, and wholehearted Reformed worship. May this truly be! Soli Deo Gloria! Amen!

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# Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (17)

*“Justification and a Final Judgment According to Works”  
(Part Three)*

There are two passages in Paul’s epistles that are of special importance to the question of justification and a final judgment according to works. The first of these, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, is especially pertinent to the question of the nature of the reward that will be granted to believers for their works. The second of these, Romans 2:13, is the one passage in Paul’s epistles that might appear to teach something like a future justification that will be based upon good works. Before drawing a conclusion on the subject of Paul’s teaching on justification and the final judgment, then, we need yet to examine these passages.

## 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

The context for this passage is the apostle Paul’s sharp rebuke to the Corinthians for their unspiritual treatment of those who are ministers and teachers of the gospel. The chapter begins with the apostle noting that he could not address them “as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ” (v. 1). The problem in Corinth was that there was an unseemly factionalism that expressed itself in terms of some saying, “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos.” This party spirit was rife among the Corinthians.

In his rebuke to them, Paul argues that it betrays a fundamentally wrong view of those who are ser-

vants of Christ. As he reminds them, ministers of Christ, though they may plant and water the seed of the Word of God, are utterly dependent upon God. In the strongest possible language, he reminds them that ministers are nothing by themselves: “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (v. 7).

After this reminder of the impropriety of a false boasting in those who are merely servants of Christ, the apostle raises the subject of the respective reward that they will receive for their work. Comparing the church to a building, he describes ministers as God’s workers, each of whom will receive his wages according to his labor (v. 8). Speaking of himself as a “skilled master builder,” Paul notes that his labor within God’s building was based upon the one foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. If he or anyone carries out his ministry on behalf of the Lord with the proper materials—gold, silver, and precious stones—his work will endure the fiery purification that will occur on the “Day” when each one’s work will become manifest. The work of Christ’s ministers that properly builds upon the foundation of Christ will issue in the granting of a reward. However, those who build upon the foundation in an improper manner, using materials that are like wood, hay, or straw, will witness the fiery destruc-

tion of this work. Such inappropriate work will not receive a reward. Nevertheless, those whose work is unworthy of a reward will be saved, though only after having passed through the fiery judgment.

The significance of this passage for our consideration of the question of justification and a final judgment according to works is transparent. All servants of Christ are reminded to labor within God’s building in a way that builds upon the one great foundation, Jesus Christ. They are reminded that the quality of their labor depends upon the means that they utilize in their church-building efforts. Some means, which conform to the nature of the gospel they minister, are like precious, abiding materials that, even when tested by fire, will endure in the day of judgment. Other means, which are not conformed to the gospel, are like worthless and fleeting materials that, when tested by fire, will be utterly consumed.

This passage, accordingly, is a clear affirmation of Paul’s teaching that Christ’s servants will undergo a judgment or testing that will be according to their works. What is particularly striking about this judgment-testing, however, is that it will not issue in the irrevocable loss of salvation for those who belong to Christ. The respective rewards that will be granted to those who labor in God’s building do not include the reward of salvation or eternal life, which is a gift of God’s grace (cf. Romans 6:13), but that praise and honor that are consistent with the quality of the work performed. Though this passage does not expressly address the subject of justi-

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fication, it is certainly consistent with the idea that the reward associated with a final judgment according to works ought not to be understood as the gift of salvation itself. As it stands, there is nothing in the passage that contradicts the historic reformational teaching that free justification secures the believer's salvation and inheritance of eternal life, though it does not mitigate the reality of a future judgment according to works. Furthermore, despite the particular focus of this passage upon judgment according to works of the labor of those who are ministers of Christ, there this does not prevent an application of its teaching that extends to all believers.

#### **What about Romans 2:13?**

The most significant passage in Paul's writings regarding the subject of justification and a final judgment according to works may be Romans 2:13: "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified." On one reading of this passage, the apostle Paul could be understood to affirm a positive connection between good works and a future, final justification or vindication that is presumably associated with the final judgment. When it comes to the ultimate justification of believers in a future judgment, it is only those who do what the law requires who will be justified. Without further qualification, this could be inter-

preted to mean that the final phase of the believer's justification, which will occur in connection with a final judgment according to works, will be one in which works, and not faith alone, will be the basis for acquittal. Upon this reading, we might conclude that the apostle Paul taught that the believer's initial justification, which is by means of faith and apart from works, needs to be completed by a future justification, which is by means of the works of faith. If this is indeed the teaching of this verse, it seems to contradict Paul's teaching elsewhere that the believer's justification is by faith and not by the works of the law (cf. Rom. 3:28).

In the history of reflection upon this verse in the context of Paul's argument in the early chapters of Romans, there have been a number of distinct interpretations. We will only consider the three most prominent views, especially as they relate to the question whether Paul taught a doctrine of a future justification by works.

The first reading of this text, which was common among representatives of the Reformation view of justification in the sixteenth century, argues that the apostle Paul is refuting the empty boast of those who seek to be justified by obedience to the law. In the context of Paul's argument in the early chapters of Romans, he is not stating that there are those who do what the law re-

quires and thereby obtain justification. Rather, he is stating a principle that is enunciated in the law of God, namely, that those who abide by its precepts will thereby possess a righteousness that would commend them to God (cf. Lev. 18:5). However, since it is not possible that anyone do what the law requires, the principle stated in this verse is *hypothetical*: if someone were to do what the law requires, *then* he would be righteous before God. But there are no such persons who do what the law requires and therefore no one can be justified by doing the law (cf. Romans 3:10). Calvin summarizes this view in his commentary on the book of Romans:

The sense of this verse, therefore, is that if righteousness is sought by the law, the law must be fulfilled, for the righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works. ... We do not deny that absolute righteousness is prescribed in the law, but since all men are convicted of offence, we assert the necessity of seeking for another righteousness. Indeed, we can prove from this passage that no one is justified by works. If only those who fulfill the law are justified by the law, it follows that no one is justified, for no one can be found who can boast of having fulfilled the law.

Among the arguments for this understanding of Romans 2:13, two stand out as of special importance. The first is an argument from the immediate context. In the verses of Romans 2 that precede verse 13, the apostle Paul is anxious to show

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*The respective rewards that will be granted to those who labor in God's building do not include the reward of salvation or eternal life, which is a gift of God's grace.*

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that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are subject to God's righteous judgment. All will be judged by God who shows no partiality (v. 11). Whether someone sins "without the law" as a Gentile or "with the law" as a Jew, no one who sins will escape the wrath and condemnation of God. To suggest that those who have the law are at a distinct advantage in distinction from those who do not have the law, is mistaken. For it is not enough to have or to be a "hearer" of the law; only those who do what the law requires will be justified. In this immediate setting of the argument of Romans, the apostle seems to be saying to his opponents who are boasting in their possession of the law, that this will be of no benefit to them since they are not doing what the law requires. Paul adduces the principle ("only doers of the law will be justified") for the express purpose of refuting the empty boast of those who seek to be justified by their obedience to the law.

The second argument appeals to the broader context of chapters two through four of Romans. Since the burden of Paul's argument in these chapters is to establish that "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23), and that justification is a free gift of God's grace in Christ (Romans 3:24-26), it seems unlikely that the point of Romans 2:13 is to affirm a positive role for works in relation to justification. Throughout these opening chapters of Romans, Paul is making a case against any kind of self-justification, which would appeal to works or works of the law as the basis for the believer's acceptance with God. Works of any kind are utterly excluded as a proper basis for justifi-

***To suggest that those who have the law are at a distinct advantage in distinction from those who do not have the law, is mistaken.***

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cation (Romans 2:19-20), both because there are no persons who are righteous by the standard of the law and because God has now revealed a righteousness "apart from the law" that is "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 2:21-22). Thus, within the immediate and broader context of Paul's argument in Romans, it does not seem likely that Romans 2:13 represents a positive statement regarding the role of good works in relation to justification.

A second reading of this text takes it as a positive description of believers whose faith is confirmed by their works of obedience. Though this reading does not claim that Paul is speaking of a final justification that is by works, it does view this passage as a description of the kind of believers who will ultimately be justified. Only those whose conduct confirms the genuineness of their faith will be justified. Because those who are truly joined to Christ are justified and sanctified by grace, there is a legitimate sense in which the works of faith are necessary to justification. Though the works of the believer are at no time the basis for their justification, this does not mean that the believer will be justified without having obeyed the law and thereby confirming the genuineness of their profession. The inseparable connection between justification and sanctification makes it possible for the apostle to insist that only those who do what the

law requires (who are being sanctified) will enjoy the benefit of God's justifying verdict. The good works of justifying faith, though not, strictly speaking, the basis for the justification of believers or their acquittal in the final judgment, are nonetheless necessary evidences of the genuineness of that faith. Though believers are not justified *on account of* their doing the law, they will not be justified *without* doing what the law requires, however imperfect their obedience may be.

Thomas Schreiner is an able exponent of this second reading of Romans 2:13. In his treatment of this text, several arguments are adduced to show that Paul is enunciating a positive principle, namely, that only those who do what the law requires by the Spirit will be justified. First, there is evidence in the context that Paul speaks positively about the actual obedience of Gentile believers, who are "doers of the law" in contrast to those Jews who "hear" the law but do not do what it requires. Of particular significance to Schreiner is the description offered at the close of Romans 2 regarding the obedience of such Gentile Christians. In verses 26-27, Paul contrasts the conduct of uncircumcised Gentiles who "keep the precepts of the law" with that of circumcised Jews who have the "written code . . . but break the law." Since Paul appeals to the actual (and not merely hypotheti-

cal) obedience of such Gentile Christians in the context of his sustained argument for the righteousness of God's judgment upon Jew and Gentile alike, the assertion that "doers of the law will be justified" likely refers to the vindication of believers who obey the law. Second, in the verses preceding Romans 2:13, Paul has described the judgment of God as an event in which God "will render to each one according to his works" (v. 6). This judgment will have a twofold outcome: some who "by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality" will receive "eternal life," others who "are self-seeking and do not obey the truth" will receive only "wrath and fury" (vv. 7-8). The distinct outcome of God's judgment for believers on the one hand and unbelievers on the other, suggests that Paul believed that only believers who do good will receive eternal life in the context of God's righteous judgment. And third, Schreiner appeals to the frequent emphasis in Paul's writings upon a final judgment that is according to works. This emphasis is fully compatible with a view of Romans 2:13 that takes it as a positive affirmation of God's approval/vindication at the final judgment of the those who do good.

Though he defends the view that Paul is stating a positive principle in Romans 2:13, Schreiner insists that Paul is not thereby contradicting his clear teaching that believers are justified by faith (alone) apart from works. In the opening chapters of Romans, Paul emphatically rejects the idea that anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, can obtain justification on the basis of the works of the law (cf. Rom. 3:20, 28). We should not

take his language that "only the doers of the law will be justified," therefore, as a description of the basis or ground for the believer's justification. Like those who take the first view of this text, Schreiner rejects the idea that Paul is teaching a future justification that is based upon works and that completes a present or initial justification. Rather, Paul is reminding his readers that true faith produces

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***Paul is reminding his readers that true faith produces good works by the Spirit of Christ, and that these works are a significant confirmation of the genuineness of faith.***

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good works by the Spirit of Christ, and that these works are a significant confirmation of the genuineness of faith. Indeed, such works, though imperfect, are a necessary part of the salvation of believers so that no one will be justified without them. Summarizing this view, Schreiner notes that

we should understand the good works that do lead to an eschatological reward in different terms. They are *the result* of the Spirit's work in one's life, as the connection forged between verses 26-27 and 28-29 demonstrates. The Spirit's work on the

heart logically precedes the observance of the law by the Gentiles. Autonomous works are rejected, but works that are the fruit of the Spirit's work are necessary to be saved. Paul is not speaking of perfect obedience, but of obedience that clarifies that one has been transformed. ... The good works done are not an achieving of salvation, then, but the outflow of the Spirit's work in a person's life.

The third reading of this text claims that the apostle Paul is affirming that the final, eschatological justification of believers will be based upon their works. This understanding is the view of some contemporary theologians, including proponents of the new perspective on Paul. In this interpretation of Romans 2:13, Paul is understood to teach that justification has a present and future phase. Though believers enjoy an initial justification by faith apart from works, there is a yet future justification that will be upon the basis of those works that belong to true faith. On this reading of the text, the apostle Paul is not speaking hypothetically but of actual believers whose works not only prove the genuineness of their faith but also constitute the ground for their final vindication or justification. Justification, according to this view, has both an initial and a final stage.

There is no uniform understanding of this view among its proponents. Some suggest that Paul is engaging in a polemic against the boast of some Jews that they, unlike the Gentiles, were given the Mosaic law. To refute this boast, Paul re-

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minds his readers that it is not enough to hear the law, since only those who do what the law requires will be justified. E. P. Sanders, for example, maintains that Paul affirms in this verse that the Gentiles who do the law will be justified upon that basis, an affirmation that contradicts Paul's teaching elsewhere that no one can be justified by the works of the law. As we noted earlier, N. T. Wright also appeals to this text to support his claim that Paul taught a doctrine of final or eschatological justification that is based upon the believer's works.

This view had proponents at the time of the Reformation, and has been suggested by interpreters of Romans at various times since. At the end of the nineteenth century, F. Godet, in his commentary on the book of Romans, maintained that Paul speaks in this verse of a yet future justification that will be based upon works. Godet cited Paul's use of the future tense in Romans 2:13, when he says that only doers of the law "will be justified."

Since the justification of which Paul speaks is a future event, it does not likely refer to a hypothetical circumstance, namely, that anyone who does what the law requires will be justified though no such person exists. Godet also appealed to the language at the close of Romans 2, which speaks of Gentiles who "keep the law" (v. 27). This language indicates that Paul is speaking, not hypothetically, but of concrete instances of obedience to the law. Since Paul speaks in this verse of a future justification, and since he appeals in the subsequent context to the concrete obedience of Gentiles to the law, Godet con-

cluded that we should distinguish between an "initial" justification and a "final" justification.

It will certainly, therefore, be required of us that we *be* righteous in the day of judgment, if God is to *recognize* and *declare* us to be such; *imputed* righteousness is the beginning of the work of salvation, the means of en-

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***N. T. Wright also appeals to this text to support his claim that Paul taught a doctrine of final or eschatological justification that is based upon the believer's works.***

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trance into the state of grace. But this initial justification, by restoring communion between God and man, should guide the latter to the *actual* possession of righteousness—that is to say, to the fulfillment of the law; otherwise, this first justification would not stand in the judgment . . . . And hence it is in keeping with Paul's views, whatever may be said by an antinomian and unsound tendency, to distinguish two justifications, the one initial, founded exclusively on faith, the other final, founded on faith *and its fruits*.

This brief overview of the three most important readings of Romans 2:13 illustrates the difficulty of determining precisely what Paul means when he says "only doers of the law will be justified." While recognizing the difficulty of interpreting this verse in its context, I am persuaded that the first view remains the most likely reading of the text. There are several reasons that, on balance, support this understanding.

First, though the apostle Paul uses the future tense in this verse, it goes beyond the interest of Romans 2:13 to connect directly its language with Paul's teaching in other places about a final judgment according to works, *as though these good works are a basis for a final justification*. We have noted that the subject of a final judgment according to works is a common one in Paul's writings. However, neither in Romans 2:13 or in any text that speaks explicitly of a final judgment does Paul speak of it as *another justification*, which is to be distinguished from a presumably initial justification that occurs by faith apart from works. To be sure, the final judgment, like justification, is a judicial act that occurs within a legal setting. But Paul never explicitly speaks of the final judgment as an act that completes or fulfills an earlier justification. If he did so in Romans 2:13, this text would be a noteworthy exception to his usual pattern.

Second, the argument from the immediate and broader context of Roman seems to support the view that Paul is speaking hypothetically. The one point that Paul wishes to make by the statement, "only the

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doers of the law will be justified,” is a negative one, namely, that those who boast of their possession of the law make an idle boast since they do not do what the law requires. Paul states a principle in order to reject those who claim to be justified by their works. However, this claim is belied by their failure to do what the law demands. As John Murray remarks in his comments on this verse,

It is quite unnecessary to find in this verse any doctrine of justification by works in conflict with the teaching of this epistle in later chapters. Whether any will be actually justified by works either in this life or at the final judgment is beside the apostle’s interest and design at this juncture. The burden of this verse is that not the hearers of mere possessors of the law will be justified before God but that in terms of the law the criterion is *doing*, not hearing.

The function of Paul’s appeal in this text to the principle that “only doers of the law will be justified” parallels his appeal elsewhere to the fact that justification by obedience to the law is precluded by the failure of anyone to do *all* that it requires (cf. Rom. 3:19-20; 10:5; Gal. 3:10; 5:1). Moreover, if the point that Paul makes in this verse were

that those who do what the law requires will be justified *on that basis*, the inconsistency of his overall argument in Romans 2-5 would be rather striking. The burden of Paul’s case in the opening chapters of Romans is that the law, so far as justification before God is concerned, serves only to expose and aggravate the reality of human sin and guilt (Rom. 3:19-20, 28; Rom. 4:4). To maintain that Romans 2:13 states a positive connection between doing the law and justification seems inconsistent with this emphasis.

Third, the argument of Schreiner and others that Paul is enunciating a positive principle in this verse depends heavily upon the claim that Romans 2:27-29 describes Gentile Christians who “keep the law” by the working of the Spirit of Christ.

Though this is a possible interpretation of these verses, it does not seem finally to fit well with the argument of this section of Romans. Even if Paul alludes to the conduct of Christians in verse 29, when he speaks of those whose circumcision is a matter of the heart “by the Spirit,” his main point in these verses reiterates what he earlier argued in verses 14-15. Paul’s concern in these verses and throughout Romans 2, is to argue that the mere possession of the law of God (the Mosaic law) does not suffice to save anyone. Only those who do

what this law requires can find salvation by means of the law. Verses 27-28 repeat a theme that was developed already at an earlier point in verses 14-15 of Romans 2, namely, the contrast between the empty boast of those Jews who possess the law but do not do what it requires, and the keeping of the law by Gentiles, who do not possess the law but (sometimes) do what it requires.

This contrast, especially if it is a contrast between Jews and Gentile Christians, might suggest that Paul believes that the latter would be saved on the basis of their keeping the precepts of the law. However, the whole thread of Paul’s argument in Romans 2 is tied together in Romans 3, where he insists that that no one, whether Jew or Gentile, can be saved upon the basis of their own works (verses 9-10). It seems unlikely, therefore, that Paul means to speak of the keeping of the law by Gentile Christians to confirm the point that “only doers of the law will be justified.” This would not seem consistent with the great theme of this section of Romans that all Jews and Gentiles are shut off from finding acceptance with God and salvation by means of the works of the law.

And fourth, Paul’s doctrine of justification amounts to the claim that believers have a final, eschatological participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, so far as this secures their acceptance and favor with God. Justification, in Paul’s teaching, is a thoroughly eschatological blessing. It represents the *present, definitive* declaration of God’s favorable verdict concerning those who are joined

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***Paul never explicitly speaks of the final judgment as an act that completes or fulfills an earlier justification.***

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to Christ by faith. This verdict anticipates and secures the believer's acceptance with God (Rom. 5:1; 8:1). If Romans 2:13 taught a future, eschatological justification, which is based upon the works of faith and not upon the work of Christ alone, the believer's present justification would no longer secure a future reception of eternal life. Rather, the prospect of yet future justification (or condemnation) upon the basis of works would undermine the believer's present persuasion of God's favor, a persuasion that derives from the gift of free justification.

These considerations favor the first reading of Romans 2:13, though not in such a way as to rule out completely the second view. Because the second view does not claim that Paul is speaking in this verse of another, yet future justification, which is based upon works and not faith alone, it does not imperil Paul's teaching regarding justification as a free gift in Christ. Though I am not finally persuaded that it does justice to the place of this verse in the context of Paul's teaching in the opening chapters of Romans, this second view rightly emphasizes the necessity of obedience as a confirmation and evidence of the genuineness of that faith that receives the grace of justification. This second view, though at variance with the common reading of Romans 2:13 in the reformational tradition, does not conflict with what we have represented as its consensus on the subject of justification and a final judgment according to works. What this second view suggests is that, because

justification and sanctification are inseparable benefits of the believer's union with Christ, no one will be justified who does not live by the Spirit.

### Conclusion

In our review of Paul's teaching regarding justification and a final judgment according to works, we have found nothing that conflicts with the historic view of the Reformed confessions. Paul clearly teaches that all believers, who are united with Christ by faith and indwelt of his sanctifying Spirit, are being renewed after the image of Christ. Salvation through fellowship with Christ involves not only the grace of free justification but also of sanctification or renewal in righteousness. Paul's insistence upon the transformation of the life of the believer in union with Christ forms the background to his insistence that believers will be judged according to their works.

The critical question, as we have seen, is whether this final judgment amounts to a final or second justification on the basis of works. Does Paul teach that believers are initially justified and granted a status of acceptance upon the basis of Christ's work alone, but that they are finally justified in the context of the final judgment upon the basis of their works? Our review of Paul's teaching in his epistles argues against the claim that the final judgment amounts to a kind of further justification. The whole burden of Paul's teaching regarding justification is that it is a definitive declaration of the believer's acceptance with God. Justification is in the strictest

sense of the term an "eschatological" blessing, a promise of final and sure acceptance with God. Those who are "in Christ" are no longer under condemnation, nor are they liable to any charge that could be brought against them. To regard the final judgment, accordingly, as a final chapter in the believer's justification is tantamount to pulling the rug out from underneath the feet of those whose confidence before God rests upon the righteousness of Christ alone.

This does not mean that justified believers will not be judged, even acquitted publicly, in the context of the final judgment. However, that judgment will be "according to works," not "on the basis of" works. Those good works that believers necessarily and inevitably perform, and that are produced by the working of Christ's Spirit in them, will confirm and demonstrate the genuineness of their faith. Indeed, so inseparable are justification and sanctification that no one will be justified without good works, even though their justification is not on account of such works. Within the context of the final judgment, believers will be openly vindicated before others by their works, works that evidence the presence and working of the Spirit of Christ in them. These works, however, are not, and never will be, any part of the basis for the justification of believers before God. To suggest that the works of believers contribute to their justification not only fails to recognize that they are inadequate to the task, but that this would be tantamount to denying the sufficiency of Christ's

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righteousness. These themes, which are found in Paul's epistles, are themes that are nicely summarized in the historic confessions of the Reformed churches.

**Dr. Cornelis P. Venema** is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He is also a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

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