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The Cup of Salvation: The Lord's Supper as a Thanksgiving Feast

"I will take the cup of salvation..." Psalm 116:13a

In ancient times, a king customarily held a feast following a great victory. At the feast, he would lift up and drink deeply from a cup of wine as a symbol of deliverance and thanksgiving. In the Lord's Supper, God's people lift up and drink deeply from the cup of thanksgiving for salvation through Jesus Christ. By faith we taste the efficacy of Christ's blood to cleanse from all sin (1 John 1:7) and become partakers of every covenant mercy (1 Corinthians 11:25). We bring our poverty to Christ's riches, our guilt to His reconciliation, our bondage to His liberation.

When the Lord's Supper is administered in psalm-singing churches, communicants often sing Psalm 116. Few songs more aptly express the character of the Holy Supper as a thanksgiving feast.

*I love the Lord, the fount of
life and grace;
He hears my voice, my cry
and supplication,
Inclines His ear, gives
strength and consolation;
In life, in death, my heart will
seek His face.*

Thou, O Jehovah, in Thy

*sovereign grace,
Hath saved my soul from
death and woe appalling,
Dried all my tears, secured
my feet from falling.
Lo, I shall live and walk
before Thy face.*

*What shall I render to
Jehovah now
For all the riches of His
consolation?
With joy I'll take the cup of
His salvation,
And call upon His name with
thankful vow.*

*I am, O Lord, Thy servant,
bound yet free,
Thy handmaid's son, whose
shackles Thou hast broken;
Redeemed by grace, I'll*



Volume 54, No. 4 (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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*render as a token
Of gratitude my constant
praise to Thee.*

I Love the Lord

Participation in the Lord's Supper requires saving faith to please God. Christ has appointed this supper only for believers. Romans 14:23 says, "He that doubteth is damned if he eats, for he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Arguing from the lesser to the greater, if this is true of an ordinary meal eaten before God, how much more is it true of a sacramental feast?

In the Lord's Supper, we come to Christ, hearing, seeing, drinking, eating, trusting, and thanking Him for what He has done. All these activities are very physical, and can be outwardly completed without an inner work of faith. But in order to participate fully in this meal of grace, we must have faith in the sovereign God, who "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We must trust in Christ, nailed to the cross and lifted up to die, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness" (John 3:14) to save His people from "death and woe appalling." Eating and drinking, we still will starve without faith.

The Fount of Life and Grace

We must believe that Christ is "the bread of life" (John 6:35). To believe on Him is to have everlasting life (John 3:36). Christ is "the fount of life and grace." But how is this life received by the people of God? According to John 6:54-55, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my

blood, hath eternal life . . . for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

Some conclude from these words that the bread and wine of the Holy Supper in some mysterious way are changed into the literal flesh and blood of Christ. But Christ's bodily ascension into heaven makes that physically impossible. As the Heidelberg Catechism says, "With respect to His human nature, He is no more on the earth" (Q. 47).

Rather, we feed on Christ by faith. As the Puritan George Swinnock

*In order to
participate fully in
this meal of grace,
we must have faith
in the sovereign
God.*

said, "First, faith must look out for Christ; secondly, faith must look up to Christ for grace; thirdly, faith must take Christ down, or receive Him and grace." Charles Bridges described Christ as the diamond that shines in the bosom of every sermon. Likewise, to the believer, Christ is the diamond embedded and displayed in every Communion feast. As Richard Baxter said, "Nowhere is God so near to man as in Jesus Christ: and nowhere is Christ so familiarly represented to us as in this holy sacrament."

People who come to the Lord's Supper without faith in Christ receive a bit of bread, a sip of wine,

and the fearful threat of being punished for intruding where they do not belong (1 Corinthians 11:29). As unbelievers, they cannot feed on Christ in their hearts.

What Shall I Render to Jehovah?

The believer who partakes of the Lord's Supper is not merely a passive recipient. As a partaker of "all the riches of His consolation," the communicant is moved to give thanks to the Lord. This thankful response is the very soul of the sacrament. Sadly, this has not always been recognized. In some traditions the Lord's Supper is regarded as itself a sacrifice for sins, as an addendum to Christ's sacrifice at the cross. What Christ did at the cross is thus regarded as neither final nor all-sufficient.

The New Testament, with feet firmly planted in the rubble of the Old Testament temple, destroyed according to Christ's judgment (Matthew 24:2), says "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Not only is the temple gone, but the sacrifices there never actually atoned for sin. They only pointed to Christ, God's appointed and effectual atonement. Thanks be to God, no more sacrifices are needed, for "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper recalls a sacrifice already consummated upon God's altar. It only remains for communicants to give thanks to God for that sacrifice,

Our response at the communion feast is not complete until we acknowledge the full weight of Christ's claim, saying, "I am, O Lord, Thy servant."

and to live in the enjoyment of the many benefits purchased by Christ in offering up His body and blood on the cross.

With Joy I'll Take the Cup

In the Holy Supper, the benefits of salvation are set before the believer as a cup of the finest wine, sparkling to the eye, sweet to the taste, and able to make the heart glad. The believer is invited to take this cup and drink deeply from it. Refreshed by this heavenly drink, the believer calls upon the name of the Lord with renewed faith and devotion.

The Psalms mention two cups that God sets before man. One is God's wrath poured out against sin. Psalm 75:8 says, "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." So dreadful is this cup that even the Lord Jesus feared to drink of it, and so He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39). Nonetheless, Christ accepted this fearful cup, saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

Because Christ drank the cup of wrath down to its bitter dregs, another cup is now offered to us, "the cup of salvation" (Psalm 116:13).

The Lord Himself is now "the portion of [our] cup" (Psalm 16:5). This is the cup that runs over (Psalm 23:5). Here is Paul's inspiration for describing "the cup of the new covenant" (see 1 Corinthians 11:25) as "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

In the Holy Supper, we take hold of Christ as the "cup of the new covenant." We thankfully recall how the eternal Son of God left the Father's throne to become an infant for us. We see how Jesus lived as a man among sinners for thirty-three years, bearing our sins, sicknesses, griefs, and sorrows. We look into the face of "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3), and are overwhelmed by what He has done for us. He carried the cruel load of our sins to Golgotha, suffered humiliation and shame in nakedness upon the cross, descended into a hell of suffering, cried the bitter cries of dereliction and thirst, and surrendered all to the cold and silent tomb.

I Am, O Lord, Thy Servant

Thanksgiving goes further than mere partaking of the sacrament. In the Holy Supper, Christ presses His claim upon us. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2

Corinthians 5:14-15). Our need could not have been greater or our plight more desperate. We were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Nothing greater could have been done for us than what Christ did. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Christ purchased our salvation at a great personal cost. Because of His sacrifice, we belong to our faithful Savior, body and soul, in life and in death. "Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). Our response at the communion feast is not complete until we acknowledge the full weight of Christ's claim, saying, "I am, O Lord, Thy servant."

When we, by grace, accept our status as the servants of Christ, we discover wondrous, authentic freedom. "Truly I am thy servant," the psalmist says, adding, "Thou hast loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16). Christ's servants are "bound yet free." Calvin says true Christian freedom is "a free servitude and a serving freedom. Those who serve God are free. We obtain liberty in order that we may more promptly and more readily obey God."

Bound yet free, we thank the Father for choosing us in Christ from the stillness of eternity past to save and preserve us for eternity future. Bound yet free, we thank the Son, who in love consented to be the Mediator of the covenant, and "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Bound yet free, we thank the Spirit of Christ, whose power quickened us



in Christ when we were in the grave of sin, whose blessing on the preaching of the gospel led us to Christ on the cross, whose witness moved us to embrace Christ as the only Savior, and whose very presence now lives in us to make us like Christ. With the cup of salvation in hand, we confess with Samuel Rutherford: “I know not which divine Person I love and must thank the most, but this I know, I love and need each of them.”

What shall we render to God for all He has given us? Powerless to repay our great debt, we can only receive His free gift, call upon His Name, and offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices, confessing, “Redeemed by grace, I’ll render as a token/Of gratitude my constant praise to Thee.” More than this we cannot do; less than this we must not do.

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Today’s Church: Standing or Falling?

[Part 1]

A staple in international, orthodox Calvinism from the opening days of the Protestant Reformation has been the theological distinction between the “Law” and the “Gospel.” What does this distinction mean, and how important is it? Simply put, it contrasts two divinely ordained ways to the obtainment of life eternal, one by meritorious works (*i.e.*, by the “Law”) and one by unmerited grace and favor (*i.e.*, by the “Gospel”).

This fundamental antithesis – reiterated time and again throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments – lays at the very core of Protestant evangelical theology, Lutheran and Reformed. Contrary to the claim made by some recent historians of doctrine, there is no disagreement or discord between these two leading Protestant traditions concerning this vital, theological distinction.

Differences of interpretation within Lutheranism and Calvinism do appear with respect to how these two principles of inheritance – works versus faith (*i.e.*, law versus grace) – apply to the various covenants in the Bible, beginning with the unique “Covenant of Works” established by God with Adam in the Garden of Eden at creation, and followed by the subsequent covenants spanning the history of redemption, all of which are subsumed under the ru-

bric of the “Covenant of Grace” (exceptions include God’s covenantal pledge to uphold and govern all humankind in accordance with His “common grace”).

It was this basic, theological antithesis between the “Law” and the “Gospel” that led Martin Luther to recover the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone – justification apart from the works of the law, even the “good works” of believers (see Ephesians 2:10). In his classic study, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther described the desperate plight of sinners. By nature (since Adam’s transgression), humankind is in bondage to sin and death. Only the mercy and grace of God in Christ can remedy the consequences of the Fall. The salvation of sinners is the manifestation of the predestinating, electing love of God. The sovereign Lord of the covenant secures for the sinner that which he cannot obtain for himself. Salvation is all of grace.

So important was this teaching of the Bible that Luther insisted it was the defining article (*i.e.*, doctrine) of the standing – or falling – church. Any admixture of faith and works (obedience which is in accordance with the law of God, the “good works” of those regenerated, sanctified, and renewed in the image of Christ) is, according to the great apostle Paul, anathema. Why

are the good works of believers – works which evidence the “obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5), works truly pleasing to God – excluded from justification (with respect to its *constitutive* aspect)? Very simply put, the reason is that what is required by the justice and holiness of God for salvation, (re)union, and communion with God, is *perfect obedience*.

The purpose of Christ’s first coming was to make atonement for sin and to secure the promised inheritance, *viz.*, a people redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The ground or basis of salvation is the righteousness of Christ alone. His perfect obedience is the exclusive, meritorious basis of life and salvation for sinners, those chosen in Christ by the Father in eternity past. The doctrine of Christ’s *meritorious* obedience is meaningful only in the context of the system of doctrine taught in the Bible. Here the interpreter of Scripture must come to grips with the Protestant-Reformed teaching concerning the “Law” and the “Gospel.” (For a summary, biblical exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, see Part Two of this two-part series.)

Neoorthodox Theology

Before commenting further upon the distinctive formulations of Reformed covenant theology, views different from classic Lutheranism, we must first consider why at present we are facing a radical shift

in theological thinking – a shift that has led to a crisis in modern-day Protestant evangelicalism. The single-most important factor giving rise to radical reinterpretations of the biblical doctrine of justification, election, and the covenants is the impact that the neoorthodox theology of Karl Barth has had upon evangelicalism, both Reformed and nonReformed varieties.

Barth is (mistakenly) considered by many to be the leading Reformed thinker of the twentieth century. Recognizing the fallacy and bankruptcy of nineteenth-century Protestant theology, Barth undertook a remake of traditional Protestant “orthodoxy,” that produced a theology having superficial resemblance to the theology of Luther and Calvin (most especially the latter). Barth ended up with a new school of theology known as “neoorthodoxy.”

To be sure, Barth is a complex theologian. But one thing is certain upon a close reading of his work: Barth is no friend of orthodox, biblical Christianity. (Of course, there are “evangelicals” who will challenge this evaluation. They do so erroneously.)

From the standpoint of the history of doctrine, it was Barth who spearheaded the transformation of contemporary evangelical theology, the form now dominant. He has vigorously maintained that there is no theological antithesis between the “Law” and the “Gospel.” On this

subject, argues Barth, the orthodox Protestant scholastics were wholly misguided and misinformed. (It is important to recognize here that Barth distinguished sharply between the teachings of Calvin and that of scholastic Calvinism.)

Among the philosophico-theological considerations that entered into Barth’s thinking was the (unbiblical) notion of divine grace as that which undergirds and sustains all creation – including the recreation of all things in Christ the Elect Man, the one man for all.

Jesus Christ, according to Barth, is the mysterious, yet sublime, revelation of God’s electing and reprobating will, the seemingly contrary motion of God at work in the redemption of the world. Stated in terms of the doctrine of justification, election, and covenant, Barth taught that there is but one covenant in Scripture, the covenant of grace (hence Barth’s doctrine of monocovenantalism).

Implicit in this interpretation is Barth’s christomonism, the notion that Christ is the fountain or source of life and death, so that in Him lie the final resolution and reconciliation of all things in heaven and in hell – all to the benefit of the world’s redemption (hence Barth’s implicit universalism). There is no ultimate conflict between the love and the wrath of God. Christ has overcome Evil; such is the triumph of divine grace.

According to Barth, law and gospel are merely twin sides of God’s promissory command – the divine

What is required by the justice and holiness of God for salvation, (re)union, and communion with God, is perfect obedience.



command that humankind be in subjection to His sovereign rule and reign, and the divine promise that He is Lord of all. Law is an expression of God's grace; grace is an expression of God's law in the world. God's image-bearer is never in a position of "earning" or "meriting" the love and favor of God. All is received by grace through faith. Humankind's "fall" from grace is remedied in the death and resurrection of Christ on behalf of all humanity. Christ is the New Man, the new humanity. The Old Man – humanity in rebellion against God, in rejection of His grace – has been subdued and renovated by the messianic Lord, the Son of Man.

In Christ, humanity stands righteous before God, free from all condemnation and sin. Jesus Christ has exhausted the wrath of God for everyman. Although evangelicalism may certainly not agree with Barth in all respects of his formulations, there is growing consensus that law and grace are not antithetical means of inheriting the favor and blessing of God. In particular, the Reformed doctrine of an original "Covenant of Works" has been widely denounced as speculative and unbiblical.

Covenant Theology

Historic covenant theology represents Reformed thinking in its most consistent expression. From the beginning of the Calvinistic tradition, the doctrine of the covenants – in conjunction with the traditional Protestant "Law"/"Gospel" contrast – played a determinative role in the exposition of Scripture. What gives covenant theology its peculiar character within the broad stream of Christian interpretation is the

What gives covenant theology its peculiar character within the broad stream of Christian interpretation is the emphasis placed upon the history of redemptive revelation and the relation of this history to the original goal of creation.

emphasis placed upon the history of redemptive revelation and the relation of this history to the original goal of creation (biblical protology and eschatology).

For purposes of this presentation, we highlight five crucial and essential biblical-theological elements within the system of covenant theology, what is the culmination of five centuries of Reformed exposition:

(1) the doctrine of probation as that pertains to Adam's original assignment in the Garden of Eden, Israel's temporal life and prosperity in the land of Canaan, and the Son of God's messianic fulfillment of all righteousness (under the law of Moses);

(2) the doctrine of meritorious reward (*i.e.*, legal obedience) associated with the original Covenant of Works (which covenant was perfectly fulfilled by the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, and by him alone);

(3) the term "grace," which, in accordance with the Protestant law/gospel distinction, pertains exclusively to the postlapsarian situation (the revelation of God's saving grace to undeserving sinners after Adam's transgression in the Garden);

(4) the doctrine of the imputation of the First Adam's sin to all humankind and the subsequent imputation of the Second Adam's righteous-

ness to all the elect of God;

(5) the explanation of the continuity/discontinuity between the old and new covenants (including the "letter"/"Spirit" contrast).

These five elements – elucidated over the course of five centuries of biblical interpretation – are vital to the system of Reformed doctrine. Regarding the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith specifically, modern-day detractors would have us abandon or radically reinterpret each of these points of doctrine. Current debate within several American-Reformed communions (reflecting developments in contemporary evangelicalism at large) focuses upon the distinctive teachings of Norman Shepherd, former systematics professor and successor to John Murray at Westminster Seminary (see his *The Call of Grace* [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000]). My exposé, *The Changing of the Guard: Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2001), republished in my *Gospel Grace: The Modern-day Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), chronicles developments at Westminster. This case study is illustrative of changes within contemporary evangelicalism – changes that are for the worse, not the better. (The debate over Open Theism within the "Evangelical" Theologi-

cal Society underscores the plight of biblical Christianity at the opening of this third millennium of church history.)

To be sure, new questions require a fresh restatement of biblical teaching. Traditional views must always be reevaluated and reformulated in the light of the Scriptures. That task ever remains for the faithful guard, those standing in defense of the biblical, Reformed faith. The responsibility of our generation of exegetes and dogmaticians, and of the generations to follow, is to carry through *consistently* the insights of our Reformed forefathers concerning the biblical doctrine of the covenants.

In Part Two we turn directly to the question regarding the relationship between the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the doctrine of judgment according to works, what stands as the crux of the contemporary dispute.

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We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 12: Of the Creation of the World, and of the Angels

Creation has been a hot-button issue in the church for the last 150 years. Thankfully, though, our Confession of Faith brings us back to what is important about creation and what we actually confess about creation as confessionally Reformed churches. Here we ponder anew the glory of God in His work of creation.

In Article 2 of the Belgic Confession, we confess that God is known by the two “books” of creation and the Word, and that in the Word He is “more clearly and fully” known. Articles 3-7 addressed what we believe about that Word, then in Articles 8-11, we learned what that Word says about the Tri-Unity of our God. Now we have come full circle to ponder what we can learn about God in the “book” of creation in Articles 12-13.

We are moving from the knowledge of God as He is in Himself, His attributes, and Triune nature, to the knowledge of God as He is before us in creation and providence.

Article 12 is divided into three sections, which we will examine in their order: first, the creation of all things, second, the creation of the angels, and third, the rejection of errors.

The Creation of the World

The Confession begins with a sweeping declaration concerning the creation saying:

We believe that the Father by the Word, that is, by His Son, has created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, when it seemed good unto Him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; that He also upholds and governs them by His eternal providence and infinite power for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God.

We confess so much in so few words! First, we believe that the Father, by means of His Son (cf. John 1:3), created “of nothing.” This is the great doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* that has been believed for millennia. Now stretch your minds for a moment with me. When we say that God made all things “out of nothing,” we are not saying that “nothing” was something, but that “nothing” was no thing at all. This is important.

Many philosophies in the ancient world believed that matter was eternal and that God took this eternal matter, this “nothing,” this unformed matter and made what we see today. But this is no ancient speculation. It is no further than that knock on your door by two Mormon missionaries. In “The Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith” (pp.



350-351) we read of a funeral sermon by Joseph Smith for King Follett, which says in part:

Now I ask all who hear me why the learned men who are preaching salvation say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The reason is they are unlearned...God had materials to organize the world out of chaos, chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles that can never be destroyed, they may be organized and reorganized but not destroyed.

We confess creation *ex nihilo* because God alone is eternal and to make matter eternal is to make matter a partaker of the divine nature, in fact, an emanation of God Himself.

God needed nothing to make everything. He did not take that which already existed and form it. Instead, He simply spoke His powerful word, what we call the divine *fiat*, “let there be” (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29 cf. Hebrews 11:3). The Hebrew word *bara* used in Genesis 1:1 does not itself mean “out of nothing,” but it is only used in the Old Testament for the work which God performs and never of man. And thus we pray to the Father, with whom “nothing is too hard” (Jeremiah 32:17), and who calls the thousands of galaxies, super-galaxies, and nebula “all by name” (Isaiah 40:26).

The second thing we confess about creation is that God created “the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), that is, everything there is. The “heavens” refer to the invisible realm, what Solomon called “the highest heaven” (1 Kings. 8:27), which is the place where God dwells. The “earth” refers to the visible realm, where we dwell. The Confession is following the Nicene Creed, which interprets the words of Genesis 1:1 as meaning “all things visible and invisible.”

The third point we confess about creation is that God created everything “when it seemed good unto Him.” The question of when God created is a moot point for the Confession. That is not the purpose of what we confess. The purpose of the Confession is to declare the wonderful works of God, to put the song in our hearts to words, to not speculate about days or the age of the earth but to say, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:11; ESV). Creation is for God’s own pleasure, “When it seemed good unto Him.” When did God create? “When it seemed good unto Him.” Why did God create? Because it “seemed good unto Him.”

The fourth confessional point

about creation is that it is God who is the master potter who gave “unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator.” We do not believe in macro-evolution that has occurred by change, but we believe in a personal God who has personally “formed my inward parts,” who “knitted me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalms 139:13).

The fifth thing we confess is that the God who created is the God who providentially sustains; but we will return to that topic in our next issue as we treat Article 13 of the Confession.

The Creation of the Angels

We now move from the creation of everything to a topic that does not get much press with us as Reformed Christians: the topic of angels. Interestingly, our Confession has a longer paragraph on angels than it does on the creation. It says:

He also created the angels good, to be His messengers and to serve His elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency in which God created them into everlasting perdition, and the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are en-

The purpose of the Confession is to declare the wonderful works of God, to put the song in our hearts to words, to not speculate about days or the age of the earth but to say, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God...”

Questions for Further Study

1. Discuss the idea that each member of creation has an “office” in which “to serve its Creator?” For example, what is the office of humans? The oceans? (cf. Psalm 96:11) The animal kingdoms?
2. Apply the power of God to create “of nothing” to the missionary calling of the Church.
3. Our culture is fascinated with the subject of angels. How much space does Scripture really give to this subject?

emies of God and every good thing; to the utmost of their power as murderers watching to ruin the Church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all; and are, therefore, by their own wickedness adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments.

Every angel was created good. But at some point in the past some of them “fell,” as the Confession says, or “sinned” as Scripture says (2 Peter 2:4), “Not stay[ing] within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling” (Jude 6). These angels, or “devils and evil spirits,” which we usually call demons, “are enemies of God and every good thing” (cf. Genesis 3:1-5; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). Their goal is to “ruin the Church” and “destroy all.”

Although they do what they must, they will have the same fate as Satan, whose “doom is sure”, as we sing. On the contrary, those angels which “by the grace of God re-

mained steadfast and continued in their first state” serve Christ as “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit eternal life” (Hebrews 1:14). And for that we must give praise.

The Rejection of Errors

Finally, because we believe the above about creation and the angels, we must distinguish ourselves from certain false teachers and teachings. We conclude in Article 12 with these words:

Therefore we reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees, who deny the existence of spirits and angels; and also that of the Manichees, who assert that the devils have their origin of themselves, and that they are wicked of their own nature, without having been corrupted.

The Sadducees were that group of Jewish religious leaders in the first century who “say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8). They were anti-supernaturalists. We find a modern-day

teaching that echoes that of the Sadducees in the philosophy that says, “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”

The Manichees (also, Manicheans) were the followers of an influential Persian named Mani, who taught, in relation to demons, that they were eternally evil. A modern-day teaching that echoes that of the Manichees is any cosmic dualism that says there is a yin and a yang, an eternal good and bad, light and dark, and that our goal is to strike a balance between them.

In all this, let us say with the Psalmist: “O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all. May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works” (Psalm 104:24, 31).

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Moving Beyond Zwingli: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

Jesus ordained the Holy Supper with the short declaration, "This is my body." He followed this statement with the equally succinct affirmation, "This is my blood" (Matthew 26:26, 28). The very simplicity of these statements along with the profundity of the realities proclaimed by the sacrament itself—accompanied by our human weakness and lack of spiritual perception—resulted in a lack of unanimity in the church concerning what the Lord actually meant. The significance of what Christ affirmed is still debated after two millennia.

The Zwinglian View

Today, within the broader evangelical community in America, the dominant position is that of the Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli. In his *Sixty-Seven Articles* (1523), he challenged all comers to debate the major doctrinal positions that he had preached in the city of Zurich. On the basis of Scripture, Zwingli staked out his position on what the Lord's Table actually is. "Therefore we conclude," he stated, "that the Mass is not a sacrifice but a memorial of the one sacrifice and a seal of redemption that Christ made good for us" (Art. 18). His denial of the sacrifice of the Mass, informed by his study in the Epistle to the Hebrews (7:27; 9:25-28; 10:10, 12, 14, 18), is a point with which all of Protestantism agreed. His conception that the Supper is both a memorial and a seal is certainly bib-

lical. Jesus himself declared with respect to eating the bread and drinking of the cup, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Likewise, the sacrament provides authentication and assurance of our redemption by Christ. The problem with the Zwinglian view (at least his teaching articulated in 1523) is that it does not say enough as to what the sacrament actually is. It is indeed a Supper of Remembrance, but it is far more than that. But how far should we go in describing the sacramental mystery?

The Roman Catholic Dogma

Roman Catholic theology, for example, offers the doctrine of *transubstantiation*—the miracle of a change in the substance of the bread and wine so that they become the very body and blood of Christ, even while their perceptible characteristics remain the same. This theory became church dogma at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and it was reaffirmed at the Council of Trent (1551) in response to the Protestant challenge in the Reformation. Trent declared, "In the august sacrament of the holy

Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things" (Thirteenth Session, Chapter I). The problem with this construction is quite simple—it stands without biblical support, and thus it must fall.

Medieval Alternatives

Equally problematic is the statement that "all our forefathers, as many as were in the true church of Christ, who have treated of this most holy Sacrament, have most openly professed, that our Redeemer instituted this so admirable a sacrament at the last supper" (Ibid.). This statement, quite frankly, lacks historical verification. Nine centuries had already come and gone before Paschasius Radbertus published his treatise on the Lord's Supper which first suggested anything like the transubstantiation doctrine. Furthermore, major theologians in the thirteenth century rejected the doctrine. Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, for example, proposed the theory of *consubstantiation*—the idea that the substance of Christ's body and blood *are present with* the substance of the bread and wine. Another theologian who dissented from the Fourth Lateran Council on this point was the Oxford professor John Wycliffe. Writing in Middle

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English—the same language used by Geoffrey Chaucer—Wyclif declared his denial of transubstantiation. In one sentence, he essentially answered three questions. First, what kind of thing is the Eucharistic bread, that is, the host? Wyclif stated, “*This oost is verri breed in his kynde.*” Secondly, what does the bread symbolize? Wyclif continued, “*This oost is verri breed in his kynde, and in figure Goddis bodi, by vertue of Cristis wordis.*” And finally, if we ask the first question once again, Wyclif essentially answered by way of negation: “*But thus it is not of Cristis fleish and His blood in His kynde*” (*Sermons. The Saturdai Gospel in Fyfthe Weke in Lente.* Emphasis added.).

The Lutheran Perspective

The Eucharistic theology of Rome goes far beyond the statements of Holy Scripture. Martin Luther described transubstantiation as “a monstrous word and a monstrous idea” (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*). What then did Luther propose as an alternative to Zwingli who lost the full wonder of the sacrament, and what did he set forth in place of the Roman doctrine which transformed the Supper into some kind of magic? The position of Luther was well-stated in the *Augsburg Confession* (1530) written by his younger colleague Philip Melancthon. Although the Emperor Charles V fell asleep while it was being read in his hearing, this fundamental confession of the Lutheran movement continues to be of great interest to students of Lutheran sacramental theology. Article X, on the Holy Supper, declares, “It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are

really present in the supper of our Lord *under the form of bread and wine* and are there distributed and received” (Emphasis added.). What Luther strenuously objected to were all attempts to “remove the body and blood of Christ *from the bread and wine*, so that it remains no more than mere bread, such as the baker bakes” (*The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics.* Emphasis added.). Here Luther neither affirmed *transubstantiation* (that the elements—their substance—*change into* the body and blood of Christ), nor *consubstantiation* (that the body and blood of Christ are *present with* the elements). Luther simply declared, “Christ’s body and blood are *truly present in* the bread and wine” (Ibid. Emphasis added.). The key issue for Luther was the preposition *in*.

The Problem with Luther

The problem with this position is that the Bible does not explicitly state that the body of Christ is *in* the bread. Nor does it clearly affirm that the blood of Christ is *in* the wine. It is interesting, however, that in the Bread of Life Discourse Jesus uses the preposition *in*—the context is his sacramental teaching that was anticipatory of the Holy Supper which he was going to give to the church. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood,” Jesus declared, “abides in me, and I *in* him (John 6:56). Rather than af-

firming that His flesh was *in* the bread or that His blood was *in* the wine, Christ explicitly stated that in the sacramental act He Himself would be *in* the believer. Thus, the Reformed community may sign on to most of the statement made in Article X of the *Augsburg Confession*: “It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the supper of our Lord . . . and received.” In clinging tenaciously to the inspired biblical text, we must affirm that the phrase and the clause “under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed” say too much.

The Insight of Calvin

This then brings us to a key distinction between the Lutheran movement and the Reformed—more specifically, those who stand in the Calvinist tradition. While the teaching of Luther puts a certain focus upon the presence of Christ *in the elements*, the position of John Calvin draws our attention to the presence of Christ *in the believer*. This is a perspective which was captured by the nineteenth-century American theologian, John Nevin—who powerfully presented the doctrine of Calvin on what the Lord’s Supper actually is.

What is the wonder and mystery of what happens at the Lord’s Table? Is it that the elements inwardly *change into* Christ, or that Christ himself is *in the elements*? In one sentence, Nevin describes what is

Rather than affirming that His flesh was in the bread or that His blood was in the wine, Christ explicitly stated that in the sacramental act He Himself would be in the believer.



supernatural about the sacrament: “The body of Christ is in heaven, the believer on earth; but by the power of the Holy Ghost, nevertheless, the obstacle of such vast local distance is fully overcome, so that in the sacramental act, while the outward symbols are received in outward way, the very body and blood of Christ are at the same time inwardly and supernaturally communicated to the worthy receiver, for the real nourishment of his new life” (*The Mystical Presence*).

The Doctrine of Paul

This statement is a faithful reflection of the teaching of Paul—who has much more than a mere memorialist view on the Lord’s Supper. On the one hand, as Nevin put it, “the outward symbols are received in an outward way.” This indeed is what Paul says, “We all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians

10:17). This, however, is not the only thing that happens in the Supper! Nevin accurately captured the Pauline emphasis when he stated that “in the sacramental act ... the very body and blood of Christ are ... inwardly and supernaturally communicated to the worthy receiver.” It is this very mystery that Paul calls to our attention in 1 Corinthians 10:16 as he asks two questions: “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless *a sharing in* the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break *a sharing in* the body of Christ? Here the word *koinonia* refers to the fact that believers participate together in the reception of Christ—including even the taking in of his humanity, indeed His body and His blood, at the Table of the Lord. Thus, we concur wholeheartedly with Luther when he answered the question as to what the believer has in his heart.

“You must answer that you have the true Christ,” Luther wrote. He then acknowledged, “How that comes about you cannot know, but your heart truly feels His presence, and through the experience of faith you know for a certainty that He is there” (*The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*). This indeed is the high privilege of our coming to the holy sacrament—it is a means of grace, providing the unspeakable opportunity of receiving Christ himself at the banquet of the Lord.

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Looking Out and About

- Rev. David Klompfen, who has served the United Reformed Churches as a church planter at Jerome, Idaho since his graduation from Westminster Theological Seminary in California, has accepted the call extended to him by the United Reformed Church of Dutton, Michigan.
- Rev. Todd Wagenmaker, who has served the First Christian Reformed Church of Oak Lawn, Illinois since 2001, has begun his service as a church planter for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He is working in Houghton, Michigan where he will be seeking to reach out to the

students at Michigan Tech University whose student body includes a large number of international students.

- The eighth Annual Women’s Conference sponsored by the Cornerstone United Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan was held on March 19 and 20. The conference featured Sharon Betters as the main speaker. The theme this year was “Will You Sing at Midnight?”
- The Bethel Church of Calgary, Alberta will be serving as the host church for the Synod of the United Reformed Churches which is

scheduled to meet June 15-18, 2004.

- Rev. Phil Grotenhuis, who since 1997 has served the United Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington, has accepted the call extended to him by the Covenant Reformed Church of Kansas City, Missouri to serve as church planter in Springfield, Missouri.
- The Lakeshore United Reformed Church of Muskegon, Michigan which is served by Rev. Gene Crow has relocated. The church is now meeting at 200 Holton Road, Unit D in Muskegon. Rev. Crow’s address is: 3383 Farr Rd. Fruitport, MI 49415.

The Blessed Trinity

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” II Corinthians 13:14

Did you know that every major branch of the Christian Church, whether it is Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Protestant, or Reformed, all teach the doctrine of the Trinity? This Doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are three persons who are God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Yet, even as we teach that, we say that there is but one God.

I have a six year old son in Kindergarten. One of the very first things that he learned was that $1+1=2$, and then, if you would add another 1 ($1+1+1$) that would equal three. Why would anyone who believes in three divine Persons insist that there is only one God? The answer to that question is found in the first half of question and answer 25 of Lord’s Day 8 in the Heidelberg Catechism. It says very simply, *“Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word...”* The Bible teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each God, and yet at the same time, the Bible teaches that there is only one God.

The Oneness of God

The one-ness of God is taught very clearly throughout the Bible beginning already in the Old Testament. It is clearest in Deuteronomy 6:4 where God says: *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord*

our God, the Lord is one!” In Isaiah 46:9 the Lord says: *“I am God, and there is no one like Me.”* The Old Testament insisted that there is only one God and it teaches us that we are to worship that one God and nothing else.

The New Testament is just as insistent that there is only one God. In I Corinthians 8:4, the apostle Paul declares: *“...we know that there is no such thing as a idol, there is no God but one.”* And so Christians believe that God is one. There is only one God. That is how God has revealed Himself to us.

Three Persons

Yet, even as we say that, God’s Word reveals three distinct Persons as God. Jesus commanded that His followers be baptized, not simply in the name of God, but in the Name of the Father and in the name of the Son and in the Name of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the centuries Christians have fol-

lowed that command given to them by Christ.

There are many passages in the Bible that teach us that Jesus is the Son of God. In John 1:1 we are told that the Word was with God and that the Word was God. Later in the same chapter we read that Word is declared to be Jesus Christ. During His ministry, Jesus did many miraculous deeds, exercising power over the forces of nature and mankind. He also exercised His authority to forgive sins.

Did you ever wonder why the religious leaders of the day wanted desperately to kill Jesus? It was because He claimed to be equal with God. That was blasphemy to their ears. They could have stoned Jesus to death immediately, but instead wanted Him crucified. They reasoned from the Old Testament that a person who hangs from a tree is cursed of God. If Jesus were crucified, it would prove He was not God. How could God reject Himself? To them, crucifixion proved Jesus was not God.

But Jesus overcame that obstacle in a unique way. He rose from

Q

Since there is but one divine Being, why do you speak of three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A

Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word that these three distinct persons are the one, true, and eternal God.



the dead. By doing so, He proved His power over death. Death could not hold the Eternal One.

The Bible also teaches us that the Holy Spirit is God. He always is included in the Bible's formulas for baptism along with the Father and the Son. The Bible also frequently refers to the Holy Spirit as "*the Spirit of God*" and as "*the Spirit of Christ*."

In Acts 5, Ananias & Sapphira made a donation to the church. They lied about how much they had kept for themselves in order to make themselves appear to be more generous than they really were. Peter's reply to them is this: "*You have lied to the Holy Spirit. What made you think you could do such a thing? You have not lied to men but you have lied to God.*" Certainly, that passage refers to the Holy Spirit as God.

We must be careful to acknowledge that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons within the Godhead. The Father did not come as a baby born in Bethlehem. The Holy Spirit did not live as a man upon the earth. Nor did either One die upon the cross. Those were accomplished by the Son in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Bible very clearly teaches that there are three divine Persons united as one God. This is what we must believe because this is what God has revealed to us about Himself.

The Bible teaches the equality of the three Persons within the oneness of God. No Person in the

Trinity lacks any of the divine attributes of the other. None within the Trinity is inferior to the other. All are equally infinite in power, splendor, wisdom, love, and holiness. All are equally eternal, equally uncreated, without beginning and without end. This is true because all three Persons share the same divine essence.

The Comfort

The comfort and joy of this doctrine is that within the Trinity there is a total unity of purpose and harmony; there is a complete oneness of will. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit never disagree with one another. In this oneness of will, the Son never contradicts the will of the Father. It is never the case that the Father wants one thing and the Son wants something else. Jesus the Son came to do the will of His Father. Likewise the Holy Spirit always does His work in perfect cooperation with the purposes of the Father and the Son.

The second Person of the Trinity left the glory of heaven to become a man. He took upon Himself our guilt, our shame, and our sin. He died for us upon the cross. We must understand, however, that it was not just Jesus coming. It was the Son of God coming as planned and as prophesied by the Father already centuries earlier in the Garden of Eden. It was the crushing of the serpent's head.

As Jesus Himself said in John 6:44 "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...*" Salvation is a work involving the Father and the

Son and the Spirit. The Father loved us enough to send His Son and then draws us to Jesus; The Son poured Himself out on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for sin; and the Spirit softens our hearts, making us receptive to the Gospel promises. Each Person of the Trinity works in cooperation with the other two to bring about our salvation.

There is nothing more wonderful and also nothing more necessary than to be drawn into the marvelous love which the Triune God has shown to us.

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Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (9)

“The ‘Righteousness of God’ and the Believer’s ‘Justification’” (Part Four)

The Meaning of “Justification”

Our consideration of Paul’s use of the language of the “righteousness of God” in the book of Romans forms an obvious basis for understanding the meaning of the language of “justification” in this and other Pauline epistles. For the justification of the ungodly is the great benefit and fruit of the revelation of the righteousness of God. Whereas the language of the “righteousness of God” refers primarily to God’s gracious action in Christ, which constitutes the basis for the granting of a righteous status to believers, the language of “justification” refers to the subjective benefit of this saving action. Those to whom God grants righteousness as a gift, which can only be received through faith (cf. Romans 4:16), are freely justified.

Though writers of the new perspective insist that the language of “justification” is “covenant membership” language, which identifies those whom God acknowledges as His covenant people, this view of the language of justification is inadequate on several counts. Like the claim that the “righteousness of God” refers to God’s covenant faithfulness in action, this understanding is far too general and imprecise to capture the specific force of this language in Paul’s writings.

If we say that the “righteousness of God” is His faithfulness to His covenant promise, we still need to ask, how does that faithfulness come to expression? And what exactly does the terminology of “righteousness” tell us about the way God’s faithfulness is demonstrated?

As we have argued, this language especially emphasizes the judicial context for God’s action in securing the acquittal/vindication of His covenant people, and bringing judgment/condemnation upon His enemies. It assumes that God is Judge and King, that He maintains justice and order in His dealings with His creatures, and that He acts justly in acquitting the righteous and condemning the wicked.

The same holds true for the related language of “justification.” No doubt this language finds its meaning within the context of God’s establishing a relationship with those whom He acknowledges as His covenant people. But this does not yet tell us what precisely “justification” means, and why this language is especially appropriate to describe what God does when he brings people into his covenant family. Obviously, the language of justification functions within the context of

the covenant, as does most of the language of the Scriptures so far as it deals with the relationship between God and his people. The question is, what does *this particular* language tell us about the nature of this relationship.

Romans 1-5

Perhaps the most serious problem with a simple identification of the language of “justification” with the idea of “belonging to the covenant people” is that it fails to do justice to the biblical context for Paul’s discussion of justification. If we consider only the context for the discussion of justification in Romans 1-5, we discover that justification answers to the problem of human sin and guilt before the judgment seat of God.

The problem of human sin and guilt, as Paul outlines it in these chapters, suggests the opposite of Wright’s genial suggestion that first century Jews were not particularly troubled by the prospect of the final judgment and the wrath of God, or whether they would “get to heaven” in the future.¹ Though there is an undoubtedly ecclesiological dimension to the language of justification (who belongs to the covenant family? Are Gentiles as well as Jews included?), *the principal issue* is quite emphatically of a *soteriological* and *theological* nature.

The question that Paul’s argument in Romans 1-5 raises goes far

*The principal issue is quite emphatically of a
soteriological and theological nature.*



The question is whether human beings, who are on trial before God on account of their sins and offenses, can find favor or acceptance with God.

deeper than, who belongs to the covenant people of God? The question that is raised is, how can guilty sinners, who have culpably broken the law of God and are subject to condemnation, be received into favor with a righteous God whose wrath is being poured out upon all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? The importance of this context for understanding the language of “justification” requires that we review briefly the argument of these chapters.

God’s Righteous Wrath

The theme of this context is stated at the outset. Immediately after Romans 1:16-17, which announces the theme of the epistle by speaking of the “righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, Paul notes that “the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (v. 18). The good news that God justifies the ungodly occurs, accordingly, against the dark background of God’s just displeasure with all guilty violators of his law.

For this reason, the problem that is resolved by the revelation of God’s righteousness is not whether God is faithful to His covenant, *but whether He is in the right when He justifies those who, by virtue of their sin and guilt, are worthy only of condemnation and death.* It is not God’s faithfulness to His promise that is in question; rather, the question is whether human be-

ings, who are on trial before God on account of their sins and offenses, can find favor or acceptance with God.

After announcing the theme of God’s righteous wrath in Romans 1:18, the apostle turns in chapter 2 of Romans to this reality of impending judgment. A “day of wrath” is coming, when God “will render to each one according to his works” (2:5-6). This day will reveal God’s judgment by Christ Jesus upon the deeds of all, including the “secret things of men” (v. 16). The setting for the demonstration of the “righteousness of God” and the “justification” of believers, therefore, is clearly one of trial and judgment before God.

All Are Guilty

Within this setting of trial and judgment before God, the apostle proceeds, after the manner of a prosecutor in a courtroom, to detail the universal sway of sin and guilt among Jews and Gentiles alike.

At the beginning of chapter 2, Paul hints that his Jewish readers might be tempted to affirm his indictment of Gentile sinners and offenders, while excluding themselves. However, he forcefully argues that *all* have sinned, whether they are Gentiles “without the law” or Jews “under the law” (2:12). Those who might be tempted to boast before God because of their privileged position, including their possession of the covenant mark of circumci-

sion, are reminded that “circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision” (2:25).²

In order to prove that Jews as much as Gentiles are at no advantage before God, Paul adduces evidence of an *ad hominem* nature to illustrate how they also have disobeyed the law of God. Despite their boast, they are as guilty as the Gentiles of the sins of hypocrisy, stealing, adultery, robbing temples (vv. 21-22). And so he draws the inescapable conclusion: “You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law” (v. 23).

The whole point of this section of Romans is to establish, within the context of the announcement of God’s wrath against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, that “none is righteous; no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). The law of God, far from being able to serve as an instrument of self-justification before God, pronounces its verdict upon Jew and Gentile alike. In the court of heaven and before God, Jews and Gentiles share the common predicament of having nothing to say in their own defense that would be exculpatory. When confronted with the demand and accusation of the law of God, every mouth is stopped and the whole world is held accountable to God.

The Gracious Provision

The significance of all this for Paul’s understanding of justification cannot be overstated. Justification, in this setting, cannot mean merely something like “covenant membership.” After all, the Jews who were circumcised were members of the

The point, as the Reformers rightly understood, was about the gracious provision in Christ for the justification of all sinners

covenant people of God. Nor can justification be reduced to Paul's answer to the question, are Gentiles also members of the covenant family? To reduce the problem to which justification provides an answer to the inclusion or non-inclusion of Gentiles within the covenant family, is to miss the real point.

That point, as the Reformers rightly understood, was about the gracious provision in Christ for the justification of all sinners. Since no one can possibly be included within the covenant family of God on the basis of the works of the law, God has demonstrated His righteousness in providing a Savior whose obedience and propitiatory death are the basis for being received into His favor. In the setting of the argument of Romans, therefore, justification language refers to God's act of granting believers a status of favor and righteousness on account of the work of Christ.

Justification is all about the forgiveness of sins and the granting of a new status of righteousness in Christ to otherwise guilty, condemnable sinners. Paul's teaching about justification is not simply about "who is a member of the covenant," but it goes to the deeper issue of "who has a right to stand before God, despite his sin and unworthiness." Justification is about God as the One who justifies the ungodly. And it is about nothing, if not the *salvation* of guilty sinners. Only within the framework of this deeper

theological and soteriological issues does the obvious ecclesiological issue regarding the inclusion of Gentiles have a place.

Romans 8:33-34

To illustrate the meaning of the language of justification, it might be useful here to cite another passage that occurs later in the book of Romans. In Romans 8:33-34, Paul declares, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?" This dramatic affirmation of the blessing of justification through the work of Christ confirms that justification language refers to a judicial act of God, which pronounces otherwise guilty sinners righteous on the basis of the work of Christ.

It is impossible to paraphrase Paul's language in these verses by inserting "covenant membership" language alone. For this passage embraces anyone whatsoever who might bring any conceivable charge against God's people. No matter who, no matter what the charge, God has assumed the burden of answering it for His elect in Christ. By virtue of Christ's death and resurrection for sinners, God Himself has entered into judgment on behalf of His people. God has in Christ

answered the charge by assuming the place of the guilty and suffering His own displeasure with sin. The consequence? There is no possibility of a charge being brought against those whom He has justified, whose acquittal and righteousness He has established. As Paul announces at the outset of Romans 8, there is "now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1).³

The Role of Faith

The last observation to be made about the language of "justification" in Paul's writings relates to the role and character of "faith." Consistent with his view of justification as "covenant membership" language, Wright speaks of faith as "the badge" of covenant membership. Faith in Jesus Christ is the mark that distinguishes Jews and Gentiles alike as members of the covenant family of God. Though this language of faith as a kind of "badge" of covenant membership fits well with the notion that justification is "covenant membership" language, it suggests something quite different than what we find in Paul's writings.

If anything may be said to be a "badge" of covenant membership, perhaps it would be something like the mark of circumcision or baptism (cf. Romans 2:26; 4:11). Abraham, for example, received the rite of circumcision after his faith was "reckoned" to him for righteousness by "faith?" The reason Wright wants to speak of faith as a "badge"

Justification is about God as the One who justifies the ungodly. And it is about nothing, if not the salvation of guilty sinners.



of membership is obvious. It keeps the language of justification within the realm of ecclesiology and the question, who belongs to the family of God.

However, if, as we have argued, justification refers to the gracious act whereby God pronounces the innocence or righteousness of believers, faith more properly must be understood as the instrument whereby to receive the gracious gift of justification. We will consider this more fully in a subsequent article, which will address specifically the way in which the believer's justification is based upon the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. At this point, however, it is important to notice that the role of faith in justification cannot be adequately

accounted for when justification is reduced to "covenant membership" language.

Endnotes

¹ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 118.

² In verse 13, Paul speaks similarly: "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified." The reformational reading of this text usually takes it as a kind of "hypothesis contrary to fact." Since no one is, strictly speaking, a "doer of the law," no one is justified by the law. However, among writers of the new perspective, this text is interpreted differently. In their view, Paul is positively affirming that in the final judgment only those who do what the law requires will be justified/vindicated. Cf. Wright. I will consider this text more

directly in a subsequent article on the final judgment and the role works play in that judgment.

³ One way to test the new perspective's claims regarding the meaning of the language of "the righteousness of God" and "justification," is to try to paraphrase Paul's uses of this language by substituting terms like "covenant faithfulness" or "covenant membership." Though the substitution might seem plausible in a few instances, it generally makes little sense.

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Worldview or Worldly ...

It is a matter of fact that everyone has a worldview, even if they have no idea of what a worldview is and from where theirs came. Everybody has a view of life and how it ought to be lived. Everybody lives their lives according to their worldview—conscious or sub-conscious. The tragedy for the Christian is that if he fails to actively develop a Biblical worldview he will draw from the world ideas about life and the living of life in this fallen world. You can not escape being shaped by the world unless you are being transformed by the teachings of God's Word. For this reason, several pastors in the West Michigan area have begun a Worldview Conference for high school and

college age adults — that they might be pressed to think in biblical terms about their lives.

This conference, The Great Lakes Worldview Conference (G.L.W.C.), is now looking forward to its fourth year and again the sponsors are excited about the opportunity that will be extended to young adults to think biblically. This conference is purposely heavy in content and schedule while maintaining an atmosphere and approach that is well suited for the attendee's age and background. In short, the conference is about helping young Christians develop a thoroughly Christian worldview that they, with others, might turn the world upside down. Reformation is the child of Biblical

teaching given life by the work of God's Spirit. It is not enough that conferences and activities be scheduled it is necessary that they be content oriented and dependent upon the Spirit's intervention. Without apology, G.L.W.C. is an appointment with the exercise of the mind and the inflaming of the life—may God make it so.

The 2004 conference is scheduled for July 14-17 and we are pleased to announce that Dr. Nick Willborn of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, pastor of Christ Reformed Church of Anaheim, CA and a regular on "The White Horse Inn" have both agreed to participate. Dr. Riddlebarger will be

(continued on page 30)

Looking Above

A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ

*The Church in the Midst of the World:
In Danger of Losing Her Identity
Revelation 2:1-7*

In previous articles we laid out the structure of the Book of Revelation, following closely upon that proposed by William Hendriksen in his classic commentary *More Than Conquerors*. The Book of Revelation is divided into seven progressive parallel sections, each of them spanning the same time period but with ever-increasing intensity. The time period covered in each section is that between Christ's first coming and His return on the clouds of glory.

This means that chapters 1-3, which contain the seven letters to the seven churches, cover the time period between Christ's first coming and His return on the clouds of glory. In other words, the seven letters to the seven churches provide a composite picture of the church as she lives in the midst of the world between the first coming of Christ and His return in glory. These seven letters to the seven churches, then, are descriptive of the church presently, for where do we live, but between the first coming of Christ and His return in glory?!

Far from being a vision of grandeur, this composite picture of the church is both realistic and sobering. The first and the last letters describe those churches in the worst condition - churches in danger of losing their very identity. The central let-

ters, letters three, four, and five, describe churches that are in serious trouble. Only the second and sixth letters describe healthy, vibrant churches, but even these churches face great persecution and turmoil. Five of the seven churches are unhealthy and in serious trouble; only two are healthy and in good condition, and they occupy the least important places in terms of the structure of these letters. Thus we begin and end with the churches in the worst condition, while those with serious trouble occupy the center of the chapters. This is a most realistic and sobering picture indeed!

The church of Ephesus is mentioned first, and that for several reasons. Geographically, Ephesus was closest to the island of Patmos (the island to which John has been exiled, and from which he writes), thus beginning the circle of seven churches to which these letters were sent. Ephesus had also played a leading role in the beginning of the Christian Church in the Gentile world; the Apostle Paul was instrumental in its development, and John later resided there. In spite of their labors, however, the church of Ephesus was soon in danger of losing her identity. Thus Ephesus is mentioned first because it is one of the seven churches in the worst condition.

Background and History

Before considering the words of Christ to the church of Ephesus, a few comments concerning its background and history are in order. The city of Ephesus was situated on the western coast of the Aegean Sea on the Caystar River, and thus became the chief commercial center of western Asia Minor, even earning the name "The Crown Jewel of the Roman Empire."

Ephesus was opulent, prosperous, rich, and wealthy. The temple of Artemis (also called Diana), the goddess of fertility, added to the wealth of Ephesus. This temple was massive. It measured 420 feet in length, 240 feet in width, 60 feet in height, with nearly 120 columns supporting it. The vastness of the temple was matched only by its magnificence and beauty. It was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Because Ephesus was considered the temple keeper of the great Artemis, pilgrims would come from all over the world to Ephesus to do homage to Artemis. As part of their worship, they would deposit money at the temple. Eventually the temple became one of the primary banking institutions of Asia Minor. Money was not only deposited here, but it was loaned out as well, at a rather high rate of interest. Thus Ephesus became rich and wealthy.

Under the labors of the Apostle Paul, a Christian church was founded in Ephesus - a church that became very dear to his heart. Paul visited the city of Ephesus near the end of his second mission-



ary journey, and again on this third missionary journey. In fact, he spent three years in Ephesus during this third missionary journey - the longest he spent in any one location. You can read of Paul's experiences in Ephesus in the book of Acts. Most notable among them are his interactions with Demetrius (Acts 19:25-28), and his farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:27-30).

Paul was not the only apostle the Ephesians would know. John, the author of the Gospel of John, the three letters of John, and the Book of Revelation, would later reside in the city of Ephesus as well. John was, therefore, quite familiar with the city of Ephesus, as well as with the church to whom he writes.

The city of Ephesus was one of the most wealthy cities of the Ancient World and, at the same time, one of the most pagan. Yet here, by the grace of God, a Christian church had been founded. We have in Ephesus a picture of the church in the world.

A Word of Commendation

It is to this church that Christ speaks, commanding John to write down His words: "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...'" (2:1). Christ speaks to the church of Ephesus with both commendation and rebuke.

First the commendation, verses 2-3, "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are

apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary."

Apparently, the church had taken the last words of the Apostle Paul seriously when he wrote to them, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). They had, indeed, guarded the church from the wolves. The church could not bear those who were evil. They had tested those who claimed to be apostles, but were not, and found them false. They labored for the name of Christ and had not become weary.

We even read in verse 6, "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." We do not know much about the Nicolaitans, other than the fact that they taught that some degree of accommodation to the pagan culture around them was permissible. The church at Ephesus hated the deeds of this group. Thus, the church at Ephesus was very much aware of doctrinal error; it was a church that was on guard against false teachers. For these things, the church is commended and praised.

A Word of Condemnation

However, that is not the whole picture. The church also received a stern rebuke, verse 4: "Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

Approximately 30 years earlier the Apostle Paul had written to the church at Ephesus of his prayer for them, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded *in love*, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - *to know the love of Christ* which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19). Paul had closed that letter with similar words, "Grace be with all those *who love our Lord Jesus Christ* in sincerity" (Ephesians 6:24).

Now 30 years have passed, and while the church maintained something of its original zeal, at least with regard to doctrinal matters, they had lost their first love. No longer did the church of Ephesus love Jesus Christ as she did before. The result? She lost her witness in the

The city of Ephesus was one of the most wealthy cities of the Ancient World and, at the same time, one of the most pagan. Yet here, by the grace of God, a Christian church had been founded.

world.

One commentator has written that this is precisely why Jesus identifies Himself in verse 1 as the One who walks in the midst of the lampstands. This statement was “intended to remind the introverted readers that their primary role in relation to their Lord should be that of a light of witness to the outside world This explains the loss of love as unfaithfulness to the covenantal task of enduring in preaching the gospel ‘for a witness.’”

Do you see what has happened? When a church no longer loves Christ - when a church no longer proclaims Christ - when a church is no longer centered upon Christ - she has gutted the gospel of its power! When Christ is no longer central to the church, she loses her very identity – even becoming like the world itself.

It is for this reason that Christ, who stands in the midst of the lampstands, comes to the church at Ephesus with the threat of curse to those who fail to repent. The rebuke is great: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent” (2:5). Jesus says to the church, I will no longer walk in your midst. Your building may still exist; your people may still gather; your programs may still continue on; you may even look strong in the eyes of the world; but I am not there – and it will be to you “Ichabod: the Glory has departed!”

But now remember that this letter is addressed not only to the church of Ephesus at the end of the first cen-

tury; it is addressed to the church that exists in the world from the time of Christ’s first coming to the time of His second coming. The letter is addressed also to us. Should we lose our love for Christ, we will lose our witness to the world, and Christ will remove the lampstand from our midst. Let us not think it cannot happen. Let us not think we are immune from such things. The warning is real. You need look no further than Ephesus.

A Word of Hope

Yet Christ does not leave His

When Christ is no longer central to the church, she loses her very identity – even becoming like the world itself.

church – even his erring church – without hope. The warning is great, but so is the encouragement to persevere. It is with the promised blessing that the letter concludes: “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (2:7).

The tree of life was first set before man as the reward for keeping the covenant of works; the test set before man in his probation was quite simple: would man love God above all? Adam, of course, disobeyed God, failing to keep the covenant of works, and so was barred from the garden, having lost the right to eat of the tree of life. But God has provided Jesus Christ, the last Adam,

who has perfectly kept the covenant of works. His cross has become for us the tree of life – the tree whereby we are given life. Christ, the last Adam, has earned and secured for us a position beyond the probation of the first Adam. In Christ alone do we overcome.

The picture given to us here is a most realistic picture. Blessings and curses are set before us; life and death are set before us. May we, by the grace of God, cling to Christ, that we might never lose our first love. May God grant us ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

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For in Six Days ...

We read these words nearly every Lord's Day in our churches as part of the commandments by which we express gratitude to our covenant God: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is ... (Exodus 20:11). All Scripture is *inspired* by God, but this verse was originally *inscribed* by God, written by His own finger in tablets of stone. If any verses of Scripture command our special attention, certainly included are those written by God Himself.

A Clear Account

Although the apostle Peter tells us there are some things in Scripture "difficult to understand," Exodus 20:11 seems very clear and straightforward. God is restating the pattern of six work days followed by a seventh day of special worship and rest that He established at creation. The creation account in Genesis 1, while emphasizing the extraordinary acts of God's supernatural creation, uses a whole series of devices apparently designed to emphasize the day as an ordinary unit of time as much like our own day as possible: bounding each day with evening and morning; using "day" for both the day/night cycle as well as for the lighted portion of that cycle; distinguishing between days, seasons, and years; etc.

It is, more than incidentally, God Himself who specifies the time involved in creation. As Genesis 2 illustrates, God could have described the events of creation without reference to time, but He chose to tell us that which we could not

otherwise discover for ourselves, that He spent six days, in creation, describing those days as we do our own. Indeed, if God had wanted to tell us how long He spent in creation (and apparently He did), it is hard to imagine how He could have spoken more clearly.

The Perspicuity of Scripture

That's the key issue in this matter of the creation days: the clarity (or "perspicuity") of Scripture. If we cannot take God at His Word in this simply "earthly" matter, how can we be sure of the grander, often more difficult, "heavenly" matters? (See John 3:12). In fact, in discussion with one of our CRC pre-seminary students, it was very easy for me to use his arguments regarding the obscure meaning of the creation days to show that the Bible - by his erroneous standards - was also unclear in its teaching regarding the divinity of Christ and His bodily resurrection! It would be an easy thing for our God to create the universe in six days; since He states and repeats that He did, why not just take Him at His Word?

Objectionable Denials

Sadly, however, Exodus 20:11 has become, for too many "twentieth century" Christians, the most embarrassing verse in the Bible. At our own Calvin College, for example, we have Professors Davis Young and George Marsden zealously writing and even testifying in court to discredit Christians who believe - and who put into practice their belief - that God simply said what He meant and meant what He said

in both Genesis 1 and Exodus 20.

Nearly all who oppose accepting the Sabbath Commandment with child-like (*not* childish) faith have some reason *outside of the Bible* for wanting to stretch out the length of the creation days. Many members of the American Scientific Affiliation (MA), for example, believe that God used evolutionary processes so bring into being a succession of life forms, including man's body ("theistic evolution"). But evolution as a process is based on *accidental* changes in heredity called mutations and on the continual *death* of the less fit in the constant struggle for survival. These processes don't create; they corrupt, becoming a part of our world only after the Fall (Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 8:18-21). Allowing more time for accident and death (the evolutionary processes of mutation and the struggle for survival) would only increase our genetic burden of birth defects and disease. The Nobel prize-winning biochemist, Jaques Monod, himself an outspoken atheist, once expressed his surprise that any Christian would believe that God would use such a "cruel, wasteful, and inefficient process" as evolution as His means of creation - and more time would only make the problem worse.

Christians who want to lengthen the creation days to allow for God's use of some process routinely forget that there are at least three different categories of process: processes that create, processes that maintain, and processes that destroy (processes of creation, conservation, and corruption, if you like the

alliteration). When it comes to automobiles, for example, pouring molten steel into especially designed molds (part of creating or making the car in the first place) is a process radically different from using gas, oil, the steering mechanism, etc. to drive the car (processes of operation and maintenance), and these are both radically different from rust, tread wear, and abrasion that represent processes of decay. Mutations and the struggle for survival are processes that really operate in our present world, but these neither would nor could be the processes a God who is grieved to His heart at the violence that fills our post-Fall world (Genesis 6:5-8) would use to create a world He called initially “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

What About Fossils?

But what about the fossils and the sedimentary strata that blanket the earth? These are the result of process, but not creative process. Would there be time since the Fall for these monumental fossil-bearing deposits to form?

Thanks to decades of indoctrination in evolution only, most people just assume it takes millions of years to form fossils and rock layers. Just the opposite is true. It is not even possible to form fossils slowly and gradually. Even evolutionary textbooks point out that most fossils are the remains of plants and animals buried rapidly under a heavy load of water-borne sediment (i.e. flood conditions). If the Grand Canyon had formed slowly and gradually, it would look nothing like it does today, and the same is true of coal seams and oil deposits. Trying to explain fossils, the Canyon, coal, and oil on

the basis of slow and gradual processes is like trying to explain the evidence of the Hiroshima blast or the explosion of a grain elevator as the result of millions of years of wind erosion. Great age makes it *difficult*, not easy, to understand many of the geological features of our earth.

New Catastrophisms

Indeed, the evidence of continental or global catastrophism is so strong that some evolutionists are now calling themselves “neo-Catastrophists” It is sadly ironic

Non-Christian geologists are beginning to recognize the overwhelming evidence of continental and global catastrophism.

that just as some Christians are beginning a loud and public attack on fellow Christians who take the Biblical account of the flood as well as the creation days historically, non-Christian geologists are beginning to recognize the overwhelming evidence of continental and global catastrophism, and the published research creationists/catastrophists is pointing the way to a new and productive understanding of such things as megabreccias, polystrate series, and coal.

Faulty Time Clocks

It is true enough that this new breed of catastrophist evolutionist

still fervently believes in the great age of the earth, but some secular scientists are openly admitting problems even in this most sacred pillar of evolutionary thought. In a college textbook written by an evolutionist for evolutionists, (*The Science of Evolution*, Macmillan, 1977, pp. 80-84), William Stansfield reviews about a dozen major indicators of the earth’s age. Concerning the amounts of water and lava released from volcanoes, helium in the atmosphere, uranium salts in the ocean, meteoritic dust in the crust, and meteorites in the sedimentary strata, etc., Stansfield says that creationists submit evidence of a young earth - and he responds neither by ridicule nor by refutation but by admitting creationists have made several scientifically valid points that pose real problems for the old earth view!

Radioactivity used in age dating? Stansfield - in that college textbook by an evolutionist for evolutionists - first describes the host of assumptions that must be made before isotope ratios can be used to estimate age, and then he points out gross errors that have resulted in the practice of those methods. His summary: It is obvious that radiometric techniques may not be the absolute dating methods that they are claimed to be. Age estimates on a given geological stratum by different radiometric methods are often quite different (sometimes by hundreds of millions of years). There is no absolutely reliable long-term radiological “clock” (p. 84).

What an astonishing assessment of radiometric dating by an evolutionist! The problems in the method are *obvious*, not difficult or subtle, or



hard to explain (and they are the problems, by the way, which young earth creationists have been pointing out for years). Age estimates for the same unit are *often*, not rarely or occasionally or once in a while, but *often* quite different. And not just different by 1 or 2% or even 10 or 20%; dates can differ by *hundreds of million* of years - just as young earth creationists have been pointing out.

But Stansfield doesn't even stop with the negative. When it comes to carbon-14, Stansfield simply acknowledges that the Creationists are right about the disequilibrium in its production and decay rate in the atmosphere, and he acknowledges quite logically that in itself this fact would argue for a young atmosphere. How does Stansfield the evolutionist get around the potential young earth implications of carbon-14?

"It is possible that a greater concentration of water vapor existed prior to the Biblical Flood (presumably about 5,000 years ago)" ... Wow! Here's an evolutionist writing a college textbook for evolutionists who treats the Biblical Flood as a simple fact of history, and he uses that fact to argue that the carbon-14 imbalance points either to a young earth or to a recent global disaster. Although a recent cataclysm is the more logical inference in this case, young earth creationists are really happy with either choice Stansfield makes.

Sadly "old earth creationists" or "progressive creationists" can be happy with neither choice, neither a young earth nor a recent global Flood. They have already reinter-

I have several Christian friends who are more committed to radiometric methods as proof of great age than many evolutionists I know!

preted the days of creation as long periods and have put all the geologic evidence of global disaster back in the indefinite "creation week" of long time between God's creative acts. So, to defend their view of the Bible they must side with evolutionists, robbing themselves of seeing the marvelous fit of the real evidence in God's world with the simple reading of His word. I have several Christian friends who are more committed to radiometric methods as proof of great age than many evolutionists I know! If only these old-earth Christians could accept the Scripture account of creation and Flood with the same simple, child-like faith they seem to put in radiometric age dating, I believe creationists working together could turn the topsy-turvy world of Lyell and Darwin right side up again!

The "Spectacles" of Scripture

Unity of thought, purpose, and action among the people of God, however, is only possible when we all put on the same "spectacles," as Calvin put it: adopt a humble (and sometimes humbling) willingness to look at the world and our place in it through the spectacles of Scripture. If we believe the spectacles are foggy and unclear (or worse, if we put them on backwards and look at Scripture through the spectacles of the world, i.e. the "vain philosophy" of Colossians 2:8 or the "science falsely so-called" of I Timothy 6:20, then unity in works cannot be

achieved (although, praise God, unity in faith and love can be maintained by His Spirit).

There remains of course, that old anesthetizing cliché, "But the Bible is not a textbook of science." The statement is, in a sense, true. I've written five science textbooks published by the secular press. But, like every other science textbook, they have all had to be revised; the Scriptures have never had to be revised even once. Why would we want to base our interpretations of Scripture on the changing milieu of science when we could base our understanding of science on the changeless Word of God? Surely God's Word is the surest guide to understanding God's world. That is a faith that works!

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The Redemption of the Soul

All mankind, with rare exception, believes in a life hereafter. There are many cults, pagan beliefs, and false teachers, all of which have their own versions of a life hereafter. All these have their origin in some manmade philosophy. Included among them are the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, New Age, Islam, Buddhism, and others. The Apostle Paul warned the church of his day regarding false teachings, stating the eminent danger they present to those of the living faith.

Paul wrote: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, (which are of the devil) and not after Christ. In Him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:8,9). Speaking of Jesus Christ, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

From the Scriptures we learn that man consists of two parts, namely the body and the soul. As to this earthly body, we are informed that "It is appointed once for man to die and then the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Then the dust (the body) shall return to the earth as it was in the beginning and the spirit (soul) shall return to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Indeed the Lord will reclaim every soul for He is the Creator. As such they belong to Him. However, we should be reminded that when death occurs, the believer will be redeemed to eternal life with the Lord while the unbeliever will be separated to suffer everlasting shame apart from God. The writer of Proverbs tells us, "The way of life is above to the wise, that one might part from Hell beneath" (Proverbs 15:24).

Enoch and Elijah

It is interesting to note that there were only two mortals in the history of the world who did not experience death. One of them was Enoch. Jude, the brother of James, tells us that Enoch was a prophet. Early in the history of mankind he foretold the coming of the Christ. Jude tells us that the people of Enoch's time were very wicked. Enoch prophesied: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they, the ungodly, committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15).

Enoch was a man of strong faith. It was said of him that "he walked with God." This does not mean that he literally walked with God, but rather that he set God always before him. He considered God's will in every aspect of his life and was

in close communication with God at all times. So much so that the author of Hebrews tells us that "he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

One can assume that the people of Enoch's generation hated Enoch for his preaching. They may even have sought to do him bodily harm. God hid Enoch from them, not under heaven, but in heaven for we read, "God took him, and he was not" (Genesis 5:24). Even as Enoch was translated into heaven, his corruptible body was changed to one of incorruption, for nothing impure can enter into the holiness of heaven.

Enoch's life is reflected in the words of a well known hymn:

*"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb."*

We can take a lesson from the life of Enoch, and that is that we are to be consistent in our Christian life. We should not leave our Christianity behind us when we exit the church door on the Lord's Day. We must take it with us and put it into practice through the week in all of life.

The second person to be translated and who did not experience the humility associated with death was Elijah. He also was a man of prayer and great faith. He was a prophet who lived in humble obedience to God's every command.

The Lord had somehow informed Elijah that his time of service had come to an end. On a certain day, when he and Elisha, his faithful servant, were walking along the road, there appeared a chariot of



fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. "Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven" (2 Kings 2:11).

The Soul Redeemed

As indicated previously, the soul of man is immortal. The last enemy the soul must face is death. Since the soul is immortal, the question may be asked: To whence is the destiny of that soul bound? In answer to that question we refer to the Scriptures. The Psalmist prays to God, "draw nigh to my soul and redeem it" (Psalm 69:18). On another occasion he declares with assurance, "God will redeem my soul from the grave" (Psalm 49:15). With conviction the Psalmist concludes: "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

The Apostle Paul writes: "Our Savior, Jesus Christ, gave Himself that He might redeem us unto Himself" (Titus 2:14). It is a certainty, based upon the promises of His Word, that God will not allow the soul to enter into the grave. Like Enoch and Elijah, He will instruct His angels to guide that soul into His very presence. Thus, the Apostle Paul defines death as a "departing of the soul, and going to be with Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:9). Paul regards the soul after death as more exalted than its condition while in the flesh, and, the change takes place immediately after death (Philippians 1:21, 23).

The question is often asked, "What do the souls do in heaven during the intermediate state?" The Bible is more or less silent with regard to that question. However, the Lord, in His Word, has revealed all that is

sufficient for us to know for our comfort and our assurance.

The vision of the Apostle John gives us some indication of heaven and the activity of the souls that have gone to be with the Lord. John says that he heard a voice from heaven saying to him: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13). This saying is interpreted to mean that those who die in the Lord are from that moment onward in a state of blessedness. They cease from their labors and enter into a state of righteousness. Death is for them a liberation from evil. It is the introduction into a state of complete happiness and joy.

John also goes on to say, "And behold, I heard a voice of many angels around the throne, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands." These angels are constantly present to minister unto the souls in heaven.

Finally, we are informed through the Scripture that the souls in heaven, together with the angelic choir, sing praises to God. They are, then, aware of their surroundings, able to communicate with one another, and will "live and rule with Christ until the second coming" (Revelation 4:6).

Mr. Dow Haan, Sr. is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is a frequent contributor to *The Outlook*.

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Be sure to check out our new 'work in progress' website: www.reformedfellowship.net.



Book Reviews

*Hoeksema, Homer C. **Unfolding Covenant History: An Exposition of the Old Testament. Volumes 1-4.** Edited by Mark H. Hoeksema. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000-2003. [For more information contact email@rfpa.org] Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien.*

The first four volumes of this fine set are now ready. They are the work of the late Professor Homer Hoeksema, ordained minister and professor of Old Testament and Dogmatics at the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. These four volumes cover Old Testament history from creation (Genesis 1) through the settlement in Canaan (Joshua 24). The future volumes in the set will be the contribution of Professor David Engelsma who now teaches Old Testament at the seminary.

Originally written in syllabus form for Professor Hoeksema's seminary students, these have now been edited by his son and put in a beautiful and more permanent form. Each volume is approximately 300 pages long, and is filled with history, Biblical exposition,

and interpretation. Very few aspects of Genesis through Joshua are left untouched.

While they were originally prepared for seminary students, this ought not to scare anyone who loves God's Word. They are valuable for Bible students and teachers alike. Their emphasis on God's covenant faithfulness will warm the heart of every believer. These very readable volumes are a veritable treasure-store into which, when the believer dips, he will surely increase his spiritual wealth.

Rev. Jerome Julien is a minister in the United Reformed Churches of North America and currently serves as a Bible teacher at Zion Christian School in Byron Center, Michigan.



*Jay E. Adams, **Handbook of Church Discipline.** Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986. 120pp. with Subject and Scripture index. Reviewed by Rev. Zach Anderson.*

Jay Adams, in his characteristic way, lays out a program for discipline that makes it easy for the church board to follow. His simple plan and careful reasoning give confidence where the church has treaded with trepidation. If you want confidence as an elder or sim-

ply wish to be a better Christian, take this book as your resource. Pastoral ministry will always be better if a minister studies Adams' books.

Before I tell you about this book, you need to know about the author.

Adams is an evangelical Presbyterian; that is, he belongs to that line of Christianity that is big on the Bible as the only answer for all of life. Hopefully that is your confession as well. He became known worldwide when he challenged the growing notion that the Bible, and therefore the minister, had little or nothing to say to the mentally "ill" or those trapped in problems requiring psychology's aid. Alongside some secular psychologists who knew nothing of the fall's reality, he helped shatter the myth of mental illness.

His answer (the Bible's answer): all our problems are rooted in man's sin and therefore all our answers are found in the revelation of God in the Scripture. There is very little that receives the title of mental illness that actually is mental illness. This is true whether I am a perpetrator of evil or a recipient of someone's wicked deeds (a victim). Adams would maintain that even if I am debilitated because of someone else's sins against me, it is still *my sins* that got me into that position: I failed to respond in a godly fashion to what was done against me in an ungodly fashion. Thus, *I am always accountable to God for what I am and have become.* When people are made to consider the root of their problem in their guilt and sinful responses to life, Adams found that the true believer in Christ can be equipped to be restored to peace with God.

Handbook of Church Discipline shows the high standards I am used to in reading Adams. Good study, careful exegesis of difficult passages, and a thoroughly systematic treatment of the topic make this a



text to be used by seminaries, elders, pastors, and any person concerned for the health of the Christian church.

While “remedial” discipline most often comes to mind when we hear the topic of discipline mentioned, we must also consider the other end of such a matter. That means “preventive” discipline is the way to a healthy church environment. Listen to what Adams says in another book (*From Forgiven to Forgiving*) about the church:

A forgiving community is made up of forgiven people who have not forgotten that fact. In pharisaical and legalistic communities, people have forgotten that it is only by the grace of God they are what they are. Or they find it possible to pretend they are better than they really are by conforming outwardly to biblical standards. Unless they are jogged from time to time by powerful and precise preaching, such communities gradually acquire the notion that they did not need forgiving all that much when they were saved—just minimally! But congregations at their best are composed of grateful people who do remember the pit from which they were rescued (Isaiah 51:1). They act neither shocked by sin in others nor superior to those in whom sin is found. (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, p. 112)

That is a good description of a healthy church in relationship to sin and sinners. Such a climate fosters

“preventive” discipline. That focus provides us with a climate of hope: when we work openly and honestly with each other we can expect the grace of God to grow in us through the regular contacts we sustain with Christians.

Another great highlight of this book (and one that makes it of interest to every Christian rather than just office-bearers) is Adams’ emphasis on self-discipline. Being self-disciplined will produce an atmosphere that will keep us from failure or hardness of heart should we find ourselves falling away or trapped by sin(s). Even when the formal procedure of corrective discipline is followed the end result should be to produce a restored believer living in self-discipline.

Each person in the church knows the pain of broken or unreconciled relationships. We must constantly try to restore such relationships or risk the condemnation that we are not the redeemed. This is a key to understanding what is basic about Christians. I would be surprised if in reading this chapter anyone could say that there is no one to whom they feel compelled to speak. Adams doesn’t write this way to increase our guilty feelings but to be faithful as an expositor of Scripture.

The next chapters, *One or Two Others* and *Tell It to the Church*, move us into the realm of the formal process of discipline. How do you know if you should progress to further steps? Who can decide about the future work of the church with this person? Listen to Adams:

As long as a reasonable discussion of these questions continues, you cannot charge him with failure to lis-

ten. But if the discussion ceases—if there is a failure to deal with issues in what you think is the biblical way and he tells you, in effect, “Look, we’ve said all there is to say on this matter. You are wrong and that is it”—you then have grounds for moving ahead. But you must first be sure that you have been willing to listen to him as well.

A repentant, forgiven sinner must be restored fully into the life of the church. Adams covers that topic in chapter 9, *Restoring to Fellowship*. Here he emphasizes forgiving and assisting the restored sinner (2 Corinthians 2:7). That means we give him “whatever help—and all the help” he needs to become a productive member of the body. Such an emphasis reminds us to be hopeful: some will return and follow the Lord.

Going back to chapter 8, *Removal From the Midst*, we find Adams’ discussion of excommunication. He takes pains to demonstrate that such an action is indeed “restorative” and “remedial.” He encourages us to look again at what we are really doing:

It is with reference to those whose sins become apparent that church discipline deals. It is not a process of separating all the tares from the wheat, but of separating from the church both tares and those who look like tares because of an unrepentant lifestyle. Church discipline is one of the two ways — the other being apostasy — in which the church makes a “judgment” about those who have a false profession of faith.”

(see 1 John 2:19)

I have only ever had to preside over one excommunication in a church. The result of that event is yet unknown. I know that when it came to actually excommunicating that person, we all prayed with great diligence for a reversal in the heart. This chapter gives great encouragement to the officers of the church who want to be diligent in their work.

As with the Old Testament, so in the New, we find God using the world and Satan as a whip on His rebellious children. Their spanking produces an earnest desire to return and be restored. Of course, if nothing happens he is to be treated, according to Jesus, “as a heathen and a tax collector.” “This means that, while making no *final* judgment about his actual heart condition, the church is to treat him *as if* he were an unbeliever.”

How do you treat an unbeliever? Well, you evangelize him! Let him attend worship if he desires. Let him be a part of your functions. But share the good news with him so he repents.

Anyone who has ever served as an Elder knows that church discipline is an integral part of the church’s work. I hope many of us may learn from a saint who has done countless hours of research for us. Let our Councils and Consistories be found ready to use such practical material and the fear of God will grow in our midst.

Rev. Zach Anderson is the Pastor of the Seventh Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He serves on the Promotions Committee of the Reformed Fellowship Board.

Worldview or Worldly

(continued from page 19)

speaking on the topic of Reformed Eschatology (the doctrine of last things), and Dr. Willborn will address the topic of Church History, carefully looking at how it has shaped the present church. Both of these topics will alter the way the attendee views the world and their life in the world. Again, the use of Reformed Bible College’s beautiful Grand Rapids campus has been secured. And again, great things are expected of the upcoming conference to the end that those attending will find much help in their understanding and living of the Christian faith. Now is the time to train the mind for, and set the heart upon, the task of living a distinctive Christian life in a dark world.

The pastors that began this conference did so because they were heart sick with the way so many youth and young adults in their reformed churches seemed to just float through church life with little zeal for the greatness of Reformed theology. This failure of many, to see how Reformed Christian thought had previously shaped the world and how it ought now to be shaping the world, was the catalyst for action. It is for this reason the conference is offered. The goal is of introducing young adults to speakers and topics in such a context as G.L.W.C., that they might be stretched and encouraged to a Christianity that is sound theologically and passionate in application.

If Reformed and Presbyterian Churches are to prosper in generations to come, and not be relegated to a shelf in the evangelical mu-

seum, our young adults must grasp the greatness, beauty and power of Biblical doctrine—which is well summarized in the reformed confessions.

For this cause the conference exists. For this cause we invite your help. Pray for the conference, the speakers and the students. Help the conference to become better known—spread the word in community and church. And finally, if you are a rising tenth grader through college age make plans to come the 2004 G.L.W.C.

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Mission Update

Greetings from Trinidad! I am writing to ask you for your prayers for a new ministry of West Indies Covenant Ministries. We have begun a new weekly radio program. It airs on Inspirational Radio which reaches Trinidad, Tobago, parts of Guyana, Barbados and Grenada. The potential to reach a large number of people is tremendous. The show airs live from Port of Spain and is a Theological talk show where we take calls from our listeners for the last half of the show. We have begun a series on salvation from Romans 3:21-25 and deal with the doctrines of Justification, Redemption, and Propitiation. Nearly half of the people here identify themselves as Roman Catholic but have never been taught. There is little teaching on the Christian Radio here so this will be an entirely new show. We will also have a large Charismatic audience as well as Hindus.

Please pray for:

1. My preparation for the weekly show.
2. Revs. Ramzan Hosein and Ricky Gosyne who will be answering the callers' questions with me.
3. Many listeners and for the Spirit of God to use this to spread the truth of the Reformed Faith.

Thanks and Blessings,
Pastor McGee

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