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# No Condemnation

*“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1, 2).*

Every day you and I are confronted with temptations that go against the desires of the God who created us; the God who saved us; and the God who loves us.

Romans 8 gives us hope that the struggle we experience is solved by Christ Jesus. This passage does not teach a life of perfection, nor does it teach a life free from struggle. It teaches us how God has come into human experience and done what no mere man - no sinful man - could do. God, through Christ, defeated that which bound us. He defeated

sin. Paul announces that with the coming of Christ Jesus the condemnation that has hung over the saints is removed.

The saint is saved not only from the verdict of condemnation, but also from the condemnatory condition that accompanies the verdict of condemnation. Part of the condemnation under which the saints existed is detailed in Romans 7. They are under the dominion of sin and under the power of sin.

Paul says in Romans 7:14, that he is

in bondage to sin. There is now *NO condemnation either in declaration or in condition, either in “verdict” (Romans 5) or in “prison term” (Romans 8)* for those who are in Christ Jesus. All condemnation is done away with in Christ Jesus. It is this treatment of condemnation, that of bondage, that Paul teaches in this passage.

There is no condemnation or bondage because “the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” What does this mean? “Law”, as it is used here, has reference to dominion or jurisdiction, similar to a constitution. Consequently, it could be read that the dominion/constitution of the Spirit of Life has set us free from the dominion/constitution



Volume 54, No. 2 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) “And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’ (Judges 7:20).

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of sin and death. A good example of this can be found in our experience with the recent war in Iraq: the dominion of the coalition forces set the Iraqis free from the dominion of Saddam Hussein.

The Spirit of Life is the Holy Spirit. He is the One who was sent to the church on Pentecost. The dominion of the Spirit of Life, then, is the reign of the Holy Spirit. It is, in essence, the Kingdom of God. This kingdom always existed, for God always existed. This kingdom, however, did not exist *with man* until Jesus Christ came. The miracles He performed indicated that the Kingdom of God had come ... and the righteous of that time were waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom of life, peace, and righteousness.

But Paul does not just explain that one dominion has released us from another. It is “in Christ Jesus” that we are set free. We need to be set free from the dominion of sin and death. This dominion is all that is opposed to *God* since it goes against His will. This dominion is opposed to *us* since it results in our death. The saints of God *want* to be set free – this is the anguished cry of Paul at the end of Romans 7. Romans 7 is the cry of the regenerate, not the unregenerate. However, we were *not* set free because of the Law. Paul taught this in Romans 7. It is “in Christ Jesus” that we are set free.

Paul is contrasting our experience under the Law with our experience under Christ Jesus.

The Law could not set us free from the dominion of sin and death. It was not because of the Law *itself*.

As Paul said in Romans 7, the Law is not sin. It was because *we* were in the flesh. The Law could not release Paul from the dominion of sin. It did not have the power. The Law merely stated what was righteous and pleasing to God. The Law merely required of its hearers what to do. The Law did not *perform* or *do* anything. It came from God written with human letters on tablets of stone... merely reference and documentation.

What the Law was unable to do, though, *God did*. God did *not* do this through the Law. He did not do it through Moses. He did not do this

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***The saints of God  
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only for the Jews. God set us free by sending His Son. It is in sending His Son that we have been set free.

Jesus was not sent only to be a good moral teacher. Jesus was not sent only to be someone to teach us how we can be in touch with God. *Jesus was sent with the express purpose of dealing with sin. To make His primary mission anything else is to twist His purpose.*

There is no condemnation for us because sin was condemned. The Law condemned sin in the sense that it declared a judicial verdict against it as Paul says in Romans 7. What the Law could not do, how-

ever, was *execute* or *carry out* the verdict. While the Law could *declare* sin “guilty” it could not *lock up* sin in prison. The Law was unable, but God through His Son was able, and He did it by His death and resurrection.

The wages of sin is death. The wages that the dominion of sin *pays* is death. Jesus received and endured those wages, not because He Himself had sinned, but because He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. He took upon Himself our sins. Consequently, when Jesus died, he was as much under the dominion of sin as is possible – *HE WAS DEAD*.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead overthrew the dominion of sin. The dominion of sin had no dominion over the Son, Jesus Christ. The dominion and power of sin could not hold Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The dominion and power of sin could not hold Him who was the author of Life. *The dominion of sin could not hold back God.*

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the condemnation of sin is complete. Consequently, for all those who are by faith united to Christ Jesus, there is no more condemnation. The agony of Romans 7 has been replaced by the triumph and comfort of Romans 8. The dominion of sin so powerfully and fully presented by Paul in Romans 7 is even more powerfully and fully shown by Paul to have been overthrown in Romans 8. *He condemned sin in the flesh*. The judgment declared by God back in the garden, in Genesis 3, is finally executed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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## *God did not save us so that we would live in what displeases Him.*

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God removed the dominion of sin so that His people would be able to present a righteous life to Him. God did not save us so that we would live in what displeases Him. God does not save His people so that they can identify themselves as thieves, adulterers, covetous, rebels, homosexuals, alcoholics, or any other thing disgraceful to God. You cannot call yourself a Christian and still identify yourself as a sinner.

That is what is so wicked about the voices in our own day. There are some who say that you can identify yourself as an alcoholic and yet be a good Christian. There are some who say that you can identify yourself as a “celibate” homosexual and yet be a member in good standing in the church of Christ, even a minister or pastor. There are some who say that you can be a rebellious teenager and yet should make profession of faith. There are some who say that a man may look at a woman lustfully (as long as you don’t touch) and partake of the Lord’s Supper. *NO! Christ did not set you free from the dominion of sin so that you can still identify with it. To walk according to the flesh, to set your mind on the things of the flesh, is to be under the dominion of sin ... it is death.* To those whose identity is “in Christ” there is no other identity. There is *no* identification with sin.

To those who are outside of Christ, the law that is now given to us may seem restrictive, because *they*

have no heart for the law. But for those who are in Christ Jesus, this law is still our delight. Just as Paul delighted in the Law in Romans 7, how much more does he delight in the Law due to Romans 8 ... but only because he is *in Christ Jesus*. If someone were to receive the law apart from being identified with Christ, it can *only* result in condemnation for him or her. But, in

Christ Jesus, the righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled. There is *no* condemnation! The law is one of gratitude for us, precisely because we are in Christ Jesus ... precisely because we are identified with Jesus.

**Mr. Talman Wagenmaker** is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is also a student at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

## *Were you there?!*

Professor David Engelsma,  
Professor of Dogmatics, Protestant Reformed Seminary

&

Dr. Richard Mouw,  
President, Fuller Theological Seminary

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# Heresy [2]

## Heresy: What Is At Stake?

Who is a Christian? Can we call those who reject the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith - Christians? Liberal theologians say they believe in God, but what is unclear is why they do so and what they mean by God. They seem to take pride in how far they can push the "theological" envelope, as if the departure from orthodox theology is a guarantee of daring and originality. One can cite numerous examples of church leaders who consider themselves "progressive" and "saviors" of the church.

In 1984 David Jenkins, the Anglican bishop of Durham, England, delighted the press, as any heretical bishop will, and gave some spectacular headlines with his denial of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Jenkins said that the Resurrection was not a single event, "but a series of experiences." Jesus was raised up, that is, "the very life and purpose and personality which was in him was continuing."

In the 1990s the Episcopal bishop Spong, infamous for his passionately held liberal convictions, saw passages in the Gospels portraying Jesus of Nazareth "as narrow-minded, vindictive, and even hypocritical," and "guilty of what we today would surely call anti-Semitism." He also made headlines when he ordained gay, lesbian and bisexual priests in his diocese. He also favors abortions, the ordination of women, and the blessing of homosexual relationships.

Recently, United Methodist bishop Joe Sprague of Chicago questioned the eternal deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His bodily resurrection, and His atonement for the sins of the world. The bishop may profess tolerance toward a host of anti-Christian ideas, but he has no patience with his critics. He calls them "narrow-minded," "theologically bankrupt," and tools of the "well-heeled religious right."

In *Gagging God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, Dr. D.A. Carson wonders how the self-confessed liberal David Edwards can be called a Christian. He notes that this instructed and thoughtful theologian explicitly rejects the Fall, denies that human beings have any need for an atonement provided by a divine/human redeemer, discounts belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus, and concludes that "everything" in the Gospel of John "must be questionable." Carson rightly comments that in Edward's case, "We are not in the realm of quibbling about the precise definition of inerrancy; we are in the realm of those truths without which Christianity is no longer Christianity."

But this departure from orthodoxy in the name of liberalism is neither original nor progressive. It reflects

the 20th century self-conscious revolt against authority. Liberal academic theologians revolted against the authority of Scripture. Their theology became more of a philosophical exercise for solving intellectual problems than a careful examination of the history of doctrine and the faithful study of the infallible Word of God. To study theology in liberal institutions was to enter a spiritual wilderness. Evangelical theologian Dr. John Stott tells of his own sad experience at Cambridge. He writes, "When I was myself an undergraduate at Cambridge during World War II, the Divinity School was entirely liberal in its orientation. I believe there were no evangelical believers in any British university post related to Theology."

### Who Are Heretics?

The term "heretic" is applicable to individuals or groups, to laymen or pastors. The term "heresy" has not been uniformly specified from age to age and from group to group. Therefore, we must obviously hesitate to stigmatize someone as a heretic or immediately call someone heretical when there is a disagreement about a specific doctrine. Care must be exercised as there is much confusion what is meant by heresy. Let me give some examples. The Roman Catholic Church defines a heretic as "any baptized person who, retaining the name Christian, pertinaciously denies or doubts one or another truth believed by the divine and catholic faith."

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*Can we call those who reject the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith - Christians?*

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Is the Salvation Army heretical because they don't baptize converts? Merja Merras, Lecturer in the Orthodox Theological Faculty, University of Joensuu, Finland, seems to say so. He says that if a group should arise within the church which does not baptize, totally rejecting the value of water baptism, and which yet insists that its members are Christians and God's children "they are heretics from the point of the church, and I do not see any reason why we cannot declare this openly."

Is apartheid heresy? I never agreed with apartheid. But I find it ironic that the World Council of Churches (WCC), which has among its members some very theologically liberal denominations and institutions, issued several resolutions of condemnation of apartheid as "a sin which, as a fundamental matter of faith, is to be rejected as a perversion of the Gospel." And right in step with the WCC, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared in 1982 that the approval of apartheid by the South African Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) was heresy.

To add to the confusion about who is heretical, Michael Ramsey, archbishop of York and later archbishop of Canterbury, denounced English fundamentalism (evangelicalism) as at once "heretical and sectarian." He also insinuated that Dr. Billy Graham was a heretic. He said that Graham's evangelicalism was "emphatically not that of the Bible." According to Ramsey, Graham's theology represents "a fixation of distorted elements from the Bible without the balanced tradition of

scriptural truth as a whole."

In our time the words "orthodoxy" and "heresy" are distasteful to those theologians heavily influenced by classic liberalism, postmodernism, relativism, radical feminism, and religious pluralism. Nevertheless, we must not hesitate to distinguish truth from error. The battle for truth has been with us since the Fall. And the turbulent history of the church shows that the longer error is tolerated, the

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***If we believe in objective truth, we automatically leave place for a distinction between truth and error, and thus for a distinction between orthodoxy and heresy.***

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easier it is to compromise the truth. But if we believe in objective truth, however cautiously and imperfectly we may think we grasp it, we automatically leave place for a distinction between truth and error, and thus for a distinction between orthodoxy and heresy.

#### **What Is Heresy?**

What is heresy? Obviously, it opposes orthodoxy, which is a fixed, enduring, unchanging body of truth which is to be believed and obeyed. Hence, it is a departure from orthodox teaching which threatens church unity. In the early church heresy was viewed as a form of blasphemy, as it exposed the true

faith to contention, even error. For these early Christians, a person or group that believed and taught false doctrines was a very serious matter because it violated Christ's word (cf. John 14:6).

The word heresy is derived from a Greek word meaning "to pick out, to choose" from the full truth. Consequently, heresy is not just a lack of knowledge, or a misunderstanding of some fine points of theology, or a limited insight into the Scripture. Far from suggesting personal originality or the daring discovering of new truth, heresy is a narrowing of the world to the things heretics arbitrarily decide to select from the riches of the Christian faith. The Spanish theologian Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 636) explains that heretics are those who "holding perverse dogma, draw apart from the Church of their own free will." In *On Heresies*, Isidore stresses that heretics are those who not only think wrongly, but persist with determined wickedness in thinking wrongly. By contrast, an orthodox believer is "a man upright in faith" who is also living a good Christian life."

#### **What Is At Stake?**

Why should we be so concerned about heresy? Why take the time and effort to recognize, expose, and reject it? Heresy is not a trivial matter. It is a destructive power which threatens the church to her foundations. It mutilates and mutes her witness in a world so desperately in need of the Gospel. Heresy is cruel. It leads people astray. It leaves them without hope, with nothing to hang on to. And it does have eternal consequences! The doctrine of salvation is at stake



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when heresy is taught and accepted! From this perspective, I think of Dr. Karl Barth's (1886 - 1968) devastating critique of 19th century Protestant liberal theology. He boldly denounced it as heresy. Bible teacher and author Arno Gaebelein (1861-1945), who had become disillusioned with the spread of liberalism within Methodism and left it, argued strongly that "modernistic" Christianity was "the most dangerous infidelity true Christianity had ever faced."

We should not hesitate to denounce liberalism. There is indeed so much at stake. The meaning of the cross of Christ has suffered a terrible decline due to liberal theology.

At the very heart of the Gospel is the proclamation that Christ died for our sins. Not His life but His death saves us. Christ died in our place. The only basis on which we can have any hope of standing in the presence of the God is the shed blood of Jesus Christ. In obscuring these Gospel truths, liberal theology is guilty of the worst possible crime against the Gospel.

The Biblical message is clear. If a theologian denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus, he forfeits the right to be called a Christian, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith .... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14,17)

The Reformed theologian John Gresham Machen (1881-1937) in *Christianity and Liberalism* clearly explained why he believed a liberal cannot be called a Christian.

Machen carefully outlined the fundamental doctrines of the church, putting his heaviest emphasis on the substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus. It was liberalism's failure to understand this that made it a different religion. Machen did not view liberalism as partly Christian and partly non-Christian; rather liberal theology was to be seen as non-Christian, heterodox, and anti-Christian. The reason for Machen's bold statement was that he was convinced classic liberal theology unashamedly rejected and ridiculed belief in the supernatural Christ of

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who not only think  
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the Scripture and the Scripture of Christ.

#### **Our Response**

How should Christians, who embrace and seek to obey the Word of God, respond to those who deny the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith? St. Augustine (354-430) discovered one positive side to heresy. He believed when heretics are disciplined, their expulsion from the church will benefit the faithful. He wrote, "For heretics spring from among those who, even though they are members of the Church fall into error. When they have been expelled, they are very helpful, not by teaching the truth, for they do not know it, but by awakening material-minded Catholics to seek the truth,

and wise Catholics to unfold it. Thus many are awakened from sleep by the heretics to look on the daylight of God and to rejoice in it."

We must remain solid at the core while staying mushy at the edges. Christian scholars cannot attain infallibility in this life. The evangelical theologian Dr. Carl F. Henry notes, "Even the apostles had to confess their knowledge to be only in 'part,' and even this knowledge includes elements that, while not beyond human understanding, await profounder clarification."

St. Augustine's observation that not every error is heresy is something almost universally agreed on in Christian history. In dealing with heresy, we must distinguish between what is essential and non-essential. In their time John Calvin and Herman Bavinck wrote about the fundamental and non-fundamental articles of the faith.

A recent example is membership in the Evangelical Theological Society. The members agree on the fundamental doctrines of the evangelical faith, but they do have some drastic differences. Furthermore, Reformed churches do accept as valid the baptism of a Roman Catholic. In other words, we must be cautious before we accuse someone of heresy. If we detect heresy, we should not immediately shoot from the hip and lay charges. We should do our "homework" and make sure we do not quote theologians out of context. Research the sources of apparent heretical statements. Get second opinions. Furthermore, it won't hurt to keep in mind that the church did not start in the 21st century. We can learn from the doctrinal struggles in the past. We can learn

from our Reformed forefathers, who by the grace of God remained faithful to the Gospel, and dealt with heresy. I also firmly believe in prayer for the errant. Scripture says that prayers are to be made “for everyone,” which include those who hold false doctrine and oppose God’s Word (1 Timothy 2:1). And humility is to characterize those who seek to restore one “caught in any trespass,” whatever that sin may be (Galatians 6:1).

Dr. Schaeffer repeatedly stated that we can only address the errant with tears, warning them like a shepherd warns his sheep when they wander away. Schaeffer believed that if we can’t have compassion for the erring, we should remain silent. “What God wants from us is not only doctrinal faithfulness,” wrote Schaeffer, “but our love day by day. Not in theory, mind you, but in practice.” Exercising love does not mean accommodating heresy. Schaeffer insisted the longer an error is condoned, the easier it is to compromise the truth. When the integrity of the Gospel and the Body of Christ is in immediate danger, we must have the courage to speak out, call a spade a spade regardless the cost.

**Rev. Johan D. Tangelder** is a retired minister in the Christian Reformed Church living in East Strathroy, Ontario.

# We Confess

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

### *Article 9: Of the Scripture Testimony of the Holy Trinity*

As we said in our last article, the Reformed Faith is the catholic Faith. And one of the purposes of the Belgic Confession was to express our catholicity, which is especially highlighted in Articles 8-9 on the Holy Trinity. In thinking about these articles on the Trinity, we enter the deepest of Christian mystery. We join with the Church of all ages singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3) We join the choirs of heaven singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy, LORD God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8)

But how do we know that the Triune God on whom we sing is One, yet Three? Article 9 turns to this question as it gives us two testimonies of the Holy Trinity; first, in Scripture, then in experience.

#### **A Doctrine of the True Church**

Before we delve into the testimonies of the Trinity, let us begin where Article 9 ends. The primary author of the Confession, de Brès, was facing both the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands. And in order to distinguish the Reformed Christians from the radical Anabaptists, our Confession explains in great detail what we believe about the Trinity. There is nothing new here, only ancient orthodoxy.

The Confession, then, ends by saying, “This doctrine of the Holy Trinity has always been affirmed and maintained by the true Church since the time of the apostles to this very day against...

1. *Jews*, who are obviously anti-Trinitarian, rejected Jesus Christ as the Son of God;
2. *Mohammedans* (Muslims), who are also anti-Trinitarian, believing Jesus Christ was only a prophet;
3. *Marcion* (2<sup>nd</sup> c.), founded a sect in 144 in Rome, denied that Jesus was the Son of the God of the Old Testament, who was evil, but was the Son of the God of the New Testament, who was love;
4. *Manes* (3<sup>rd</sup> c.), was a Persian who claimed that he was the Paraclete promised by Jesus, taught that there are dueling eternal principles of Light and Darkness, and that the Christ was a semi-divine being which came to teach the world the “Light” and that the human Jesus was crucified because he interfered with the mission of the Christ;
5. *Praxeas* (3<sup>rd</sup> c.), taught what is called “Patripassionism,” that is, that on the cross it was the Father who was crucified, not the Son;
6. *Sabellius* (3<sup>rd</sup> c.), taught that there was only one God, and that



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the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit refer to the different modes in which this God reveals Himself in history;

7. *Samosatenus* (Paul of Samosata, 3<sup>rd</sup> c.), was the bishop of Antioch who taught adoptionism, that is, that the man Jesus was adopted by God and was indwelt by the Logos of God.
8. *Arius* (250-336), the greatest of ancient heretics, taught that the Son of God was a created being, and therefore was less than fully God.

So we as Reformed Christians reject all the ancient anti-Trinitarian heresies and “we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nicea, and of Athanasius; likewise, that which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers.”

How is this relevant? In our post-modern age, many Generation-X and Net-Gen young people see the world as meaningless, as purposeless, and a random combination of isolated events. But as the church of Jesus Christ, we can offer not only a transcendent reality for the future, but a reality far larger than the events in our lives that spans the ages of history past.

### **The Holy Trinity & Scripture**

#### *Old Testament*

The Trinity is a mystery in both senses of the word. It is a mystery in the Biblical sense of a truth that was hidden in shadows in the Old Testament, but is now exposed to the light of Jesus Christ in the New. And it is a mystery because it is an incomprehensible, transcendent truth that only God Himself knows fully.

The Old Testament, as we saw in our last article, teaches the fundamental doctrine of the Jewish Church, that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10-11, 44:6, 8, 45:5-6, 14, 18, 21-22, 46:9). But the Confession draws out for us that there are also shadowy pictures of a plurality within the Godhead. Speaking of the “Us” and “Our” passages in Genesis 1:26-27 and 3:22, the Confession says, “From this saying, Let *us* make man in *our* image, it appears that there

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are more persons than one in the Godhead; and when He says, *God* created, He signifies the unity. It is true, He does not say how many persons there are...”

We also see the Holy Trinity in a shadowy way in the following texts:

1. In Genesis 1:1-3 God makes the heavens and the earth, the Spirit of God hovers over the creation, and God by His word speaks everything into existence;
2. In Psalm 33:6 it is by the *word* and *breathe* of the *LORD* that the heavens are made;
3. In Isaiah 6:3 the seraphim cry out three times “Holy, Holy, Holy”;

4. In Isaiah 61:1 we hear the voice of the *Servant of the LORD* speak of the *Spirit* of the *LORD* being upon Him;

5. In Isaiah 63:7-14 we read that it was the *LORD*, the angel of His presence, and the Holy Spirit that redeemed Israel from Egypt;

6. Finally, in Numbers 6:24-26, the Aaronic Blessing, we are blessed by the *LORD* three times.

#### *New Testament*

The Confession goes on to teach that “what seems to be somewhat obscure in the Old Testament is very plain in the New Testament.” As Augustine said, the New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New revealed; and as Francis Turretin said, “The light of the New Testament serves in a great measure to illuminate for us the obscurity of the ancient oracles.”

This plainness is shown as we hear the voice of the Father, see the Son in the Jordan, and see the Spirit descending as a dove; as Jesus institutes baptism in the name (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (plural); as the angel pronounces to Mary that the Holy Spirit shall come upon her, that the power of the Most High shall overshadow her, and what is to be born shall be the Son of God; and as Paul blesses us with the grace of Christ, the love of God (the Father), and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Another practical aspect of the Trinity is that this mysterious doctrine is the basis of our personal faith in a personal God. The Persons of the Holy Trinity have eternal love and fellowship with each other,

## Questions for Further Study/Discussion

1. Do some studying and try to apply the various ancient heresies of the Trinity with false religions, cults, and teachers today.
2. As you read through your Bible, find other shadowy allusions to the Holy Trinity.
3. How does 1 John apply to the doctrine of the Trinity? What does that tell us about its importance?
4. Use the three Persons of the Trinity as an outline for your prayers and as a way to greater devotion of the Holy Trinity.

and when we place our faith in Jesus Christ we are united to that personal fellowship. Without the Trinity there would be no personal relationship with a personal God, no personal relationships as image bearers of God, and no communion with God in worship. We need a Trinitarian God.

### The Holy Trinity & Christian Experience

The second testimony that the Confession gives for the Holy Trinity is Christian experience. As the Confession says,

All this we know as well from the testimonies of Holy Writ as from their operations, and *chiefly by those we feel in ourselves ...* Moreover, we must observe the particular offices and operations of these three persons *towards us.*"

I went to an Assemblies of God college, which, if you do not know, is Pentecostal. The man who taught me the basics of Calvinism was my theology professor and he always told me, "Danny, theology that does not become biography is wishful thinking." What he was saying was

that Christian doctrine and life must go hand in hand. We as Calvinists are often reluctant to speak of experience in case we go to the extreme of Pentecostalism. But we must acknowledge that there is an experiential side of the Christian life. We are emotional beings and must not suppress that which is a part of our humanity.

### God the Father

We experience God the Father, the first Person of the Holy Trinity, as our "Creator, by His power." He is both our Creator physically speaking (Genesis 1), but also our Creator spiritually speaking (Ephesians 1; Galatians 4). As our Father spiritually speaking, we can speak of this both from the point of view of eternity in election, and from the point of view of time, in adoption. Although we have been chosen by the Father from eternity, we have to be born again spiritually and adopted by God in time to experience His Fatherly care in our lives. As Calvin said, in his sermon on Ephesians 1:13-14

Although we cannot conceive either by argument or reason how God has elected us before the creation of the

world, yet we know it by His declaring it to us; *and experience itself vouches for it sufficiently*, when we are enlightened in the faith.

### God the Son

We experience God the Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, as our "Redeemer, by His blood." We know experientially that we are born in sin and continue to live in sin all the days of our lives. We need redemption. We need to be freed from our slavery to the Devil, and pass through the waters of the Red Sea, that is, Jesus Christ's blood, in order to be saved. We know this, we've experienced this if we have faith in Christ! And we continue to experientially receive the benefits of Christ's redeeming work in the Lord's Supper, the sacrament which continually feeds and nourishes our souls.

And we experience God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, as our "Sanctifier, by His dwelling in our hearts." Again, that ongoing, sanctifying work of the Spirit must be experienced. How? We experience Him through the means of grace, the preaching of the Holy Gospel and the partaking of the Holy Sacraments (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 65).

Know your Triune God; experience your Triune God: "To the great One in Three, eternal praises be, hence evermore. His sovereign majesty, may we in glory see, and to eternity love and adore."

**Rev. Daniel R. Hyde** is the Pastor of the Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, California.



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# Press Release of the Church Order Committees of the URCNA and the CanRC

The meeting of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order, held November 4-6, 2003 at the United Reformed Church of Dutton, Michigan.

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gorp, representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John Van Woudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Psalm 46 in which he reflected on how the psalmist reminds us about God's presence in the church but also in the world: "Come, behold the works of the Lord, how He has wrought desolations in the earth." Witness the devastating fires in California and other disasters. The world agonizes in pain. Yet: "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob our refuge." Therefore we may continue in trust and confidence.

After opening prayer, an agenda and timetable for the next three days were circulated and adopted. The minutes of the August 5-7, 2003 meeting were reviewed and approved.

A review of the articles thus far adopted resulted in a few modifications in grammar and syntax. Several items yet to be done were noted. In the article dealing with 'The Classis' the following sentence was added: "Ordinarily a classis shall consist of between 8 and 12 churches."

## General Synods

The matter of the number and choosing of delegates to general synod was once more discussed. It was clear that arriving at an appropriate formulation of such an article depends in great measure on understanding the nature and functioning of a general synod. Since the functioning process is normally identified in a set of regulations for general synod, it was decided to approach the 2004 Synods of the respective churches for a mandate for the Combined Committee to also formulate such synod regulations.

Since broader assemblies ought to be deliberative in nature the general consensus is that delegation from each consistory will result in numbers that would make this deliberative functioning impractical if not impossible. It was therefore agreed that the second to the last classis before general synod will choose delegates to that synod. The exact numbers or formula will be determined later after advice from the respective 2004 Synods has been

received. Regulations for broader assemblies shall also delineate the function of the convening church and / or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.

Dr. Witten presented an interim report regarding 'gaps' still to be addressed by the Committee. This report compared the Church Order of Dort, 1920 with the proposed church order thus far completed, identifying items still to be addressed.

Rev. VanWoudenberg presented a draft formulation of various appendices to the proposed Church Order. They included credentials for delegates to classis, regional synod and general synod as well as stipulations for a licensure exam, candidacy exam, ordination exam and a colloquium doctum. An ad-hoc committee of two members was struck to serve the Committee with recommendations regarding these appendices.

## The Office of Minister

The following was added to Article 2: No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it. Also the stipulation was added in the relevant article that all ministers shall remain subject to the church order whether he serves as the minister of a congregation or as one charged with some other ministerial task. In the article dealing with the calling of an ordained minister within the federation, wording was added. The classis is to ensure the good order of the calling process. Written testimonies of his (the minister being called) good standing and of his release from the church and classis he last served are to be submitted.

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An understanding was reached that it is the responsibility of classis to examine a student requesting a license to exhort or speak an edifying word in the churches. This is based on the consideration that such license to exhort extends beyond the local congregation and affects all the churches of the federation.

Regarding the preparation for the ministry, articles were formulated stating that competent men shall be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church shall see to it that his financial needs are met.

Anyone aspiring to the ministry shall seek licensure to exhort in the churches. Such licensure shall be granted only after the student has completed at least one year of theological education, and has sustained a licensure examination conducted by his classis. Stipulations for such examination to be specified in an appropriate appendix. Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry and only for the duration of his theological training. All the work of the licentiate shall be conducted under consistorial supervision.

At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct a candidacy examination, as stipulated in the relevant appendix. Upon sustaining this examination, the classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall de-

clare him eligible for call among the churches of the federation.

When, for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances, a pastoral relationship has become irreconcilably broken, a minister may be released from his duties in the congregation only under the following conditions: A. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline, B. This release shall take place only when attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of

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***It is the responsibility of classis to examine a student requesting a license to exhort or speak an edifying word in the churches.***

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classis has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation; C. This release shall occur only with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, which approval shall include provisions for proper support of the minister and his family for up to two years.

The council from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, where after he shall be honorably discharged from office.

**The Office of Elder and Deacon**

The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons

by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of: First, the council shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office and who indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the council may invite the congregation to direct attention to suitable men. The number of nominees shall be at least equal to, or at most twice, the number of vacancies.

Second, after public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the regulations adopted for that purpose, to a term specified by the consistory.

Third, the council shall appoint the elders and deacons and shall announce their names to the congregation two weeks prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory. They shall be publicly ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form and shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a term specified by the consistory and having been appointed by the council, shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, and shall be ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form before entering upon their work.

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of shepherding and



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ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. They shall see to it that their fellow-elders, the minister(s) and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and sacraments, persist in praying for the congregation, assist in catechizing the youth, and promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels. Moreover they shall visit the members of the congregation according to needs, engage in family visiting, preserve and promote concord and unity among the members and between the congregation and its office bearers, exercise discipline in the congregation, promote the work of evangelism and missions, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order.

#### **Church Assemblies**

In every assembly a clerk shall keep an accurate record of the proceedings. A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall ordinarily meet once per year. If it appears necessary to convene a regional synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its classis. The regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and with lawful appeals of decisions of classis. The chairman, vice-chairman and clerk shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod. In addition to hearing and acting on the reports of its deputies, it shall determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

Regarding the term of the deputies of regional synod it was agreed that the deputies shall serve until they are discharged from their duties by their regional synod.

As discussed earlier, a general synod shall consist of delegates chosen by the classes. A general synod shall meet at least once every three years at a time and place set by the previous synod, which shall also designate a convening church. If it appears necessary to convene a general synod before the ap-

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***Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry and only for the duration of his theological training.***

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pointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod. The chairman, vice-chairman and clerk(s) shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod. In addition to acting on reports that were mandated by the previous synod, a general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and the regional synods.

The last hour was used to review the agenda for the next meeting. The press release was presented and approved. Again it was stated that it is important to understand that the Committee, in fulfilling its

mandate, is only preparing a church order proposal. And, while considerable time is spent in formulating the various articles, taking in consideration their history and their function in the new united federation, it is still a working document. The Committee will present its report to the 2004 Synods of the respective churches and is looking forward to receiving comments and feedback.

This next meeting will take place D.V. August 10-12, 2004 at the Ebenezer CanRC in Burlington

Appreciation was expressed to the Dutton URC for its hospitality and the exceptional help its secretary was able to give to the committee. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its work. Seldom had he experienced such good harmony and patient deliberation in the work of a committee. To God alone be the praise and glory.

For the Committee  
Gerard J. Nordeman

# Protect Your Mind, Your Heart, Your Salvation

*“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16a).*

There are many different types of helmets. Today we see football helmets, motorcycle helmets, and baseball helmets. You may even think of a goalie’s mask in hockey as a type of helmet. When I think of a helmet, the first thing that comes to mind is a helmet worn by a soldier. This helmet protects the soldier in his time of greatest need, in battle.

What does a helmet protect? We could answer it protects the head and that would be correct, but not precise. The head is protected but it is not totally covered. The face is exposed. The brain is what is being protected when wearing a helmet. That is the primary purpose of the helmet whether it is worn in baseball or in battle. When we think of the “helmet of salvation” in terms of the armor of God, we need to think about what is being protected.

The brain controls our body. It does so without us even thinking about it. But that is not why we are concerned about the brain at this point. What we are really concerned about is our mind. Our mind is where we make our decisions, have our thoughts, and where we comprehend what we read and listen to. It gives us the ability to do our homework. The mind in many ways makes us who we are.

The mind is also part of something

much bigger than just how or what we think. It is part of our heart. When the Bible uses the word “heart”, it is not talking about that organ which is pumping blood inside your chest. The heart is what you live out of (it is where the issues of life flow from), the Bible says it is “the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). In other words the heart directs how you are going to act, live, talk, and think. Your whole being is controlled by your heart.

Another part of your “heart” is your desires and affections; the things that you long after or that you are pursuing. If you deeply desire something you pursue it until you

attain it. This could be power, fame or fortune but it could also be humility, gentleness or self-control. Our affection should be for the glory of God and the benefit of others and not as the world would say, “what can we get out of it.”

This part of our heart also has close connections to our mind. Often we see or hear of things which are processed in the mind and we come to desire them. This is what happened to Adam & Eve. They saw the fruit as good for food and also as desirable for wisdom. The desire of their heart at that time was to be like God and they acted on it.

The final part of your heart is your soul. Your soul, along with the rest of your heart, is what makes you in the image of God. It is not your exterior physical form but what is on the inside of you. Animals have physical form but this does not make them in the image of God. The soul in man means that we are going to exist forever. Animals will

## ***FOR FURTHER THOUGHT & STUDY:***

- Do people like to admit to sinning? What do they do instead of admitting their sin?
- Name some sins that take place within the mind. How do these sins affect people?
- When people desire something what should be their motive? What is yours?

### **Read Genesis 3:1-7**

- How did Adam & Eve’s mind react when tempted? What were the consequences?

### **Read Genesis 39:7-10**

- How did Joseph’s mind react when faced with this temptation? What did he risk?

### **Read James 1:13-15**

- What can you learn about temptation in this passage?



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not continue to exist after they die; all dogs do not go to heaven. When a person dies his soul goes to a specific place, heaven or hell. Everyone at that point will understand their relationship with God; either for their benefit and salvation or for their sorrow and damnation.

So when it comes to the full armor of God why is the helmet described as salvation? Because it is in the mind as part of the true heart that we have salvation. It is in the mind that we understand salvation and yet not fully understand it. It is in the heart and mind that the Holy Spirit moves in us to drive us to Christ for our salvation. It is in the mind and heart that we desire God and His way. The mind and heart drives us to Christ in our need of a Savior and also acts as a defense against the attacks that would come from the outside to push us away from Christ.

Our mind and hearts must be protected for there is where we know Christ. Protect your mind and heart by being in God's Word and this will set up the defenses that you need in battle. Satan and his minions would attack your mind to drive you away from Christ. Satan would lay temptations before you so your mind would desire those things instead of God. God is always with you and you must rely on Him for your strength to fight this battle. Keep firm in your mind the salvation that you have now and the hope of that salvation for eternity with God.

**Mr. Dave Vander Meer** is the Youth Director of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

# Looking Out and About

- Rev. Joel Vander Kooi the pastor of the Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan accepted the call extended to him by the Bethel United Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta. Rev. Vander Kooi gave his farewell message on January 25, 2004 which also mark the twelfth anniversary of his service at the Walker Church. He will be installed [D.V.] at Bethel this month.
- On January 19, 2004 the congregation of the Thunder Bay United Reformed Church in Thunder Bay, Ontario dedicated its newly completed facility. Rev. Barry Beukema the pastor of the Thunder Bay congregation officiated at the dedication service.
- Dr. Fred Klooster who taught systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary for over thirty years passed away on December 27, 2003 at the age of 81. The funeral service was held at the Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan on Tuesday, December 30. Dr. Klooster was an early contributor to the *Torch and Trumpet* now known as *The Outlook*.
- Rev. Duane Veddors who until recently served as the pastor of the Reformed Heritage Church in Holland, Michigan and who is now serving as a missionary in Eritrea was mugged on New Year's Eve as he traveled through Nairobi, Kenya. Although he was spared serious injury his money and papers including his passport were stolen resulting in major complications.
- The recent Classis of the Heritage Reformed Congregations approved the building plans for Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, which offers M.Div. and M.A.R. degrees and will soon be working on developing a Th.M. program. PRTS will be building a 20,000 sq. ft. building on 8 acres in northeast Grand Rapids, Michigan. Construction will begin after the new year, and we hope to be in the new building by the end of 2004, D.V. The new building will also house the Puritan Resource Study Center, which will seek to promote Puritan studies throughout the world. Feel free to call the president, Dr. Joel R. Beeke, for more information (616)977-0599.
- In October 2002, Rev. Steve Arrick preached the Installation Service of Rev. Steve McGee in Trinidad. That same month, one week after they were moved into their new home, the McGees were robbed. Rev. McGee writes, "We awoke to find that someone had broken into our home and had stolen several items. We contacted the local police immediately. Within a few hours, four men were arrested and within three days most everything had been recovered. These men had been responsible for several robberies in the area. Although this was a very stressful happening, God has used this to open several doors for ministry. We met several neighbors and Steve was able to share the gospel with the chief investigator on our case."

# Jehovah's Salvation

*"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe in Him has been judged already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God"* John 3:18.

John 3:16 is not only one of the most familiar passages in the Bible, it has also been labeled as one of the most beautiful passages in God's Word. There Jesus tells us: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

This verse speaks to us the very heart of the Gospel. It addresses God's love, God's Son, and eternal life. As you read it, however, a question immediately arises. Does God save the whole world, even those who do not believe in His Son? Two verses later, in John 3:18, Jesus answers that very question.

Most people do not like John 3:18. It is not one that many people commit to memory. They do not like what it says nor what it teaches. They love to quote John 3:16 out of context and throw "God's love" all over the place. Don't get me wrong - God's love is very great. In fact, it is infinite. There is a never ending supply of love in God.

## Condemned Already

No matter how great God's love is, the fact remains that there is sin in the world and sin has consequences. One of those consequences is alienation from God; another is God's judgment. As we have already learned from the Scripture and the Catechism, we are all guilty of sin and under the wrath of God. We may not like that, but whether we like it or not, that is the way things are from God's perspective. We have already, by our very nature, rejected God's Son, Jesus Christ, and therefore face condemnation.

Years ago, there was a small Bible tract that asked a very simple question: "What must one do to be lost?" Notice it did not ask what one must do to be saved; it asked what one must do to be *lost*. The pages inside of that tract were blank. That was the answer. What must I do to be lost? Nothing - left to yourself, you already are.

## The One Who Saves

In order to avoid this condemnation, you have to have true faith ingrafted in you. John 3:16 says "whoever *believes* in the Son of God will not perish but have eternal life." Two verses later, Jesus again says: "Whoever *believes* on Him is not condemned."

Clearly, you must put your complete trust in the one and only Son of God who alone can save you from the awful predicament of God's righteous anger. You need to believe in Jesus Christ. He alone can save you from the wrath of God upon your sins. He alone is able to pay the price for those sins through His sacrifice on the cross and, thereby, provide you with the righteousness you need to come before God. The destiny of every person in the world depends upon the relationship they have with Jesus Christ.

Jesus says very clearly, "Whoever does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God." They have not believed in the NAME of Jesus Christ. What does that name mean? The answer to that question can be found in Matthew 1:21. There the angel of the Lord told Joseph to name the child "Jesus" because, the angel said, "He will save His people from their sins."

The first two letters of the name "Jesus" come from the Old Testament name for God: Jehovah. The remaining letters come from the verb "to save" or "salvation." The name "Jesus" literally means "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah's salvation."

**Q** *Are all men, then, saved by Christ as they perished through Adam?*

**A** *No; but only those who by a true faith are ingrafted into Him and receive all His benefits.*



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## *The destiny of every person in the world depends upon the relationship they have with Jesus Christ.*

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When John writes in his Gospel that men and women are condemned because they have not believed on the name of God's only begotten Son, he means that they are condemned because they will not confess Jesus as Jehovah's salvation. They will not acknowledge Him as the way God has provided as the means to be reconciled to Him. Jesus alone can save because Jesus alone is the One Jehovah provided.

### **Receiving the Promise**

Receiving the gospel promise is the most difficult thing for people to do spiritually. If you have ever witnessed to anyone about the Gospel, you know that there are many things in the Gospel that people have very little trouble accepting as truth. Most people, for example, have very little trouble believing in the existence of God. Most people who believe in God have no difficulty believing Him to be a God of love and a God of great power. Many people believe in some form of creation and that God has a purpose for their lives.

You can even talk to people about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a good man, born in Bethlehem. He taught a very high moral system and gave an excellent example of His philosophy in His own life. While all these things about Jesus are good and true, to simply believe those things about Him is not enough. You must believe in His Name. You

must believe that He is the Jehovah saves.

Faith, in and of itself, does not save you. You must have your faith in the proper object. We all know how much the bible speaks against idolatry. You cannot put your faith in Buddah and expect God to save you. Nor can you worship the God of Islam and expect to be saved.

Likewise, you cannot simply believe that Jesus was a good, moral man who was born in Nazareth and expect God to save you.

John makes very clear in his Gospel that a precise faith is required in a specific Person. That Person, we have seen in past months, must be truly human, truly righteous, and truly divine. Only such a Person can save you. Such a Person has been provided by God in His Son, "Jehovah saves."

People remain condemned because they reject Jesus Christ as their Savior. Simply because God provided us with the good news of the Gospel does not mean that God is no longer a Judge or that He is no longer terribly angry at our sin. Jehovah will pronounce His judgment and it will either be a sentence of condemnation or a sentence of acquittal.

That acquittal is based upon divine mercy. Mercy because God loved the world so much that He provided a way of salvation - His own Son, Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news! It tells us that, although we are children of Adam, born in sin and deserving of condemnation, an escape is offered us. We can be free from the burden of sin

Jehovah sent a Savior who died on the cross to save condemned sinners. He took the sins of all who believe in Him to the cross where He bore the wrath of God in our place. He was condemned in our place! Then He rose again from the dead to prove that He had conquered sin, death, and hell.

Not everyone will be saved. Many are condemned already because they fail to acknowledge the name of the Son of God - "Jehovah's salvation" How important to confess Jesus as Savior and Lord and to acknowledge Him as Jehovah's salvation.

**Rev. Wybren Oord** is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan and editor of *The Outlook*.



# Book Review

## *God's Pattern for Creation: A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1*

W. Robert Godfrey. P&R Publishing 2003, 141 pp. ISBN 0-87552-799-X (pbk).

Dr. Robert Godfrey, president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, has written a short book advocating a figurative interpretation of the days of Genesis 1. He writes "... this study is written to communicate not primarily with scholars or ministers but with thoughtful Christian church members" (p. 16). In accordance with his intended readership, the book is readily understandable and easy to read.

### **A Covenantal Perspective**

The author begins by asserting that "We cannot understand Genesis 1 until we see it covenantally" (p. 16). The covenant he has in mind here, however, is not God's relationship to His creation in general, but rather "the divinely established relationship between humanity and God" (p. 16), and even more narrowly, God's relationship with His covenantal people.

"Although all the Bible is true," Godfrey writes, "the Bible never provides random or abstract tidbits of knowledge. It is not an encyclopedia but a covenantal record, always focused on God and his relationship to his people" (p. 17). Godfrey describes a primary purpose of Genesis as providing the

people of Israel with the historical background to God's covenant with them at Sinai.

The first chapter, which "stands outside the structure of the ten generations" under which the rest of Genesis is organized, is viewed as "the introduction to the introduction, the historical background to the historical background. If Genesis is the introduction to Exodus, Genesis 1 is the introduction to Genesis" (p. 20).

This particular "covenantal perspective" is an emphasis that is presumed to predominate in the biblical author's intent. This is true not only in the Pentateuch, nor just in the book of Genesis taken as a whole, but also throughout the first chapter of Genesis. Godfrey concludes that "Covenant" predominates Genesis 1 to such an extent that exegetical conclusions deemed as not falling within this narrow "covenantal" focus are considered erroneous or doubtful.

Viewing Genesis 1 from this perspective, Dr. Godfrey in succeeding chapters considers "The First Three Days of Creation," "The Final Four Days of Creation," and "The Message of Genesis 1."

On Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God...") the author remarks that the fact that God is not introduced or explained in this text "reminds us that Genesis is not written as a history book for uninformed, worldwide readers but is part of the covenant history written for a covenant people who already knew their God" (p. 22). Godfrey sees similar "reminders" or "pointers" at nearly every turn in Genesis 1, claiming they reveal in sum not only a "covenantal" perspective and intent but also a figurative presentation of the days and chronology.

The reader may wonder whether granting that Genesis 1 is part of a "covenant history written for a covenant people" must exclude a divine purpose in Genesis 1 *also to reveal* chronological history both to covenantal readers and ultimately even to "uninformed, worldwide readers".

The near certainty that the revelation of God's creation was known (at least in oral form) before the time of Moses, and even before the time of Noah, is not discussed. Even in pagan myths, faint echoes of the creation revelation can still be discerned, however distorted and corrupted they may have become. May not there be a broader "covenantal focus" of Genesis 1 which encompasses all of creation, all men, and all times?

Dr. Godfrey does assert that Genesis 1:1 teaches the absolute sovereignty of God in an *ex nihilo* original creation and briefly contrasts this to the gods in ancient Near East creation myths. Nevertheless it is surprising in a book subtitled "A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1,"



that the author includes no substantial discussion of a possible broader covenantal focus. Nor is there any discussion of the significance of God's covenantal name "JHWH" which does not appear at all in Genesis 1, but only after the first "generation" in Genesis 2.

### **Development in Creation**

Genesis 1:2 is a crucial text for the author's interpretation of the days of Genesis 1:

First, God shows us that his purpose in creation is not some kind of static, unchanging reality. Just as time is built into creation from the beginning, so is development. God in his creation is already pointing us to a fulfillment or consummation of that creation. ... God is already preparing us for the idea of a final completion of his work that is more developed than what is created at first. (p. 24, 25).

Second, Genesis 1:2 shows us that God's creative purpose is not for himself but rather culminates in the creation of humanity. A world that is empty or covered with water or dark is not a problem for God's existence. ... Genesis 1:2 is critical for understanding the rest of the creation narrative because the three elements that rendered earth uninhabitable for humanity [emptiness, darkness, waters covering the earth] are dealt with one at a time in God's subsequent acts of creation. These problems are a key to under-

standing what God is revealing about the meaning of creation in Genesis 1. (p. 25).

One is leery of seeing too much built-in "development" in God's creation. "Development" has too often been used by liberalizing theologians as a euphemism for "evolution". Dr. Godfrey, however, does make some valuable comments in what follows. Godfrey sees God's creative works in day 1 as solving the problem of darkness, His works in days 2 and 3 as solving the problem of the waters, and His works in days 4, 5 and 6 as solving the prob-

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lem of the emptiness of the earth.

This seems a helpful insight, but one that in no wise conflicts with the traditional interpretation of the days. However, maintaining that "Day one is not presented as the beginning of creation" (p. 26) seems to be a doubtful assertion. Nor does it seem necessary to consider the phrase "and God said" as essentially anthropomorphic (see p. 27), which Godfrey does.

### **The Second Day**

On the biblical description of the second day (Gen. 1:6-8) Dr. Godfrey remarks "Here we see Moses giving a description of God's

creative act from the perspective of what the common man sees and experiences in this world" (p. 31). Godfrey sees this as evidence that the intent "is not to tell us about creation in the abstract but about the appearance and meaning of creation for God's image bearer (p. 31)."

Here again Professor Godfrey sounds the refrain "Genesis 1:6-8 is not a detailed scientific description of reality ...", "Genesis 1 is not an encyclopedia of history or science ..." The refrain in the biblical text of "And there was evening and there was morning ..." is considered to be merely Moses "reminding us that the work of the first day [e.g. the creation of day] carries over to the second day" (p. 32).

It is noted that God does not declare His acts on the second day as good. Dr. Godfrey plausibly reasons that this is because "God points to the fact that the work on the waters is not completed until the third day" (p. 32). He further suggests that thereby "God wants to indicate that the days of creation are not the only structure of Genesis 1 (p. 32)." Here he begins to remark on the "subtle structural elements that Moses has worked into the text," pointing out the number of times various phrases appear in the text of Genesis 1. No mention is made of the phrase "according to its kind," which is repeated a total of ten times. However, Dr. Godfrey does remark on Genesis 1:11 ('Let the land produce vegetation') that "We must remember that God acts just as truly and effectively when he works through means [e.g., the land or earth] as when he works directly" (p. 35).

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**The Fourth Day**

In his treatment of the “Final Four Days of Creation” (Gen 1:14-2:3), the author sees God as solving the final problem remaining of the three mentioned in Genesis 1:2, namely the emptiness of the world: “God begins by filling the sky with lights as he will later fill the sea with fish, the sky with birds, and the land with animals and people” (p. 37).

The fourth day is considered to be “one of the key days in terms of the structure and interpretation of Genesis 1” (p. 38). Dr. Godfrey remarks on the length of the descriptions of the three functions of the lights (“to separate the day from the night,” “to be signs to mark seasons” (or “to rule”), and “to give light to the earth”). He also remarks on their pattern of repetition.

Godfrey lists parallels between the first and fourth days of creation, and asks “How do we account for these similarities?” (p. 41). He briefly considers “the traditional interpretation” which “suggests that God changes the relationship between light and source of light from day one to day four” (p. 41). Here the author erroneously claims that the traditional interpretation requires “some other created source for the light than the lights of the fourth day.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Godfrey finds the traditional interpretation wanting in that it “does not give adequate attention to the way in which the days of cre-

ation are addressing the problems of Genesis 1:2.” He claims that when this principle of organization is duly recognized:

The text seems to suggest that day four is not about the creation of a new and different source for the light created on day one but rather is now pointing us to the lights that fill the sky and that always were the source of light. In other words, day one and day four describe the same creative act of God from different perspectives and as solutions to different problems posed in Genesis 1:2. (p. 42)

The author maintains that this interpretation is also supported by the fact that God often works through means, and claims that “elsewhere the Bible always links the light to the lights,” citing such texts as Zech. 14:6-7 as “surely imply[ing] that in the old heaven and earth light came only from the lights” (p. 43). The reader may wish that he had also dealt with II Cor. 4:6 (“For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, ...”).

Dr. Godfrey summarizes, “If we conclude that days one and four seem to describe the same activity of God from different perspectives, then we must conclude that the days of creation in Genesis 1 are not simple chronology” (p. 44).

To bolster his case, the author

“pause[s] to observe that throughout the Bible texts are arranged in ways that appear to be simple chronology when they are something else” (p. 44). Here he cites: the different orders of the temptations of Christ as presented by Matthew and Luke, the history of King Joash as given in 2 Kings 13 and 14, the thousand years in Revelation 20, and especially the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1.

From the fact that Matthew omits mention of some generations that are recorded elsewhere in Scripture, Godfrey claims that “strict chronological sequence is subordinated to theological concerns” (p. 48). From this, Godfrey concludes that “what was apparently chronological had another meaning,” and that “the same, then, could be true of Genesis 1.” What Godfrey does not consider is that if Matthew says that “Joram begat Uzziah” we may certainly know that Joram was the ancestor of Uzziah and that Joram chronologically preceded Uzziah, even if some intervening generations may have been passed over.

**The Framework Theory**

As he proceeds to the fifth day, Dr. Godfrey describes and comments on various arguments that have been advanced by those who hold to a “Framework Interpretation” of Genesis 1. He finds Framework advocates’ (i.e., L. Irons and M. Kline’s) recognition of the “two triads” of “kingdoms” (Days 1-3) and “kings” (Days 4-6) to be only of limited usefulness. Godfrey considers their argument from Genesis 2:5 (“because it had not rained”) to be their strongest. This argument infers from this text that ordinary providence was normative for



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growth and development during the creation week, and that therefore the days are not 24-hour chronological days.<sup>2</sup>

With respect to the (rather arcane) “two-register cosmology” Framework argument, the author remarks “it is not clear that it is a helpful key with reference to the days of Genesis 1” (p. 53). This argument, which focuses on events in the heavenly realm (such as the supposedly eternal Seventh day), conflicts with Godfrey’s contention that the focus in Genesis 1 is primarily on the Earth. Surprisingly — given his argumentation thus far in his book — Godfrey also faults the Framework interpretation because its “approach to the days of Genesis 1 as figurative does not seem to fully explain the chronological and sequential character of the text” (p. 53).

In his treatment of the sixth day, the author emphasizes that the text reveals the special position of man as made in God’s image, made for fellowship with God, and made to rule over the Earth and to fill it. Man’s task in ruling and filling the Earth is seen to be analogous to God’s work in creation.

### **The Day of Rest**

On the seventh day, Dr. Godfrey remarks:

If God cannot need rest and refreshment and if Jesus tells us that God did not rest on the Sabbath, then what is the meaning of the Sabbath day? We can only conclude that God spoke about himself as he does in Genesis 2 in order to teach us about ourselves. If we are in his im-

age, then he presents his rest so that we can know about our own. He does not need to rest, but we do. He is accommodating his revelation of his creating work to us and our needs. He speaks of himself in a way that serves as a model for us. (p. 62)

Here the author appears to stand the reason for the Sabbath on its head. Exodus 20:11 teaches that *because God* rested on the seventh day and hallowed it, *therefore we* must keep the Sabbath. But Dr. Godfrey seems to be saying that *because we* must rest on the seventh day and keep it holy, *therefore God* said that He rested on the seventh day even though He really did not. At least in the Framework’s “two-register cosmology” there is still considered to be a heavenly reality to God’s resting, but in Godfrey’s interpretation there no longer appears to be any reality to God’s resting on the seventh day at all. Not only is the seventh day figurative and God’s rest on it presented as an anthropomorphic and figurative mode of expression, but God’s resting appears in Godfrey’s interpretation as a complete fiction invented by God to provide a pretext for a Sabbath command.

### **The Message of Genesis 1**

In his final chapter, entitled “The Message of Genesis 1,” Dr.

Godfrey restates and summarizes his previous arguments — both positive and negative — and adds a couple more. He emphasizes that the Scriptures (especially in poetical and prophecy sections) frequently use anthropomorphic and metaphorical language. He writes:

What is true of poetry and prophecy may well be true of the account of creation in Genesis 1 as well. After all, we have no real experience of that phenomenon of creation at the beginning of time. We know the world only as a created, functioning, purposeful place. In order to tell us about creation, God uses images and language that we can understand. But much of the language must be figurative. (p. 67)

Dr. Godfrey emphasizes (and exaggerates) the number of different ways in which the word “day” is used in Genesis 1:1 - 2: 4. He argues that there is an apparent conflict in chronology between the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and in Genesis 2 which is best resolved through recognizing that “God’s primary concern in both accounts is not to give us a specific chronology of God’s acts but to show us God’s meaning and purpose for humanity in creation” (p. 81). Dr. Godfrey then turns his attention to “Traditional Interpretation Problems.” Here he briefly recapitulates some

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of his earlier arguments, and also briefly counters the traditional interpretation's "waw consecutive" grammatical argument and its argument that church history is on its side.

After all the arguments that have preceded, it surprises the reader that Dr. Godfrey here affirms "that the days and week of Genesis 1 are presented to us as a real week of twenty-four-hour days." Lest he be misunderstood, he immediately adds "These days and week, however, do not describe God's actions in themselves but present God's creative purpose in a way that is a model for us" (p. 85). Later he further clarifies "The days are actual for us but figurative for God. They are not a timetable of God's actions but are a model timetable for us to follow" (p. 90). At this point the reader begins to understand Godfrey's earlier criticism that the Framework Interpretation "does not seem to fully explain the chronological and sequential character of the text" (p. 53). So it is finally conceded that the text of Genesis 1 has a chronological character, that the days are presented as twenty-four-hour days and the week as a real week — but only as a figurative and anthropomorphic mode of expression.

Dr. Godfrey concludes the chapter by giving his opinion that the current controversy over the interpretation of Genesis 1 has arisen in the last decade or so as "a result of a heightened sense of alienation from our dominant culture that conservative Christians have come to feel in the last ten to twenty years." It is clear that the

author has a strong antipathy for the creation science movement. He writes:

Feeling betrayed by politicians, the public schools, and even many church leaders, many Christians have sought ways to isolate themselves from the evil and degeneration they sense around them. They have sought to create a subculture of their own. The phenomenon of home schooling is one manifesta-

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tion of that withdrawal. So is the rise of creation science as an antidote to evolution and materialism. (p. 91).

Just as we must beware of anti-Christian forms of thought that claim to be science, so we must beware of anti-intellectualism and an inappropriate rejection of science parading itself as Christianity. As Christians we must not tie our faith to a pseudoscience of human invention, whether by a fad of secular science or so-called creation science. We must not hobble the evangelistic

work of the church by embracing a false science of any kind. (p. 91).

### **The Appendixes**

A short 2-page "Conclusion" follows, which includes "Ten Theses on Creation." Here Dr. Godfrey again posits, among other things, the *ex nihilo* nature of God's creative work, the special status of man as made in God's image, and man's creation by God immediately from the dust of the earth. Four appendixes provide: (1) excerpts from Calvin's commentary on Genesis 1 interspersed with added comments of Dr. Godfrey, (2) a passage from an apocryphal book (2 Esdras 6:35-59) that speaks of the creation days, (3) excerpts from various Reformed confessions on Creation, and (4) quotations from eleven Presbyterian theologians commenting on the meaning of "*in the space of six days*" in the Westminster Standards. Finally, there are 5 pages of end-notes.

In the first appendix, Dr. Godfrey notes that Calvin "writes forcefully against the opinion of Augustine that God created everything in a moment and then described the creation in terms of six days to instruct us" (p. 97). He provides a quote from Calvin's Commentary on Genesis which appropriately includes the following:

Here the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment, for it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work of God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying



instruction. Let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men.

Dr. Godfrey claims that “The principles of biblical analysis used here [i.e., in my book] are those used by John Calvin in his commentary on Genesis 1” (p. 16). One of Calvin’s “principles of interpretation” that Godfrey identifies is to “recognize that in the text God is accommodating himself to our capacity” (p. 105). However, with respect to the days of Genesis 1, Calvin says *not* that God accommodated “*the text*” to our capacity, but that he accommodated “*his works*” to our capacity.

Furthermore, Godfrey nowhere in his book acknowledges that Augustine depended on a mis-translation of an apocryphal text to come up with his novel interpretation of the days of Genesis 1, nor that Calvin specifically criticized Augustine on that score:

For the confirmation of the gloss above alluded to, a passage from Ecclesiasticus is unskillfully cited. ‘He who liveth for ever created all things at once,’ (Ecclus. 18:1) For the Greek adverb *choine*, which the writer uses, means no such thing, nor does it refer to time, but to all things universally.

On the contrary, Augustine is rather held up by Godfrey elsewhere in his book (e.g. p. 15 and p. 82) as an example of an orthodox scholar who responsibly interprets the days of Genesis 1 as figurative.

Is it not also “too violent a cavil”, as Calvin said, to contend that Moses distributes the work of God perfected over eons into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction? This “violent cavil” seems a fairly accurate description of Dr. Godfrey’s position. Calvin’s phrase “the space of six days” is echoed in the Westminster Standards. In the opinion of this reviewer, if “in the space of six days” in the Westminster Standards should be understood to exclude Augustine’s position (and it should), it should also be understood to exclude the position that Dr. Godfrey has taken in this book.

The author writes “No doubt the approach to Genesis 1 taken in this book will not convince everyone that it is correct, but it should demonstrate that it is an exegesis that is responsible to the text and ought to be tolerable in conservative Protestant circles” (p. 95). Few will disagree with the first half of this statement. Many may disagree with the second half.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to this claim, for example, Professor Robert Grossman has written the following:

The textual conclusion is that while light is often associated with light-bearers and is produced by them, it also has an existence apart from the light bearers. This is attested to by the findings of physics. Once light has been produced by a star, for example, it continues to pass through space whether the star continues to exist or not. ...

God could very simply have created a shaft of light of suffi-

cient diameter to illuminate the earth and of sufficient length to keep shining on the earth until the fourth day when the light bearers were created.

(“Light Called Day,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* V. 3, No. 1, p. 11)

<sup>2</sup> This argument has been well-answered from a traditional viewpoint by E. J. Young, A. Cassuto, J. Pipa, and others.

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# Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (8)

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

### The “Righteousness of God” in Romans

To assess the validity of the new perspective’s understanding of the language of the “righteousness of God” and “justification” is not an easy task. A full assessment would require a series of studies of the use of this language in the Old Testament, in Second Temple Judaism, and in all of the writings of the apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup> However, the most important basis for this assessment remains the Pauline epistles themselves. Do Paul’s letters, especially Romans and Galatians, support the claims of the new perspective regarding this language? For our purpose, a consideration of the use of this language in the epistles of Paul will have to suffice.

In order to achieve this purpose, we will begin with a treatment of the language of the “righteousness of God,” particularly as it is used in Romans.<sup>2</sup> Then we will consider the related issue of the use of the language of “justification” in Paul’s writings.

The book of Romans is a particularly important source for understanding Paul’s use of the expression, “the righteousness of God.” Though similar expressions are used in his other epistles, this epistle is the only one to use the expression on several occasions (Romans 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3; eight times in all). Though it is used on one other oc-

casation in Paul’s epistles (II Corinthians 5:21), its prominence in the book of Romans is clearly evident. Indeed, this expression is used in two places (Romans 1:17; 3:21-26) that are generally acknowledged to be thematic passages, which set forth comprehensively the primary theme of the book of Romans. For this reason, the use of the expression in Romans seems to be rather decisive in terms of interpreting Paul’s understanding.

#### Romans 1:17

The first instance of the use of the expression, “the righteousness of God,” occurs in Romans 1:16-17, a passage generally viewed as a thematic statement of the teaching of the epistle as a whole. In this passage, the apostle Paul affirms his unashamed commitment to the gospel, in which the righteousness of God is revealed.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Though this passage makes clear that Paul regarded “the righteousness of God,” which reveals the saving power of the gospel and is received by faith, to be a central theme of his preaching, the passage

itself does not explain what precisely he means by this language. To understand this expression, it is necessary to go elsewhere, either to the presumed Old Testament and Judaistic background to this language or to its use elsewhere in the epistle to the Romans. Since the background to Paul’s use of this language is somewhat uncertain, the way he speaks of “righteousness” elsewhere in the epistle is of first importance.

Among those who appeal to the presumed Old Testament background to this language, some point to the use of the language of “God’s righteousness” as a way of expressing His covenant faithfulness. Writers of the new perspective, including N. T. Wright, take this approach.<sup>3</sup> In a number of places in the Old Testament, the righteousness of God or the covenant Lord refers to the basis or motive of God’s actions in saving His people. In these passages, the language of righteousness occurs in the context of actions performed in accordance with covenant obligations and commitments.

Hence, when God’s righteousness is described, it is often expressed in terms of His fidelity to His people and reliability in securing the promises made to them. The righteousness of God is, in this respect, relational or covenantal terminology. One example of this kind of passage is Psalm 31:1, “In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me!” Another example would be Exodus 15:13, “You have led in your steadfast love [Septuagint reads “righteousness”] the people whom you have redeemed; you



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have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.” In these passages where God’s righteousness seems to be equivalent to his covenant faithfulness, a variety of terms are used to express the way God is faithful to his people in securing their salvation.<sup>4</sup> If this is the specific background to Paul’s language in Romans 1:17, we could paraphrase his language to read something like, “the gospel reveals the faithfulness of the covenant Lord to His promises to His people.”

In addition to this possible Old Testament background to Paul’s use of the language of the “righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17, there is another, closely related Old Testament usage that may be behind Paul’s language.<sup>5</sup> Often, Old Testament references to God’s righteousness are used as equivalents for His saving action on behalf of His people. When God intervenes on behalf of His people in order to save them, His righteousness is revealed. Psalm 51:14 is an example of this use of the language of righteousness: “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.” Perhaps an even more clear example is Isaiah 46:13: “I will bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay.” In this prophetic declaration, the coming-near of the Lord’s righteousness is parallel to the swift coming of salvation for His people. Examples of this kind of identification of the righteousness of God with His saving activity on behalf of His people are not difficult to find in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalms 22:31; 35:28; 40:10; 69:27; 71:15, 16,

19, 24; 88:12; 98:2; 119:123; Micah 6:5; 7:9; Isaiah 51:5, 6, 8).

Since the covenant faithfulness of the Lord is especially revealed in His saving acts on behalf of His people, it is not difficult to combine this use of the language of God’s righteousness with the first. In both instances, the righteousness of God is language that functions within the context of God’s covenant relationship with His people. When the righteousness of God is revealed, God is witnessed to be One who

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faithfully and reliably acts to secure His people’s well-being.<sup>6</sup>

If either one or the other, or some combination, of these uses of the language of the righteousness of God lies behind Paul’s statement in Romans 1:17, it would seem that this passage confirms the view of new perspective writers. The righteousness of God does not have to do with something God gives to believers, which enables them to enjoy a relationship or status of favor with Him in spite of their sinfulness. Rather, the righteousness of God is God’s demonstration of His

covenant-keeping character, and of His accomplishments that secure the redemption of His people.

Before drawing this conclusion too hastily, however, we need to consider two further lines of evidence, one from the Old Testament, the other from the book of Romans. First, in the Old Testament use of the language of righteousness, there is also a strongly forensic or legal emphasis that includes the idea of God’s righteousness in granting to His people a righteous status and, at the same time, condemning their enemies or adversaries. This use fits well with the Reformation view that the righteousness of God in Romans 1:17 is a right standing or status that God freely grants to His people. And second, if we consider the close connection Paul draws between the righteousness of God and faith in this passage (“the righteousness of God is revealed *from faith to faith*”), an important clue to the meaning of this language may be found in Paul’s treatment of the connection between righteousness and faith elsewhere in the book of Romans.

An examination of the use of the language of the righteousness of God in the Old Testament will show that it often occurs in settings that are thoroughly judicial. When God acts righteously, He does more than act in accord with a general kind of covenant faithfulness or saving intention. He rules and orders the affairs of His creation, and of His human image-bearers particularly, in a way that is right and that accords with his own righteous character. Thus, it is in righteousness that God punishes the wicked and

secures the salvation of the righteous. In Psalm 98, for example, the revelation of God's righteousness to the nations involves not only God's acts of faithfulness in bringing His people salvation, but also His righteous judgments upon His enemies. The salvation that the righteousness of God brings includes the coming of the Lord in order to judge the nations. God's righteousness is, therefore, an expression of His kingly and judicial dominion over the creation and all its creatures. Because God is righteous in this sense, He rules and administers the circumstances of His creatures in a way that is just. For this reason, the language of "ruling and judging" are often intimately linked with God's righteousness (e.g. Psalm 72:1-3; II Samuel 8:15; 1 Kings 10:9; Jeremiah 22:3; Proverbs 31:8-9).<sup>7</sup> The righteousness of God involves, for this reason, more than a simple restoration of a proper relationship between God and His people. In His righteousness, God maintains order and justice; He simultaneously vindicates His people, and brings retribution upon their enemies (Psalm 143:1-3; Jeremiah 22:3). Summarizing this use of the language of God's righteousness, Mark Seifrid observes that

[t]he concept of 'God's righteousness' in the Hebrew Scriptures cannot be reduced to the meaning 'salvation' or the like, since it always functions within the context of a legal dispute or contention. When God works salvation for his people, he establishes justice for them (and for himself) over against their enemies and his. Saving righteous-

ness and wrath parallel one another, since they are different aspects of the same event. Correspondingly, along with the references to a 'saving righteousness' of God, there are a number of passages in which punitive or retributive conceptions are associated with the 'righteousness of God.'<sup>8</sup>

The significance of this pervasively forensic or judicial use of the language of God's righteousness

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***The righteousness of God involves more than a simple restoration of a proper relationship between God and His people.***

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should be apparent. The righteousness of God cannot simply be identified with something like God's faithfulness to His promises, or His saving acts to secure the redemption of His people. The language of the righteousness of God indicates that God's faithfulness and saving action are demonstrated in His judgments, which include the *vindication of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked*.

Integral to God's righteousness are His actions as just Ruler and Judge over the nations. Thus, the administration of God's justice occurs in a legal framework, which includes as an integral component the ele-

ment of a legal contention or dispute. When God's covenant word and law are violated, God's righteousness is expressed in retributive justice (e.g. Isaiah 5:16; 10:22). God's righteousness secures the salvation of his people, but it also brings judgment upon the wicked (Psalms 7:17; 9:4, 8; 50:4-6; 97:2). Thus, Psalm 119 can speak on five occasions of "the judgments of your [God's] righteousness" (vv. 7, 62, 106, 160, 164), each of which refers to God's condemnation of the wicked. Within this judicial or forensic framework, the righteousness of God is intimately linked to God's acts of judgment, which include, respectively, the acquittal of His people and the condemnation of the wicked.<sup>9</sup>

Another important clue to the meaning of the "righteousness of God" in this text is the phrase "from faith to faith." This phrase is further explained by Paul's appeal to Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by faith." This link between righteousness and faith is a characteristic theme throughout the book of Romans. It occurs in other important passages in the epistle (3:21-22; 10:3; cf. 10:6), and in each instance faith is the appropriate response to God's righteousness. Through the response of faith, believers come to benefit from the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which reveals the righteousness of God.

Consistent with the more general use of the term "righteousness" in Romans, these passages indicate that righteousness is something that God grants or communicates to believers, and that it involves the restoration of believers to favor



with Him. In Romans 5:17, for example, the “righteousness” that acquits believers of condemnation and death is God’s “gift” to them (cf. Philippians. 3:9). Similarly, in Romans 10:3-6, Paul draws a close parallel between the “righteousness of God” and the “righteousness based on faith.” Though we will have occasion in what follows to deal more directly with the issue of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers, these passages illustrate that the righteousness of God is not simply God’s own character as One who is faithful to His promises. The righteousness of God is also something that can be granted or given to those who respond appropriately to its revelation, that is, to those who receive this righteousness by faith.

If we put these lines of evidence together, the outcome is rather strikingly similar to the Reformation’s view of God’s righteousness. Though the righteousness of God undoubtedly refers to His faithfulness to His covenant promise in saving His people, the special character of God’s righteousness is expressed in His acts of judgment, which secure the acquittal of His people and the condemnation of the wicked. Against the background of the Old Testament idea of God’s righteousness, the apostle Paul is affirming that the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals God’s judicial action in securing the righteous status of His people before Him. What is remarkable about the gospel of God’s righteousness in Christ is that God has, in the person and work of His Son, entered into judgment on behalf of *the ungodly*. By virtue of the work of Christ, God has obtained righteousness for all who believe in

Him. All who receive the free gift of right standing with God on the basis of the work of Christ, are beneficiaries of God’s righteousness. They are freed from condemnation and granted right standing with God, the Judge.<sup>10</sup> God’s righteousness reveals His covenant faithfulness to secure His people’s salvation, to be sure. But it especially reveals God’s powerful intervention in His own court to grant a righteous status to believers on the basis of the work of Christ.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a good brief summary of the debate regarding this language, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 63-90.

<sup>2</sup> In one important respect, my consideration of this language at this point is incomplete. In a subsequent article, I wish to consider directly the question of the legitimacy of the doctrine of an “imputation” of the righteousness of Christ to believers. If Paul teaches such a doctrine, as I shall argue he does, then that has direct bearing on the question of the meaning of the language of the “righteousness

of God.”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, vol. 10 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 393-405; Sam K. Williams, “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980), pp. 241-90; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 340-6; and Manfred T. Barauch, “Perspectives on ‘God’s righteousness’ in recent German Discussion,” in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* by E. P. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 523-42.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Isa. 63:7 (parallel with “loving-kindness”); Isa. 38:19 (“covenant favor”); Ps. 36:6 (“truthfulness”); Ps. 88:12 (“mercy”); and Ps. 145:7 (“goodness”). See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 82, for a more extensive list of texts and discussion of this use of the language of God’s righteousness in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, vol. 38 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), pp. 36-49.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that, contrary to the suggestion among new perspective authors that this feature of the meaning of the “righteousness of God was largely absent among the Reformers, Calvin was well aware of this usage. Cf. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [reprint of Calvin Translation Society edition, 1843]), p. 96: (on Ps. 71:16) “‘*The Righteousness of God*, as we have just now observed, does not here denote that free gift by which he reconciles men to himself, or by which he regenerates them to newness of life; but his faithfulness in keeping his promises, by which he means to show that he is righteous, upright, and true toward his servants.”

<sup>7</sup> See Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2000), p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> *Christ, our Righteousness*, p. 43. Old Testament texts that speak of God's righteousness in retribution against the wicked include: Nehemiah 9:33; Deuteronomy 32:4-5; II Chronicles 12:6; Psalms. 7:10, 12; 11:5-7; 50:6; Isaiah 1:27; 5:16; 10:22; Lamentations 1:18; Daniel 9:7, 14, 16. Thus, Wright's comment that this meaning is a "Latin irrelevance" is at best overstated, but likely incorrect (see fn 5).

<sup>9</sup> This emphasis provides an Old Testament background to Paul's description in Romans 1:18ff. of how the wrath of God is being revealed against all the "unrighteousness and ungodliness of men."

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 110: "Romans is often regarded as an exposition of judicial, or law-court, theology. But that is a mistake. The law court forms a vital metaphor at a key stage of the argument. But at the heart of Romans we find a theology of love." If our analysis is correct, then this statement of Wright's is seriously misleading at two points. Judicial theology is not merely metaphorical; it expresses the reality of God's own nature as one who is righteous and who acts accordingly. Furthermore, Wright's subordination of God's righteousness to his love inappropriately plays God's attributes off against each other. It would be more proper to say that, just as God *is* loving, so he *is* righteous.

**Dr. Cornel Venema** is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary where he also teaches Doctrinal Studies. Dr. Venema is a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

# Looking Above

## *A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ*

### *"The Seven Stars"*

Revelation 1:20

If you have ever heard a series of sermons on the book of Revelation, most likely those sermons were seven in number: one sermon for each of the seven letters to the seven churches. Indeed, it seems that most sermons preached on Revelation are taken from chapters 2-3, the seven letters to the seven churches.

While the seven letters to the seven churches may be the most accessible section in the book of Revelation, thus reflecting the prevalence of sermons on this portion of the book, there remains much confusion as to how the seven letters to the seven churches are to be understood. Are these letters reflective of seven successive, chronological periods through which the church must pass? Do these letters lead us to understand the history of the church in terms of seven distinct dispensations? Is our goal to decipher the period in which we are now living (are we living in the times of Thyatira? Or perhaps of Sardis? Or maybe in the last days of Laodicea?!)? How are we to understand the seven letters to the seven churches?

The Spirit has given us verse 20 of chapter 1 as the lens through which we must understand chapters 2-3. We cannot understand the seven letters to the seven churches unless we understand "the mystery of the

seven stars and the seven golden lampstands." Thankfully, verse 20 is exegetical. That is to say, verse 20 interprets itself. The Spirit has given us the interpretation of the seven stars and the seven lampstands. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." The Spirit identifies the seven stars as the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands as the seven churches. But what are we to make of that?!

Let us begin with the seven stars. The seven stars are identified as "the angels of the seven churches." But who are these angels? Are they "heavenly beings"? Are they "guardian angels"? Are they the human leaders of the churches - such as the elders or the ministers? Or is this a reference to the prevailing spirit or character of the churches? Who are these seven angels?

In light of the fact that nearly 60 times in the book of Revelation the word "angel" refers to heavenly beings, it seems fitting to understand it in this way here as well. The angels of the seven churches are indeed heavenly beings. There is no compelling reason to take them as anything other than heavenly beings. They are exactly what the Spirit calls them: they are angels!

But note well the number of them: they are seven in number. We have already seen the significance of the



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number seven in the book of Revelation: it represents fullness, completeness. The seven angels, then, ought to be interpreted as the common company of angels in heaven. The seven angels provide us a picture of the common company of the heavenly heralds.

It is beyond the scope of this column to develop an entire theology of angels. But here it bears mentioning that angels are “heralds,” they are “messengers.” That is what their name means. An angel is a messenger; an angel is a herald. There is in heaven a common company of messengers, a common company of heralds.

But then notice that these seven angels, whom we have identified as the common company of angels in heaven, are directly connected with the seven churches on earth: they are the “angels of the seven churches.” That is to say, there is a correspondence between the seven angels in heaven and the seven churches on earth. The common company of angels in heaven have their counterpart on earth *in the church!* There is a matching up of things between heaven and earth: as it is in heaven, so it is on earth.

As there are heavenly messengers, so there are earthly messengers. As there are heavenly heralds, so there are earthly heralds. As there is the common company of messengers in heaven, so there is the common company of messengers on earth. As there is the common company of heralds in heaven, so there is the common company of heralds on earth. But to whom are we referring? Who are the earthly

messengers? Who are the earthly heralds? Those who are called to declare the Word of God: ministers - preachers - they are earthly messengers – they are earthly heralds.

There is then a correspondence between the heavenly heralds and the earthly heralds, between the heavenly messengers and the earthly messengers, between angels and preachers! The conclusion of Psalm 103 even brings them into the closest proximity possible: “Bless the Lord, you His *angels*, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you *ministers* of His who do His pleasure” (Psalm 103:20-21). In other places, those who bear the Word of God are designated as messengers, the very same term given to angels (cf. II Chronicles 36:15).

That the office of the minister of the Word is pictured to us here in terms of the angels of the seven churches - suggesting this matching up of things on earth with things in heaven - underscores the gravity and weight of the office of the minister of the Word. As angels are God’s heavenly messengers, so ministers of the Word are God’s earthly messengers. As angels speak on behalf of God in heaven, so ministers speak on behalf of God on earth. As the angels of God in heaven never go forth, except with the message of God, so the minister of the Word ought never go forth into the pulpit, except with the message of God. As angels do not proclaim themselves, so the minister of the Word ought never proclaim himself. As angels serve the One who sends them, so the minister of the

Word serves the One who sends him. As angels announced the mighty acts of God in history (you might recall the morning stars who sang for joy at creation), so the minister of the Word proclaims the mighty acts of God in history (what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, bringing a new creation). And as the message of angels was to be received as the very message of God, so the message of the minister of the Word ought to be received as the very message of God.

Let the minister of the Word, then, preach the Word of God. Any minister who occupies the pulpit and proclaims anything else is not worthy of the name. The minister of the Word of God is to preach the Word of God! And when the congregation gathers on the Lord’s Day, let it expect to hear the Word of God. The Church of Jesus Christ should never be satisfied with anything less, lest she lose her lampstand.

**Rev. Brian Vos** is the Pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan. He is also the President of the Board of Reformed Fellowship.

# God's People, My Parish

Sometimes God places people in our lives who change us forever. One such person in my life was my first piano teacher, Mrs. Jo Kooiker. When I was seven years old, my dream was to play the saxophone. At the insistence of my parents, however, I first took piano lessons to acquaint myself with the world of music. Mrs. Kooiker gladly shared her gift of music with a young first grader. Every Tuesday after school, I went to her house for lessons. She began to teach me the basics. Simple melody lines and notes eventually turned to four-part harmony and decorated arrangements under her tender care.

But what I learned on her small upright was ever so much more than technique and rhythm. Although Mrs. Kooiker was not a professional piano teacher, she taught me a genuine love for music. Other teachers stress practicing scales or learning technique. She never did that. Mrs. Kooiker encouraged me to enjoy music and to enjoy what I play. She instilled in me a passion for music. Her teaching was the foundation of everything that I have done musically. I am convinced that every song that I play, every concert that I attend, every CD that I buy, and every tune that I hum comes from that basic love for music that she taught me.

As the years flew by, Tuesday afternoons became one of my favorite times of the week. When I arrived at Mrs. Kooiker's after a day

at school, she always had a small snack waiting for us. While we ate our cakes and cookies, we would talk. She always had a funny story about her grandchildren or an anecdote about her trips into town. Sometimes our chats would last longer than the piano lesson! Being a former school teacher, she could answer any question I would ask. Whenever I had a project or report for school, she could always find an article or book about it. One room in her house had books on every subject imaginable.

I will always think of Mrs. Kooiker as an adopted grandmother. We went on numerous "field trips" together. She took me to museums all over West Michigan, she brought me to gardens and parades, we went exploring through downtown Holland, and so much more. In the summertime, she would take me to an organ concert almost every Wednesday and afterwards, we would go to a restaurant for lunch. We always had a wonderful time together.

We received a phone call early one morning this past June telling us that Mrs. Kooiker had unexpectedly passed away. As I played the piano at her funeral, I was reminded again what a special gift God had given me in her. By her Christian example, Mrs. Kooiker had taught me more than music. She was always a godly woman, who exhibited a passion for learning and life. Whenever I count my blessings, she

is always on the top of my list.

*"Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for a while and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never the same."*

**Mr. James Oord** is a Sophomore at Reformed Heritage Christian School in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is the son of the Editor.

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# Sound Bites

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### January 1981

“The biggest idol we all have is ourselves .... The biggest enemy and danger of the church is apathy.”

*Revivals That Are  
Pleasing to God*  
John Blankespoor

### February 1981

“‘Neutral’ knowledge does not exist. There are no value-free facts, nor fact-free values: there are, that is, no citations of ‘facts’ without attached significance.”

*Christian Versus  
Humanistic Education*  
Neal Frey

### March 1981

“Some among us say that it is our Christian duty to stay with the denomination until it disciplines us or in some other way prevents us from holding and preaching the gospel. It seems to me that that is saying too much. Liberal churches today usually do not discipline.”

*Corporate Responsibility*  
Peter De Jong

### April 1981

“Believing in the risen Lord, being a follower of Him, is more than what the eye sees, more than something tangible, it is something of the heart.”

*My Lord and My God*  
John Blankespoor

### May 1981

“Because the Bible teaches us that its writers wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this power predominates over any influence of cultural environment. Therefore, the Bible is not like another ordinary book written by man, in which the times and culture could determine what a man writes. This is God’s Holy Word and when He wrote these words they hold for all generations until the end of time as well as for those at the time in which they were written.”

*What Does Galatians 3:28  
Really Say?*  
Alfred Dykema

### June 1981

“An event that may prove to be important in our Reformed circles was the decision made on April 21, 1981 to organize a society to establish a new Reformed theological seminary .... The organization is to be incorporated as the Mid-America Reformed Seminary Association.”

*A New Reformed Seminary*  
Peter De Jong

### July 1981

“The pre-eminent failing in the evangelical pulpit is a misunderstanding of the nature of preaching .... There is a sense, I think, in which the so-called ‘conversational style [preaching]’ has brought

death to the pulpit.”

*Contemporary Failure  
in the Pulpit*  
John R. De Witt

### September 1981

“Neither evangelistic additions, revival enthusiasms, nor corrective synod decisions are likely to have much lasting significance if they are not accompanied by systematic, sound Biblical teaching. We need Reformation in Catechism classes.”

*Time for Catechism*  
Peter De Jong

### October 1981

“The Bible does not present the church in terms of a theatre or a football game. The church is a body in which each member does his or her part .... Where did I ever get the idea that the church was a spectator event?”

*A Bored Denomination*  
Norman B. Haan

### November 1981

“The conservatives, it seems to me, can best be compared to back-seat drivers. Although they still have some influence in the denomination, they are clearly not behind the wheel. Because they are in the back seat, they are being taken where they do not want to go. As back-seat drivers, they do not have a good view of the road ahead. They issue warnings now and then, but no one seems to pay much attention as the car lurches along.

*Conservatives in the CRC*  
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(continued from page 31)

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*An Ecumenical Christian  
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