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# Being a Father

The other day I heard my six year old talking with his friends about the future. When talking about what they were going to do when they grew up, one child said, "I want to be a father, like my dad." "That's not a job," another child retorted. "Yes, it is," came the reply. "Well, what does your father do?" the third child asked. "He takes care of me." What better compliment could a father have?

When God sought a common way to describe Himself to us, He chose not a crown or a priestly robe. No, He chose the term "father". I believe that we take God's name in vain when we make by-words of the name of God. Words like "gee"

and "gosh" are only abbreviations of profanity. For some, even the qualities and manifestations of God are violations of the third commandment. The Dutch word for "lightning", for example, is considered by many to be a swear word because it refers to a manifestation of God.

Viewed from that perspective, what a fearful thing it is to take lightly the holy manifestation of God as revealed in fatherhood. Not only to misuse the word, but to misuse the very position given to those who portray that aspect of God must be against the will of our Father in heaven.

## The High Calling

How can we truly fulfill so high a trust given to us as fathers? To whom should we look as our example? We must look, of course, to God. When God came to reveal Himself as our "Father", He came as a Son. If we are to be true fathers, we must first be true sons, that is, true sons of God. A father may domineer and establish a tyranny that outwardly appears to be a firm grasp on fatherhood; but if he is going to instill respect instead of terror, he must first seek fatherhood through sonship. He must become a child of God the Father.

True, it is possible to toss out the foundation that demands we first honor God and still be a father. But the home that is built without such



Volume 54, No. 6 (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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a foundation, although it may stand for a time, will collapse. Parental authority that does not rest in God's authority cannot survive the tests of time. We must be faithful to Him who is our Father, receiving our authority from Him, if we are to maintain true authority within the home.

### **Fatherly Guidance**

It is one thing, however, to say, "I will rule my home as a true father in the sight of my heavenly Father," and quite another to carry out such a resolution. First of all, it is impossible to rightly rule our homes under our own strength. We need constant guidance in order to show leadership.

Such guidance comes from the Word of God. As fathers, we should not self-righteously claim, "My home maintains family devotions." Rather, we must in all humility say, "Our family devotions maintain my home." How often, in the busy-ness of life, we neglect the very thing that our homes need the most - time spent with our heavenly Father. It is time with the Father that will give fathers the instruction they need. In such a home children will know that the father's authority is not in and of himself, but that he receives his authority from his heavenly Father, thus teaching them an effective example of respect for authority.

A home that is maintained by family devotions should also be in close relation with the activities of the church. In the past year, my teenage son and I attended the Men's Bible Study sponsored by our church. Not only were we extremely blessed by the leader of the

study, but several opportunities were made available for us to discuss different aspects of the lessons throughout the week. As fathers, we have the responsibility of teaching our sons their responsibilities within the church. If they are to be the future leaders of the church, we must lead them to an understanding of the importance of the church in their lives. One easy way to do that, and receive a blessing ourselves, is to get them involved in the activities of the church. The best way to get them involved in the church is to be joyfully involved ourselves.

### **Fatherly Discipline**

In all likelihood, there will be days when discipline of one kind or another will be required. Sometimes this can be the most difficult task the father must perform in his role as father and spiritual leader of the household.

The father should remember that discipline is to be done in the same manner as he receives it from his Father. Our own Father chastens us, even though we cannot always understand His purposes. Yet, we understand that His discipline is not out of anger but done out of love. Our Father's discipline is done in order to draw us away from our own selfishness into His loving arms. Likewise, we must lovingly discipline our children. Part of that discipline means that we must lead our children. After all, discipline is for instruction.

### **Fatherly Forgiveness**

A final aspect that we fathers must learn from our Father is that of forgiveness. There will be times when our children will hurt us emotionally.

They will do things that will be difficult for us understand. The father who has lived in the everlasting love of his Father and has himself experienced the grace of God that leads to forgiveness, will not give up on his children. He will always be there for them, always show them his love, and he will always be ready to forgive them when they ask for it.

An earthly father is human and fallible. As his children grow older, they will see that he is not free from error, nor his life free from sin. If, through their growing years, the father has maintained his own sovereignty rather than acknowledging that his authority comes from God, his children will rebel against him as they notice his inabilities. If, however, he renders himself in obedience to his Father the children will view him as a child of God placed in charge their household. As fathers, let us seek to live up to the title given us by our Father.

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# Prophetic Fathers

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD . . .”  
(Psalm 78:4b)

In Psalm 78 Asaph speaks as a father to his children, but also as a priest to God’s people. Let us, then, eagerly expect godly instruction applied to our hearts with warm affection. You might even be a father yourself. If so, you have the added bonus of learning from this Spirit-filled saint.

## Christ’s Calling

Firmly Asaph commands their attention, “Give ear . . . incline your ears” (v.1). At the same time he communicates with personal tenderness by calling them “my people” and referring to “my law.” A thoughtful father attempts to speak on a level that his children can understand. This explains Asaph’s method. According to vv.2-3, he intends to teach with the simplicity of a parable in order to convey deep truths. His teaching whets the appetite for the greatest Teacher of parables nearly a thousand years later.

God calls fathers in every generation to serve as prophets in their homes. Fathers represent Jesus Christ to their families. If you are a father, do not be like Moses and complain about your inadequacies. Instead, confess your weakness to God, humbly admit it to your family, but do not shirk your calling. If you are not a father, pray for God to equip the fathers around you to be faithful teachers.

## A God-centered Focus

Asaph’s curriculum begins with a

God-centered focus: “Telling to the generation to come the *praises of the LORD . . .*” (v.4b). *Praise* is as simple as repeating the number of home runs of your favorite baseball player or putting into words your admiration for the technological abilities of your computer. That kind of praise comes quite naturally and all too easily crowds out our praise for God. Perhaps Asaph recognized that tendency in his own day and for that reason gives us a lesson plan for praising God: “And [tell] *His strength* and *His wonderful works* that He has done” (v.4c).

Beginning with verse twelve, Asaph lists the specific acts of God which burst with more power than any home-run king and which are more wonderful than the latest telecommunication systems. Notice how Asaph writes more than a “personal testimony.” He reaches back five hundred years in his family’s history. He retells the heroic feat by which God rescued his own ancestors from Egypt and eventually brought them into the promised land. His detailed list includes the division of the Red Sea (v.13), the pillars of cloud and of fire (v.14), water from rocks (vv.15-16,19-20), and most of the ten plagues (vv. 43-52).

These works of power become all the more *wonderful* as Asaph traces a parallel history. He notices that a rebellion eventually erupts after every great act of God in

Israel’s history (see vv. 17-19, 22, 32, 36-37, 40-42, 56-58). Astonishingly, God does not exterminate Israel. Instead, He generously cares for them (vv. 20, 23-29, 53-55), patiently disciplines them (vv.21, 30-31, 59-64), compassionately forgives them (vv. 38-39) and tenderly shepherds them (vv. 67-72).

## Inspiration & Motivation

With three inspiring purposes, Asaph motivates our praise and the training of our children in the same way.

First, he views the influence of a prophetic father through the lens of a telescope. The purpose of teaching children the habits of praise is “That the generation *to come* might know [the works of the LORD], The children who *would be born*, That they may arise and declare them to *their children*” (v.6). Asaph’s telescopic approach enables him to look light-years beyond his own children. He’s not just training children; he’s training *future* fathers to do the same thing he is doing.

The second prophetic purpose for training children in the LORD’s praise is “That they may set their *hope in God*, And not forget the works of God, But *keep His commandments . . .*” (v.7). One of the surest ways to nurture a hopeful and obedient faith is to focus our attention on the wonderful works of God. This is true for childhood temptations and trials as much as for the adult ones.

The last prophetic purpose is stated negatively in v.8, “And [that they] may *not* be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that *did not* set its heart

aright, And whose spirit was *not faithful* to God.”

Let us keenly sense that the wonderful works of God’s *mercy* never deny nor minimize the harsh reality of His *justice*. According to God’s righteous anger, fire actually consumed some of Israel’s young men (v.63) and the enemy’s sword really did butcher some of their priests (v.64).

How can we guard ourselves and our families against the dangers of reckless presumption? Asaph compels the entire congregation to bear witness to each succeeding generation. How desperately we need prophetic fathers who will diligently teach their children the wonderful works of the LORD.

**Rev. Ken Anema** is the Pastor of Messiah’s Independent Reformed Church in Overisel, Michigan.

## Heresy - Part 3

The early church never enjoyed a golden age. According to the New Testament, a Christian is someone who believes, receives, and obeys the teachings of the Gospel (Romans 6:17). He knows that the Church is the pillar and ground of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Before the New Testament canon was even closed, all major heresies were beginning to show their ugly heads. Already then, certain fundamental truths of the Gospel were rejected, injuring the unity of the Church.

It is wrong to say that early Christians were so devoted to their Lord and lived in such a wonderful harmony and peace with each other that they were not interested in the distinction between truth and error, between orthodoxy and heresy. It is impossible to read Galatians 1:8-9 or 1 John 2:22, or Hebrews 2:1-2 and fail to recognize that certain beliefs were viewed as nonnegotiable. The Church knew that outside the Gospel there is no salvation. The presence of false teachers in the early Church, their ongoing activities, and their increasing attraction in the last days is a clear teaching of Scripture.

### New Testament

Our Lord was concerned about doctrinal purity. He warned His followers against the false prophets of His day. He told them that these people go around in sheep’s clothing but are inwardly ferocious wolves. He also prophesied that false teachers would come in the future. The apostles made frequent references to heresy and heretics. Their epistles are directed toward every kind of

problem within the Church from the doctrinal errors of Gnosticism, to instructions about social responsibility, to admonitions about sexual immorality.

The apostle Paul called false doctrine a “gangrene” (2 Timothy 2:17). When he addressed heresy in his letter to the Galatians, he did not mince words. The issues were too serious for niceties. The very salvation of the Galatians was at stake! The Galatian saints were warned. Some of them were already following a different Gospel (Galatians 1:6) and thereby seeking “to distort the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7). God, through Paul, pronounced a curse on those who proclaimed a false Gospel (Galatians 1:9). Paul’s great concern was the purity of the Church. He grieved over the sowing of jealousy, contentious behavior, and mutual distrust among believers. He repeatedly stated that divisions within the Church threaten her unity and hinder the spread of the Gospel. Paul lamented that his flock in Corinth was split by factionalism and heresies (1 Corinthians 11: 18-19). He worked hard to maintain the unity of the Church.

Paul compared the Church to a bride and Christ as the bridegroom (Ephesians 25b-32). Nothing should come between the bride and the bridegroom and spoil their beautiful relationship. The Church must remain faithful to her Lord. The jealous love of our Lord calls for His bride to keep pure until He comes for her in glory (1 Corinthians 6:17).

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## *Why do we see false teachings, factionalism, and other troubles within the Church? When the Gospel is preached, Satan opposes.*

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The Church must not commit spiritual adultery which results when those who claim to be God's people stop listening to what the Lord has said, follow false teachers, and turn to other gods (2 Corinthians 11:1-2).

John reminded Christians about the danger of false prophets (1 John 4:1). The problem of heresy over against orthodoxy, shows itself in 2 Peter 2:1, referring to false teachers who will "secretly introduce destructive heresies" in their denial of Christ. The epistles of Paul, John, and Peter clearly reveal early pressures on the Church to resist doctrinal error within her ranks. They also declare that we have no right to tamper with the Gospel, or to add or subtract from it. We must remain alert and valiantly guard the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:14).

### **Satan**

Why do we see false teachings, factionalism, and other troubles within the Church? When the Gospel is preached, Satan opposes. Paul saw how his work for the Lord was continually frustrated by Satan. Satan is a wily antagonist and all his powers and forces are arrayed against the Church. As Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones puts it: "The confusion in the Christian church today is not merely the result of what is proudly called 'scholarship.' It is the fruit of activity of the devil. The Apostles were aware of it in the first century."

Christ is the King of Truth (John

18:37). He is the Truth (John 14:6). Satan is the father of lies, who hates the Truth. Hence, all false teaching originates in Satan (John 8:44). He is an expert at instigating false teachings. The apostle Paul said, "In later times some will abandon the faith and following deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). Satan is the prince of darkness. Those who are in his domain walk in the spiritual night and can not see the truth. They believe a lie rather than truth.

Satan hates the Church. His sole object is to disturb the life of the church, to shake the confidence of Christian people, to spoil God's work in Christ. When we say Church, we say Christ. That is why Satan hates the Church. He knows how much Christ loves the Church. Consequently, Christians wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness and powers of darkness.

The devil is a determined foe. In his day, John Calvin saw the devil working hard to undermine the Church. Calvin noted that Satan brought in "false doctrines by the wagon load as soon as the gospel began to spring up." He warned that "everyone should be on their guard lest Satan should gain access to the flock and scatter it through their agency." But we can take heart. Satan may be at work but so is the Holy Spirit. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit the lie will never gain complete victory. How-

ever threatening the flood of lies may be, the truth struggles on and surfaces time and time again.

### **The Early Church**

Wherever the early Christians spread the Gospel, Satan did his utmost to halt the advance of God's Kingdom. They were persecuted, driven from their homes, and deprived of jobs. Many sacrificed their lives for the sake of their Lord. For several centuries the Church was literally fighting for her very life.

Yet in the midst of all their ordeals, believers did not lose their vision of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Unity was their ideal (cf. John 17). It became obvious early in the history of the Church that the human reality did not always match the ideal. Although courageous and committed to the Lord and His Great Commission, the early Christians had their faults. They fell for temptations. They were sinners as well as saints. Lack of love and self-assertiveness led to divisions in Christian communities. False teachers led believers astray.

Many of the heresies of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries were doctrinal, concerned with the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, free will, grace, predestination, original sin, the sacraments, and so on. We should not be surprised by sin even in the lives of Christians. As G.K. Chesterton aptly remarked, "Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved."

Unity was under strain from a very early stage as power struggles emerged. But that did not diminish the importance of the ideal of unity. Despite the divisions and internal

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troubles, the early church fathers worked and prayed for unity. Cyprian's (Bishop of Carthage d.258 A.D.) overriding concern was to maintain unity. He spoke of the "mystery of unity." He associated this unity with the chastity, modesty, and purity of the Church as the Bride of Christ. He longed to keep the church pure for the sake of the Gospel. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) emphasized preserving "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4: 3). He believed that the right way to behave is not to eject the schismatics themselves from the community but to drive the evil out of their views and persuade them to return to the fold.

### **Boundaries**

The history of the early church relates her intense struggle with heresy. What gripping conflict! The foundations of the orthodox faith were shaking! The threat became so severe that it soon became apparent that something had to be done to safeguard the Gospel. Boundaries had to be drawn. Church leaders deemed it necessary to define orthodoxy. Unless this was done, any heretic could masquerade as having the truth. They held councils in order to clarify the Christian faith, to pinpoint heresies, and to protect people from believing them. Already in the second century, Irenaeus (ca. 115 - 202), wrote in *Against Heresies*, that Christians had a "rule of faith," a creed that stated what each Christian was required to believe.

A major crisis was caused by the Arian heresy in the fourth century. Arius, a priest at Alexandria, denied the divinity of Christ and the reality of salvation. The doctrine of the

Trinity was also in dispute. A special early difficulty was to establish a Christian orthodoxy about the three persons in one God. An issue closely connected was what it could mean to say that "God became man" in Christ. The Council of Nicea, a new and dramatic procedure for dealing with the outbreak of heresy, was called in 325 A.D.

Out of the refining fire of those theological conflicts have come creeds which we still confess today in our churches. The council of Nicea formulated a creed, now known as the Nicene Creed, which spelled out the orthodox Christian beliefs regarding the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ. It also defined the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. A revised version of the Nicene Creed was agreed on by the Council of Constantinople in 381. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 a definition of faith was agreed upon. They went on to list the heretical ideas their restatement of the creed outlaws and to insist that "since we have formulated these things with all possible accuracy and attention... no one is permitted to produce, or even to write down or compose, any other creed or to think or teach otherwise." Anyone who attempted it was to be deposed if a cleric or anathematized if a lay person. The Nicene Creed is still a touchstone or benchmark of right belief.

None of the great creeds of the Church were produced indepen-

dently of what the Church thought and said in previous generations. The Creeds were attempts on the part of the Church to define, and to lay down, what is true and what is not true. And in this way they were able to brand certain teachers as heretics. The Creeds were products of careful and prayerful deliberations in official gatherings of Church representatives. These representatives were convinced that when Christians assembled for the welfare of the Church, the Holy Spirit was also present and they could be sure of having divine guidance in reaching their conclusions.

### **Reformation**

During the Middle Ages the West had only one Church. The 16th century brought about Reformation which repudiated the assumption that there was one visible church and that to be outside it was to be a heretic or a schismatic. The Reformation era made the question of heresy increasingly complex. It introduced a wholly different view of the Christian faith and ethics than the Christendom in the Middle Ages had taught.

Catholics and Protestants were alike in agreeing that right belief is necessary for salvation. But they differed in their interpretation of heresy. Protestants defined heresy as a departure from the teaching of Scripture. Traditional Roman Catholics equated the teaching of Scripture with that of the church. Heresy for them was a departure

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*Despite the divisions and other internal troubles, the early church fathers worked and prayed for unity.*

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from the church's teaching. Among the Protestants grew an increasing disagreement in what constituted right belief. A series of alternative Churches came into being and have continued in existence since the Reformation. Not all members of such communities have recognized each other as churches. Indeed the whole question "what is the Church?" was thrown into uncertainty by the Reformation.

For the Reformers, heresy was a serious matter. John Calvin called it an offense against God, the Church, and society. All Reformers rejected the label "heretics" for themselves. They thought of themselves as representing truth over apostasy. The major Reformers did not label the Roman Catholic Church *per se* as heretical. Calvin did note that in the Roman Catholic Church the signs of the true church - the Word rightly preached, the sacraments rightly celebrated, and discipline faithfully exercised - were missing (Institutes IV, vii, 23).

For Martin Luther heresy was a "spiritual thing." At the time when the Roman Catholic Church fiercely persecuted Protestants and was employing torture through the Inquisition to expose men's secret thoughts, he declared, "We do not kill, banish, and persecute anybody who teaches other than we do. We fight them with the Word of God alone." Luther regarded the pope as the apostate of the New Israel and spoke of "the swarm of vermin in Rome," but he did not designate Catholicism as heresy.

During the Reformation the need to determine the doctrinal boundaries of the orthodox faith became ex-

ceedingly important. In response, the different sections of the Reformed Church drew up their Confessions of Faith, such as the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.

In these confessions our forefathers stated as clearly as possible a summary of the great doctrines of the historic Christian faith as found in infallible Scriptures. They were convinced of the finality of the Gospel, and that it cannot be changed without altering the very character of Christianity. The con-

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fessions were drawn up for the same reason as held good during the earlier centuries. Church leaders, led by the Holy Spirit, and enlightened by Him, saw very clearly that they must lay down clearly on paper what is true and what is not true. They had to define their faith over against Roman Catholicism and also against certain heresies that were tending to rise even amongst themselves.

Today, we often hear complaints about the dated language of the confessions. The riches they contain are barely known because many think these 16th-century documents have little value for our

time. But we should know and confess them. We need to preserve the confessions, in all their illuminating richness, which past generations have handed down to us. Devaluation of the confession greatly harms the Church. We need doctrinal clarity in our age of mass religious confusion. The plurality of errors and heresies that our generation confronts demands that lines be drawn - thoughtfully, humbly, but drawn nonetheless. And we need honesty in the Church.

Do we believe and live our confessions? The 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian theologian and church historian W.G.T. Shedd observed in *Calvinism: Pure & Mixed*: "Denominational honesty consists, first, in a clear unambiguous statement by a church of its doctrinal belief, and, second, in an unequivocal and sincere adoption of it by its members. Both are requisite."

**Faith and Practice**

It has been said that doctrine divides but good works unite. We do not dispute the need for good works. As crucial as correct theology is correct behavior. Good works must necessarily flow from the life of one truly redeemed. We cannot separate doctrine from life. Departure from the truth is not a greater sin than disobeying the law of God. That's why heresy always had a wider meaning. It is not only a denial of revealed truth. It is also related to Christian life and conduct.

As Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones put it, "One of the first things you are to learn in this Christian life and warfare is that, if you go wrong in your doctrine, you will go wrong in all

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aspects of life.” In other words, the Christian faith is more than a consent to certain truths but a response of faith to the Word of God. It means fully trusting the Lord, showing the Lord our love through doctrinal faithfulness to His Word, by following Him heroically without any reservations. Obedience to the Lord in faith and practice may well lead to controversy and conflict.

There always be some point of conflict or disagreement with the Christian message and the spirit of any age. As we discern the spirit of our postmodern age, the constant call for peace unaccompanied by a passion for truth will not in the end serve the Church. The time may come when the Christian witness will be costly - even in North America. The well-known hymn *The Church's One Foundation* was written in 1864 when British Christians were undergoing heart-searching concerning the nature of the Church and its authority. “Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed; Yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up ‘How long?’ And soon the night of weeping shall be a morn of song.” For two thousand years, the saints and the martyrs have cried “How long?” Let us cling to our Lord’s promise, that soon, very soon, the night of weeping shall be the morn of song (cf. Revelation 22:20).

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

# Looking Out and About

- On April 16, 2004, the Faith United Reformed Church of Olive Center, Michigan celebrated its tenth anniversary. Rev. Wybren Oord, their first pastor and Rev. Art Besteman, who served as interim pastor during their vacancy, reminisced with the large audience in attendance about some of the experiences of the congregation. The church, which was able to have a mortgage burning ceremony some time ago on their original building, has authorized the preparation of architectural drawings for the construction of an educational wing on their present building. Rev. Ed Marcusse is serving as the present pastor.

- On April 29, 2004 the Missions Committee of Classis Michigan sponsored the First Annual Spring Mission Rally. The meeting was held at the Trinity United Reformed Church of Caledonia, Michigan. Rev. Paul Murphy, Pastor of Messiah’s Reformed Fellowship in Manhattan, New York was the speaker. His address was entitled “THE GREAT O-MISSION: THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM”. The rally was concluded with a fellowship hour.

- The Reformed Youth Services Annual Junior High Retreat was held on April 30 and May 1, 2004 at Camp Geneva on the shores of Lake Michigan in Holland, Michigan. Rev. Peter Adams, pastor of the Grace United Reformed

Church of Alto, Michigan, had chosen as his theme “Movin’ On Up”. He helped those in attendance think about the transition from childhood toward adulthood.

- Mr. Douglas Barnes, a recent graduate of Mid America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana has accepted the call extended to him by the United Reformed Church of Hills, Minnesota.

- Rev. C.J. Den Dulk of Trinity CRC in Sparta, Michigan visited the Ukraine with Dr. and Mrs. Joel Nederhood. The two men lectured at a pastor’s conference which was attended by over a thousand pastors.

- Matthew Powell and Lee Johnson from New Geneva, as was Dan Rogers from Mid-America Reformed Seminary were licensed to exhort in the Reformed Church US by their South Central Classis.

- Mr. Dave Klumpenhower sustained his candidacy exam and has been declared a candidate in the URCNA by the Consistory of the Phoenix URC. He is available immediately and is eligible for a call.

*The Outlook* would like to encourage submissions to Looking Out and About. If you have any church news, please email [wyb.kath@juno.com](mailto:wyb.kath@juno.com)

# We Confess

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

### *Article 14: Of the Creation, Fall, and Corruption of Man*

Who am I? From where have I come? Where am I going? These questions have intrigued, or haunted, the mind of man for centuries. These perennial questions are making a comeback of sorts amid Generation-X and now Net-Gen men and women in our culture. After a generation of saying “God is dead,” and “if it feels good, do it,” many young people today have become disillusioned and disenchanted with society, their families, and even themselves. The words of the 1969 Beatles song sums up their despair:

*He's a real nowhere man  
Sitting in his nowhere land  
Making all his nowhere plans  
For nobody*

*Doesn't have a point of view  
Knows not where he's going to  
Isn't he a bit like you and me?*

Into this culture of despair and meaninglessness, we as Christians have a message to speak. The answer to the question, “Who am I?” is found in where we have come from and where we are going. As human beings we were fearfully and wonderfully created in the image of God in our first parents, Adam and Eve. That wonderful image was shattered into a thousand pieces by their willful sin against God. Because this is from where we have come, we are going to a place of eternal punishment and separation from the grace and mercy of God – unless our shattered, meaningless lives are gra-

ciously recreated by Jesus Christ.

This is what we confess about our fellow man and ourselves. In this article we make the transition from what we confess about God (*theology proper*; Articles 1-13) to what we confess about mankind (*theological anthropology*; Articles 14-15). Recall that in Article 12 of the Belgic Confession we made the sweeping declaration, with Scripture, that God “has created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures. God is Creator and Lord of all. Here in Article 14 the focus is narrowed to the creation of humanity in the image of God along with our subsequent “Fall” into sin, and the consequences of that sin.

#### **The Height of Glory**

The Reformed doctrine of man would make a great drama entitled, “From the height of glory to the depth of depravity.” The Confession begins with the height of our creation in saying

*We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth and made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God.*

Scripture teaches that man was the pinnacle, the “noblest” of God’s creative works that culminated on the sixth day of creation, being

“crowned...with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5).

It is instructive for us to note that in Genesis 1 mankind is made in the image of God by “God” (Hebrew, *Elohim*), while the Psalmist reflects upon that work as the work of the “LORD” (Hebrew, *Yahweh*). What we confess when we say that man was made in the image of God is that we were made to be in covenant with the LORD, the covenant God.

This height of glory being made in covenant with God is seen in our creation “out of the dust of the earth.” Notice how Biblical our Confession is as it echoes the words of Genesis 2:7, “The LORD God formed the man from dust of the ground.” Whereas with everything else we read that “God said...and it was so,” with Adam we read that God actually formed him. God is here described as a master potter, intimately shaping and forming His masterpiece, as Israel said of God: “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).

#### **In the Image of God**

This height of glory is also seen as God made humanity “after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy.” Here the Confession again parrots the words of Scripture in Genesis 1:26-27, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

What does it mean that man was made in the image of God (Latin, *imago Dei*)? The Confession says that Adam was made “good, righteous, and holy.” Why? Where do those terms come from? First, man was made good as God had declared everything that He had made, including Adam “very good” (Genesis 1:31). We also see what it meant for Adam to be made in the image of God before the Fall, from how Christ remakes us after the Fall, after redemption. In Christ, we have a “new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24 cf. Colossians 3:10). In terms of the image of God, what Adam was, we have become.

Our Three Forms of Unity are unified in teaching this about the image of God, as the following shows:

*Did God create man thus, wicked and perverse? No, but God created man good and after His own image, that is, in righteousness and true holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness, to praise and glorify Him.”* (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 6)

*Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole man was holy.* (Canons of Dort III/IV, 1)

So does this mean that when Adam fell into sin, and we with him, that he lost the image of God? In standard, classic Reformed theology, the answer is yes and no. We have always distinguished ourselves from the Lutheran position by making a distinction between the image of God in two senses: broad and narrow. The broader aspect of the image of God consists of such things as the ability to think, the capacity to be religious, and the

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***Does this mean that when Adam fell into sin, and we with him, that he lost the image of God? In standard, classic Reformed theology, the answer is yes and no.***

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ability to exercise volition. The narrower aspect, which the Confession emphasizes, consists in what Scripture calls true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10).

As a result of the Fall, Adam, and all mankind to follow, lost the narrower aspect of the image of God. The Confession says later in Article 14, “And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, *he has lost all his excellent gifts* which he had received from God, *and retained only small remains thereof*” (emphasis mine). The Canons of Dort III/IV, 1 agrees with this position, saying that Adam: “forfeited these excellent gifts”

(that is, the narrow image).

After the Fall, however, man still retains the broader sense in the image of God. In speaking of the tongue, James 3:9 indicates that unregenerate man is still, in some sense, in the image of God, saying, “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.” Another article in the Canons of Dort also highlights this as we are told that

*There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, and natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior* (CD, III/IV, 4).

*... man by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin which pervaded the whole race of mankind deprive him of the human nature... this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties...* (CD, III/IV, 16).

This height of man’s original glory is seen, finally, in that he was “capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God.” Adam, as the “type of the one who was to come” (Romans 5:14) was completely able to keep the law of God that was given to him in the

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Garden. This is why since the time of St. Augustine, Christian theology has confessed that Adam was made *posse peccare et posse non peccare*, that is, possible to sin and possible not to sin. He truly had a free will in every sense of the word. What a height he stood on!

### **The Depths of Depravity**

But how he fell! Adam, the crown of God's creation, the only creature made in God's image and likeness, the creature to whom God gave dominion, and the one with whom God made a covenant, broke that covenant. We continue with the words of the Confession, which says

*But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed ...*

Then what? Was there any consequence of Adam's covenant disobedience? Did his sin effect us? Again, the Confession continues

*... and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life; having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made*

*himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he has lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and retained only small remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teaches us, saying: The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not; where St. John calls men darkness.*

Notice the litany of these depths of depravity in which Adam plunged our race: separation from God (Isaiah 59:2), corruption of our whole nature (Romans 3:10-18), bodily and spiritual death (Genesis 2:17; Ephesians 2:1), and darkness of understanding (Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14); as the Canons, in even darker language, say

*But, revolting from God by the instigation of the devil and by his own free will, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and in the place thereof became involved in blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness*

*of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obstinate in heart and will, and impure in his affections. (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 1)*

### **But What About "Free Will?"**

As a result of this separation and all other curses, we have also lost any ability to restore this covenantal relationship between us and God. The Confession appends to the previous words of Article 14 a rejection of the errors of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, which teach that man, after the Fall, still has the ability either to save himself by his will and effort or to cooperate with grace in his salvation. Against this we confess

*Therefore we reject all that is taught repugnant to this concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin, and can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven. For who may presume to boast that he of himself can do any good, since Christ says: No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him? Who will glory in his own will, who understands that the mind of the flesh is enmity against God? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God? In short, who dares suggest any thought,*

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***We have also lost any ability to restore this covenantal relationship between us and God.***

## Questions for Further Study

1. Did God make a covenant with Adam before the Fall? (cf. Hos. 6:7)  
If so, what should this tell us about how God relates to humanity?
2. How does the understanding that even your non-Christian neighbors are still, in a sense, in the image of God, cause you treat them?
3. What does Jesus' being *the* image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) have to do with us being remade in the image of God? (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10)
4. Why is the teaching of "free will" so dangerous to how one views their guilt, God's grace, and their response of gratitude?

*since he knows that we are not sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God? And therefore what the apostle says ought justly to be held sure and firm, that God worketh in us both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. For there is no understanding nor will conformable to the divine understanding and will but what Christ has wrought in man; which He teaches us, when He says: Apart from me ye can do nothing.*

The consequence of the Fall is that we no longer have a free will to choose either good or bad, in relation to God, as Adam was able to do in the Garden. We see this taught in the impressive, yet by no means exhaustive, list of Scriptures that the Confession adduces to establish this truth

1. Man is but a slave to sin (John 8:34)
2. [Man] can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven (John 3:27)
3. No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him (John 6:44)
4. The mind of the flesh is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7)
5. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:4)
6. We are not sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God (2 Cor. 3:5)
7. God worketh in us both to will and to work, for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13)
8. Apart from me ye can do nothing (John 15:5)

So the question for us is, are unregenerate people, after the Fall,

in the same position as Adam in being able to obey the law of God and to do the will of God in order to save themselves? Our answer is that of St. Augustine, who said that after the Fall, and prior to regeneration, man is *non posse non peccare*, that is, not possible not to sin.

Praise be to the Lord that once He regenerates us, we are made *posse non peccare*, that is, possible not to sin, as we begin to live a life of gratitude. Furthermore, praise the Lord that on the last day, we shall be made even better than Adam, *non posse peccare*, that is, not possible to sin!

And this is our message to the world – that we were made in the image of God, that we have shattered ourselves into a thousands pieces by the Fall and our actual sins, but that in Christ we have been remade and that a day is coming in which we shall completely be remade and restored.

**Rev. Daniel R. Hyde** is the Pastor of the Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, California.  
([www.oceansideurc.org](http://www.oceansideurc.org))

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# Classis Southwest U.S.

## Report

### March 23-24, 2004

Classis Southwest U.S. was held in beautiful Loveland, Colorado, as it conducted its 12th regular session on March 23-24, 2004, at the Calvary United Reformed Church.

Tuesday afternoon was taken up with two matters. The first was the election of classical functionaries. Rev. Danny Hyde, from the Oceanside United Reformed Church of Oceanside, California, was elected as classical clerk to a three-year term beginning on April 1, 2004. His alternate is Rev. Stephen Donovan. Mr. Jake Sonke, who has faithfully served as classical treasurer in the past, was re-elected to another three-year term. His alternate is Mr. Tom Sloan.

The rest of the day was filled with the candidacy examination of Mr. David Klumpenhower, a graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and a member of the Phoenix United Reformed Church. Mr. Klumpenhower was examined in the seven areas prescribed by the Church Order. He sustained his examination and will now be declared a candidate by his church. We praise God for continuing to provide men qualified and trained for the pulpit ministry.

The Tuesday evening fellowship time was lead by Elder Bill Kok. The delegates heard reports about

the current church planting activities and spent time together in prayer and song.

Wednesday's agenda was very full, but was handled with great efficiency. The first order of business was to give permission for the organization of the Emmanuel United Reformed Church of Lemoore, California, a church-planting effort of the Zion United Reformed Church of Ripon, California. The delegates paused to thank God in prayer for His work in this young congregation.

There were seven overtures that were presented to classis from the churches. The first dealt with the way in which classical examinations are conducted. It will be possible for delegates to vote on whether a man has passed each individual section of the examination, rather than a straight up-or-down-vote on the entire exam. The next two overture were concerning a classical church-planting seminar. While affirming the importance of a coherent church-planting strategy, the delegate chose not to pass either of these overtures.

The fourth overture asked for a new Church Order Article dealing with the discipline of office-bearers. If a man's own consistory or classis failed to discipline him,

this overture would have allowed the matter to be brought to synod by another consistory. This overture was defeated.

The fifth overture was the most theological of the overtures brought before classis. This five-page overture sought to articulate what the confessions affirm and deny with regard to the doctrine of justification. The overture was not sustained by the classical delegates.

The delegates did vote to bring two matters to Synod Calgary 2004. The first asks for an amendment to be made to Appendix 1 of the Church Order, which would specify that it is the consistory, not the council, who shall be responsible for conducting a licensure examination. The second overture asks for oversight and direction to be given regarding how synodical committee expenditures are to be administered.

Classis Southwest U.S. is schedule to convene next on September 14-15, 2004, at the Oceanside United Reformed Church.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk  
Classis Southwest U.S.

*The Outlook* invites Clerks of Classis to send a summary of their activities to [wyb.kath@juno.com](mailto:wyb.kath@juno.com)

# The Name That Saves

*So when He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."... "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?"* Luke 5:20, 23

About thirty years ago, Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a song entitled, "There's Something About That Name". The song was about that name that is above every name, that name that is so sweet to the believer's ear: the name "Jesus".

In the Bible there are more than one hundred names and titles given to the Second Person of the Trinity. The most familiar are the names we confess in the Apostles' Creed: Jesus, Christ, Son of God, and Lord.

In the Creed, as well as in the Catechism, the name "Jesus" is mentioned first. It is the personal name of the Child of Mary. It is the name by which the Incarnate God was called in His boyhood. It remained His name throughout all His life. It is still His name today. This name reveals to the believer who the Second Person of the Trinity is. He is our Savior and His name tells us as much.

## A God Given Name

It is important for us to remember that God the Father gave this name to God the Son. An angel of God was sent to Joseph even before the child was born and told the Nazarene, "You shall call His name 'Jesus' for He shall save His people from their sins." Heaven had a special interest in this baby. And no wonder! This was the One destined to bring light to those living in darkness and salvation to a world

lost in sin and death.

God wanted the name of His Son to represent who His Son is. He wanted the name itself to be a revelation to us. He wanted that name to reflect the work of His Son and to declare to the world the mission for which He came.

## The Saving Name

The mission of the Second Person of Trinity is to save. Whatever else the Christ may be: teacher, example, miracle worker, Lord, or King, He is first and foremost Savior. His name means "Jehovah Saves".

The simple truth that the first section of the Heidelberg Catechism points out is that we are all sinners. If we are sinners, we are unsaved, doomed, and damned sinners. It is from this horrible condition that Jesus came to save us.

He came first of all to save us from our guilt. There is no one who is

free from guilt. No one can stand before the Father in judgment and say, "I am not guilty of sin." Scripture declares us guilty. Any honest look at ourselves would have our own consciences declare us guilty. We are guilty of sinning against the most holy God and we are in desperate need of a Savior.

In the Gospel of Luke there was a man who was paralyzed. His friends carried him to the place where Jesus was preaching in Capernaum. Unfortunately, the house in which Jesus was preaching was very crowded and they could not get anywhere near Him. An idea entered their minds and the men carried their friend to the top of a house, tore the roof off, and lowered their friend before Jesus.

One might have expected the Great Physician to cure this man physically. And Jesus does heal him. But not before the Savior looked upon the man with compassion and said, "Your sins are forgiven you." Notice that Jesus did not first tell him to take up his bed and walk. Jesus knew this man's deepest need was not the ability to walk or to work for a living. His greatest need was the forgiveness of sins!

**Q** *Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Savior?*

**A** *Because He delivers us from all our sins and saves us.*

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Isn't that true of us, as well? Our greatest need is not physical but spiritual. It is the forgiveness of our sins. And the message that Jesus brings - even in the very name that He bears - is that He has provided forgiveness through His own precious blood.

Jesus is a Savior who saves us not only from the guilt of sin but also from the power of sin. Forgiveness of our sins is only part of the work that the Savior came to bring us. Our Savior also delivers us from our love of sinning.

Recently, I read an interesting article in the newspaper about a man the governor of our state had pardoned. This man had been sent to prison several years ago for a crime he had committed. Now his guilt had been cancelled. His past record had been completely blotted out. The reason the article was interesting was because the man was back in jail for committing the same crime again. Even though the governor may have been able to declare this man free from the guilt of past sin, she could not set him free from the power of sin. She could not change his heart.

When the Savior comes, He not only forgives us, He also cleanses our hearts. He not only delivers us from our guilt, He also delivers us from our pollution, that is, our desire to sin. He grants us justification and provides for sanctification.

The moment Paul was converted He asked, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" Through the power of Christ, Paul turned from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of Christ. No sooner did the seraphim touch the unclean lips

of Isaiah than Isaiah says, "Here I am, send me."

Once we are saved we no longer have the desire to do the works of darkness. Once forgiven by the blood of Christ, we are filled with a desire to live for Christ. Why? Because, as the angel announced to Joseph, He has saved us from our sins. There's just something about that name.

### **The Only Name**

Question and Answer 29 ends with the words, "It is futile to look for salvation elsewhere." Very clearly,

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## ***Salvation by human effort is the greatest fallacy within all of religion.***

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it is a waste of time to put your hope for salvation in anyone or anything else but Jesus.

There is only one Savior; only one way to have peace with God; only one way to forgiveness; only one way to be free from the guilt of sin and that is through the One whom God has sent. Those who look elsewhere will not find it.

The reason that the church must preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified is because the worst thing that could ever happen to a person is for him to die in his sin. All the turmoil that we see in the world around us is due to a neglect of God and the refusal to ac-

knowledge His Son as our Savior.

There are many people who are not satisfied with the idea of salvation through Christ alone. They want to be able to earn their salvation or they want to seek salvation through Mary or through saints and angels.

I met a man in the hospital who thought he had an 85% chance of getting into heaven. After all, he argued, he had lived a decent life and he believed the better he lived, the better his 'odds' of getting into heaven were. His foundation for salvation was following the example of Jesus. He did not think he needed Jesus as a Savior.

Salvation by human effort is the greatest fallacy within all of religion. It is the biggest trick that Satan can play on a person. Our assurance of salvation can never be 50-50. It can never be that we have an 85% chance of getting to heaven. Our assurance of salvation is either 100% in Jesus Christ, or it is 0%.

Many people believe that Christ did His part in the salvation plan on the cross and now the rest is up to us. They think that God's grace is brought down to a point just above our heads, so to speak, and now all we have to do is reach up and grab it and apply it to ourselves.

If that were true, then Christ would not be worthy of all the glory. Some of it would be ours because we were the ones who reached out for our own salvation. If that were true then Jesus would not be a perfect nor a complete Savior.

If God were to bring His grace to just within our grasp, the hard truth is, in our totally depraved state, not only would we be unable to reach

out and grab it, we would have no desire within us to even reach out for it.

Our repentance and our faith are all the power of the Holy Spirit working within us applying God's grace to our lives. He overwhelms us with God's love, God's mercy, God's goodness, and God's faithfulness so much so that His grace becomes irresistible to us and we are compelled to respond to His saving work.

Is the salvation that God gives through His Son a real part of your life? Please do not say, "I am doing the best that I can." The best that you can do is to hate God and your neighbor. Instead, admit that you are helpless and in desperate need of a Savior. And then rejoice, because God has provided one - even His own Son, Jesus Christ.

**Rev. Wybren H. Oord** is Pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He also serves as editor of *The Outlook*.

## Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (12)

### "Justification and the 'Imputation' of Christ's Righteousness" (Part Two)

In my previous article, I noted that, despite the importance of the idea of the imputation of Christ's righteousness in the Reformation's understanding of justification, the new perspective generally tends to diminish or deny that justification involves such an act. Though N. T. Wright allows that justification is to be understood in the context of the court-room (God as Judge vindicates or pronounces in favor of someone), he dismisses the notion that in so doing God grants or imputes righteousness to the justified person.

When the Reformers spoke of the "imputation" of the righteousness of Christ to believers in justification, they appealed to a number of passages in Paul's epistles that speak of justification in terms of an act of imputation. Thus far we have considered only Romans 4:2-6, one of the more important of these passages. In the following, we will consider several additional passages that are of special importance to the idea of imputation.

#### Romans 5:12-19

Though Romans 4 (a passage we considered in a previous article) may not explicitly identify the righteousness that is the basis for the believer's justification, there are several key passages in Paul's epistles that clearly identify this righteousness as the righteousness of Christ. These passages affirm

that in justification God freely grants and imputes the righteousness of Christ to believers. The first of these passages is Romans 5:12-21, especially verses 16-21.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many transgressions brought justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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***The dominant thread in Paul's argument is the judicial implication of our union with the first and second Adams. God counts or reckons as guilty all who are in Adam; and He counts or reckons as innocent all who are in the second Adam, Christ.***

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This passage, which closes the apostle Paul's summary treatment of the doctrine of justification in Romans 3-5, draws a far-reaching comparison and contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam, Christ. Just as all who are "in Adam" are subject to condemnation on account of his one trespass, so all who are "in Christ" receive justification and life on account of His one act of righteousness. Though this passage bristles with difficult questions of interpretation, our treatment of it will have to focus only on those things that directly bear upon the subject of imputation and justification.<sup>1</sup>

In order to appreciate what this passage teaches about imputation and justification, it is necessary to begin by noting the way the Apostle Paul connects the one trespass of the first man, Adam, with the fact that "all sinned" (v. 12) and are under the reign of death. Though there are those who attempt to explain the phrase "all sinned" by taking this language to refer to the actual sins of all men, this explanation does not fit well with the nature of Paul's argument. The burden of Paul's argument is that there is an *immediate link* between the one trespass of the one man, Adam, on the one hand, and the reign of death and the judgment that brings condemnation upon the many, on the other. For this reason, he em-

phasizes that death reigned from Adam to Moses, "even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (v. 14).

Even though the trespass was Adam's, and Adam's alone, the consequence of this trespass, death, reigned over all. Accordingly, the apostle insists that the "one trespass led to condemnation for all men" and "the many were made sinners" (vv. 18-19). By virtue of the union of all with Adam in his one trespass, God imputes or reckons to all men the guilt of this trespass and its judicial consequence, death. This is the sense in which we may say that "all sinned" in Adam, and all bear, as a consequence, the judicial liability of condemnation and death.

In a similar way, the apostle links the one man's obedience (lit., "the act of righteousness of one") with the making righteous of the many. Just as death reigned through the disobedience of the first Adam, so "the free gift of righteousness reign[s] in life through the one man Jesus Christ." So far as the doctrine of imputation is concerned, the critical phrase in these verses is "the free gift of righteousness." The many who are made righteous, who receive justification and life through the work of Christ, are not made righteous through their own deed or

deeds. Nothing that they are or do constitutes them righteous or beneficiaries of God's favorable verdict and acceptance. Rather, God's grace "super-abounds" toward the many who are through union with Christ made partakers of His righteousness.

For the purpose of understanding the doctrine of imputation, the critical point in Paul's argument is his insistence upon the direct (or immediate) participation of all who are united with Christ in His one act of obedience. Just as Adam's sin (and not the sins of all men) constitutes all as sinners under the judicial sentence of condemnation and death, so Christ's obedience (and not the obedience of the many) constitutes the many as righteous and under the judicial sentence of justification and life. The dominant thread in Paul's argument, both with respect to the participation of all men in Adam and the participation of the many in Christ, is the *judicial implication* of our union with the first and second Adams. God counts or reckons as guilty all who are in Adam; and He counts or reckons as innocent all who are in the second Adam, Christ.

One question that arises in this connection relates to the meaning of Paul's expression, "the one act of obedience/righteousness." Does this refer, to use the language of theology, to Christ's passive obedience alone (His cross)? Or does it refer to Christ's active and passive obedience, using the language of "one act" to summarize the whole of His life of obedience? John Murray provides a helpful answer to this question:

If the question be asked how the righteousness of Christ could be defined as “one righteous act,” the answer is that the righteousness of Christ is regarded in its compact unity in parallelism with the one trespass, and there is good reason for speaking of it as the one righteous act because, as the one trespass is the trespass of the one, so that one righteousness is the righteousness of the one and the unity and the person and his accomplishment must always be assumed.<sup>2</sup>

Christ’s obedience upon the cross epitomizes His whole life of obedience. The cross does not exhaust Christ’s obedience but reveals it in its most striking form (cf. Philippians 2:8, “becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”). Indeed, were it not for the entirety of Christ’s obedience from the beginning to the end of His ministry, it would not be possible to speak of His having died “*the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God*” (1 Peter 3:18).

#### **Philippians 3:8-9**

Another important passage for an understanding of the imputation of righteousness as the basis for the believer’s justification is Philippians 3:8-9.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be

found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

This remarkable testimony of the apostle was written in the context of his fierce and unyielding opposition to certain persons who were placing their confidence before God on their own flesh (v. 3). Though the apostle does not explicitly identify his opponents, it appears that they were persons who were boasting of their own religious pedigree and credentials, particularly circumcision, on the basis of which they sought to commend themselves before God. In his initial reply to these opponents, the apostle engages in an extended *ad hominem* argument. If his opponents would place their confidence before God in such things, the apostle Paul has even more right to do so: “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless.”

Unlike these opponents, however, Paul’s boast or confidence is not in “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.” His

boast, rather, is in “the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” This righteousness of God comes “through faith” to those who are “found in Christ.” Though Paul does not explicitly speak of God imputing or reckoning the righteousness of Christ in these verses, the idea is certainly present. Those who are *united with Christ through faith* receive, *on that account*, a righteousness from God. This righteousness, Paul insists in the most emphatic terms, is not his own righteousness but a righteousness that comes from “outside of himself” as God grants it to him. Paul’s righteousness, as is true of any believer’s, consists in the free bestowal of an “alien” righteousness by God to all who are in union with Christ.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:19-21**

The last key passage to consider is 2 Corinthians 5:19-21.

In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him

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***Were it not for the entirety of Christ’s obedience from the beginning to the end of His ministry, it would not be possible to speak of His having died “the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God”***

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we might become the righteousness of God.

Perhaps no passage in Scripture more clearly teaches the doctrine of imputation than this one. The reconciling work of God in Christ took place when Christ, who “knew no sin,” was “made to be sin.” In an inscrutable manner, God regarded the sinless Christ as though He were sin. On the other hand, God did “not count [our] trespasses against [us]”; He did not treat or regard us in a manner consistent with our condition and circumstance as sinners. By these means—not counting our sins against us, making and treating Christ as though He were sin—we are “become the righteousness of God in Him.” In this passage, as in those previously considered, the apostle Paul does not expressly speak of the granting and imputing of Christ’s righteousness to believers. However, no other interpretation can legitimately claim to do justice to this passage. It is only by virtue of our union and participation in Christ that we come to benefit from His saving and reconciling work. Charles Hodge’s comments on this passage express this truth well:

Our sins were imputed to Christ, and His righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in His righteousness. ... Christ bearing our sins did not make Him morally a sinner ... nor does Christ’s righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls. ... Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and His righteousness is the judicial ground

of our acceptance with God, so that our pardon is an act of justice.... It is not mere pardon, but justification alone, that gives us peace with God.<sup>3</sup>

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive treatment of Romans 5:12-21 and its implications for the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, see Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, pp. 90-114; and John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed reprint, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, pp. 201-202. Cf. Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, pp. 110-114.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), pp. 150-151.

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Peter De Jong

## Pastor Paula

Pastor Paula Irik is a minister of the combined congregation of the Nassau and Prinsesse churches (Reformed, GKN and “state,” HK) in Amsterdam. *Nederlands Dagblad*, a Dutch periodical, relayed from the *Waarheidsvriend* the report of an interview with the minister which appeared in her church’s monthly bulletin, which we translate.

The occasion for the interview is the happy news that Paula is expecting a baby in September and because she wants to arrange her life somewhat differently than is perhaps expected we asked her several questions

*Question:* What do you plan for the future?

*Paula:* My friend Hans and I are going to live together in July; we

have found an apartment on Watteaustreet.

*Question:* You are not getting married. Why not?

*Paula:* In my circle of friends are many who are not officially married and who would feel alienated if I were. It is a matter of feeling. The church can be very hard on people who choose another lifestyle than marriage. I hope for a church with more room for people who want to live differently, such as lesbians living together, or living singly.

*Question:* How can you solemnize a marriage if you yourself do not choose to be married?

*Paula:* That belongs to my job. I keenly enjoy it, and I am not against church marriage. It is good if people want to express their happi-

ness over their covenant in the church, with their weal and woe. It grieves me that church marriage is played off against other lifestyles. The joy of homosexual relations, for example, I would also like to see celebrated in church. Now that can often not be done.

*Question:* Don't you think that the minister, as leader, must be an example to the congregation? What about the teenagers?

*Paula:* Are we on the way of the Messiah? Has our way anything to do with the way that Jesus took? To that I want to be held. The minister does not stand above the congregation, but with it. How do we live together as Christians? The Shepherd must go the way of the good Shepherd; the Teacher is concerned with opening the Scriptures together. The congregation may not call me to account for the form, but only for the content of my relation. And that is going very well; I have full confidence in it. Parents of teenagers may be shocked - I can readily imagine that - thinking, "I hope that my child doesn't..." Children may freely choose the lifestyle that suits them. Are they happy? Are they good to each other? Children are not an extension of ourselves; they are entrusted to us. In our congregation, there is, fortunately, room for various opinions and a readiness to talk about them.

*Question:* What kind of person is Hans? Many of us do not know him. And he is outside of the church. What about that?

*Paula:* We met each other shortly after I came to work in the Prinsesse church. All of the good things then occurred together. Hans

is a political scientist and he has an office at the Bureau of Economics in The Hague. He commutes each day by train and in September will be working three days a week. Just like Hans Mos and Rev. Hibma, we are choosing to take care of this child together, and both to continue working. When Hans was 17 he left the Dutch Reformed Church after much thought. I see much Calvinism in him. We have good talks about my work and my faith; he supports me completely in what I do. He listens critically to my sermons, especially development of the theme. We can freely discuss discoveries I make in a Bible text. He doesn't go to church because he doesn't want to appear to belong to a fellowship of which he is not a part. If Hans

had been a church member I would gladly have celebrated my commitment and joy in the church. But Hans thinks that it is hypocrisy to bring something into a church in which he doesn't believe. No one must get the impression from me that I am opposed to marriage. I only oppose using fixed norms and values against people. Do people get their rights? That is what it is about. I ask the freedom to live in that way. We are very happy with that.

The interview demonstrates again what can and may be expected to happen when the church discards the norms of God's Word to replace it with mere personal opinions - as also our denomination is doing.

## Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary Groundbreaking



Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new building project on March 18, 2004. The new site is located at 2965 Leonard NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525. The ceremony was attended by students, faculty,

and friends of PRTS. Many ministers and elders who were in Grand Rapids for the Theological Seminary Committee and Classis meetings were able to join us for this special occasion.

Rev. Mark Kelderman, chairman of the Theological Seminary Commit-

tee, opened with prayer and reading of Psalm 90:14-17 and Heb. 3:1-6. Dr. Gerald Bilkes, Professor of Old and New Testament, gave a short address on Psalm 90:16-17 and provided a dedicatory meditation of the land.



John DeBlaay, the Office Project Manager at Dan Vos Construction, explained the seminary's layout on the construction site. For the actual groundbreaking, Mr. DeBlaay was joined by Mr. Kevin Ash (chairman of the Building Committee), Dr. Joel Beeke (President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics), Dr. Gerald Bilkes, Rev. Kelderman, Mr. Jake Sinke (chairman of the Seminary Education Committee), and Mr. Dan VanRee (Dan Vos Construction on-site supervisor).

Dr. Beeke closed the ceremony with prayer.

We ask that you would continue to remember PRTS and the building project in prayer, asking the Lord for safety for the construction crew and for His grace and blessing to rest on the seminary and its students.

# Sound Bites - 1985

## January 1985

“When assemblies disregard the Bible, creeds and church order, the decisions are invalid and may not compel members to support what violates the Word of God.”

*The Road Ahead*  
Peter De Jong

“Arguments advanced for opening the door to women in office are virtually identical to those employed to promote more liberal views on other topics such as, for example, homosexuality.”

*Regarding Bible and Culture*  
John Byl

## April 1985

“The truth is above all. No blind loyalty to an institution (not even to the church) should make us compromise the truth. And the conscience of the believer is bound by the Word of God alone.”

*A Little Plain Talk About the Church*  
Jelle Tuininga

“It is sad that the Christian world has become so insensitive to the reality of divine calling. Looking for a thrill instead of God's will can only bring pain. Not to mention disaster for God's cause!”

*Comment and Opinion*  
John H. Piersma

## May 1985

“Islam has never recognized realistically the consequences of man's rebellion against God. While admitting the fall of Adam as an historic event, Islam does not pos-

sess the Biblical realism which makes us acknowledge the seriousness of man's sinfulness.”

*The Biblical Approach*  
Shirley W. Madany

## July/August 1985

“The Reformed gave intense study to the subject of worship because they were concerned that our worship be according to God's Word. We haven't examined our heritage of worship and seen that it was grounded in the Word of God. And so we are in great danger of being led astray by music that doesn't honor the holiness of God, by ritual more oriented to our experience than to God's grace, by novel forms of worship such as liturgical dancing, utterly alien to the Reformed tradition and the spirituality of its worship.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“In church a couple of weeks ago we sang the familiar hymn, ‘Am I a Soldier of the Cross?’ My attention was especially caught by the third stanza, ‘Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?’ It struck me that many people are answering that question, ‘Yes.’”

*Where are We Going?*  
W. Robert Godfrey

“Jesus told the disciples to make disciples, not converts. A disciple is a long term student who shoulders a cross as he follows the Master.”

*On the Northwest Iowa Chapter of Reformed Fellowship*  
Mark Vander Hart

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**September 1985**

“We live in a society that is becoming increasingly estranged from the Bible. Even in its churches there is a growing denial of or questioning of the Bible’s inerrancy and infallibility, and a corresponding indifference to it and ignorance of it.”

*Like a Baby Craves Milk*  
John Blankespoor

“When we compare Christian education with public education, we are not talking about two parallel institutions, in one of which there is a little peppering of religion; we are talking about two institutions that are on diametrically opposed paths, with two radically distinct objectives.”

*The Three Pillars of Christian Education*  
John Engbers

**November 1985**

“If it be true that salvation is altogether of the Lord, than both substance and method must be of Him. The Scriptural teaching regarding Jehovah must not be confused with the Quranic teaching regarding Allah.”

*Bridges to Islam*  
Fredrick W. Evans, Jr.

# *Essay Contest*

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5. Manuscript must be original material.
6. Author must guarantee that their manuscript contains no copyright material without receiving full permission for its use.
7. Manuscripts must be received by the editor by September 15, 2004.
8. Manuscripts are preferred on disc in Microsoft Works or Rich Text Format or emailed to [wyb.kath@juno.com](mailto:wyb.kath@juno.com). If no computer is available, send manuscript to Rev. W. H. Oord, 7724 Hampton Oaks, Portage, MI, 49024.
9. Manuscripts become the property of Reformed Fellowship and will not be returned.
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**Introductory Notice**

Reformed Fellowship Inc. would like to remind our readers of the study materials available to them at a very moderate cost. From the pen of both familiar authors who now enjoy their eternal reward as well as from well-known ministers and professors of today, this rich treasure trove won't disappoint you.

This issue of *The Outlook* begins a regular column highlighting one of the many booklets that are available and briefly describing its content and application. Sample copies of all the materials that Reformed Fellowship produces are available free upon request. Call 616-532-8510 or write or e-mail us to request a copy.

***What We Believe: An  
Exposition of the Apostles'  
Creed***

By Cornelis P. Venema

There have been and always will be fresh resources to explain the Apostles' Creed. What distinguishes Dr. Venema's volume is a timeless and less sectarian approach. This bird's eye view of the faith presents the

reader with a brief panorama of our beliefs and how they have been presented, preserved, and promoted through history.

Venema would have us see that the Reformed faith, by and large, fits well with all streams of Christian history faithful to God's word. That makes this book an excellent resource for high school study (such as a catechism class), new members in the church, and a first doctrinal guide for teachers.

Don't hesitate to give this book to your pastor: he will read it and enjoy handing it out to those with basic questions about our faith. Don't hesitate to give it to a teenager: especially if you hope that such a one will find confidence that our faith is not just a culture or tradition.

One suggestion I have for reading this work: start with reading the study questions, then read the chapters. Christians ought to know the answer to each of these questions! If you don't yet, you will when you are done.

Rev. Zachary Anderson  
Seventh Reformed Church

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