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The Prayer of Jabez

And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bear him with sorrow. And Jabez called on God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested. (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)

Most likely you have seen the little book. It has been on the top of the best seller list, advertised in religious periodicals, rewritten for almost every conceivable reading audience, and even sold in grocery stores! The little book *The Prayer of Jabez* has become very popular.

The emphasis in the little book is something like this: you have great difficulties in your life. Maybe you

have financial difficulties, or difficulties of another kind. Break through your difficulties. Ask God for the abundant blessing He longs to give you. Pray this prayer of Jabez, author Wilkenson says. Use it as something like a mantra as a set of words that you can repeat over and over, and then you will receive the answer you deeply desire. The author testifies that this has happened for him, and he urges his readers to

join him. This sounds very good, even very appealing. After all, who does not want God's blessing?

Many reviews have been written about this popular book, both negative and positive. One, appearing in a *World* magazine was of particular interest. It stated that the good thing about this book was the emphasis on something we often forget: God answers prayer. This must be emphasized regularly. The bad thing about this book is that when a book like this is successful, we are in big trouble!

Why are we in trouble? Because when the words of Scripture are taken apart from their context we are given a wrong impression of what God says!



Volume 53, No. 7 (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).

Journal of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Send all copy to:
Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord
7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.
Portage, MI 49024
Phone: (269) 324-5132 Fax: (269) 324-9606
Email: wyb.kath@juno.com

Board of Trustees

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Editor: Wybren Oord

Contributing Editor: Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema

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Cover Logo: Peter Hoekema

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Biblical Reformed faith. Its purpose is to advocate and propagate this faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, and the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms*.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy

The Outlook (USPS 633-980) is published monthly by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. (except July-August combined) for \$21.00 per year; (foreign rates: \$27.50 per year; Canadian rates: \$27.50 per year plus 7% GST Tax. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. Anyone desiring a change of address should notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Zip Code should be included. Periodicals postage paid at Grandville, MI and an additional office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Outlook*, 2930 Chicago Drive S.W., Grandville, MI 49418-1176; OR in Canada to *The Outlook*, P.O. Box 39, Norwich, Ontario NOJ1P0. Registered as International Publications Contract #40036516 at Norwich, Ontario.

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Editorial Office

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.
Portage, MI 49024
(269) 324-5132 Phone
(269) 324-9606 Fax
wyb.kath@juno.com Email

Circulation Office

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418-1176
(616) 532-8510 Phone

Circulation Office Hours

Monday, Wednesday, 9:00-11:00 AM
After Office Hours please call: (616) 455-1827

Business Mailing Address

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418-1176
Email: reffellowship@juno.com



In many ways, this prayer of Jabez is an Old Testament form of the Lord's Prayer and the prayer we are taught at the end of the Book of Revelation, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The Historic Setting

These, now well-known words of Jabez, are tucked away in a part of the Bible we do not often read: the first nine chapters of I Chronicles. We see a list of names and besides struggling with a tongue that twists with almost every new name, we wonder about the value of such a list. These lists of names lay before us that fact that God continues to work out His plan. And from time to time God gives us the glorious gem of His truth. Here in the prayer of Jabez we are given one of those gems.

The books of Samuel and Kings give us an account of the political history of Israel, while the books of Chronicles give us the account of Israel's spiritual history. We get a hint that this is a spiritual history when we read, "And the families of the scribes who dwelt at Jabez *were* the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and the Sucathites" (I Chronicles, 2:55). Then in chapter four, verses 9 and 10, we read about Jabez, the man. Was he the founder of this town, or was he connected in some way with the town? We do not know, and it really does not matter much. However, these are the only places where the name Jabez appears.

Some things are said about this man which are very significant. If nothing else were ever said of us, we would like to have most of these things said. We are given a mini-biography of Jabez. Nothing more

is known of him other than that his mother named him Jabez, his birth was difficult, that he "was more honorable than his brethren" and that he "called on the God of Israel," — he prayed.

What is the purpose of this part of God's revelation? Is there a reason why this prayer is found in this list of names? Why is it that Jabez uttered these words? For what does he pray? The words of this prayer hold the key to the understanding of the spiritual history of Israel. Thus, these words have a deep significance for the church today.

The words of this prayer hold the key to the understanding of the spiritual history of Israel.

A Man Named Jabez

Jabez had many reasons to call upon the name of God. They were personal as well as spiritual.

The text tells us that when he was born, his mother gave him a terrible name: she called his name Jabez, meaning, "he will cause pain". Imagine having a name like that! Can you possibly understand what it was like for him as a young person to hear someone say, "Here comes that pain in the neck," or, "Here comes Mr. Pain"? All because his mother had given him the name after a hard, difficult birth! All through his life he had to carry this name! In a very real way his mother

had laid a curse on him.

What a name! It was a prophecy of misery and sorrow for him and for the people of God. Obviously, Jabez knew himself to be sinful. He knew his weaknesses. He knew he was not as he ought to be. And so he cries out to God.

But even more: this verse seen in its historical context, what was taking place at the very time, reminds us that his concern goes beyond his sin and sinfulness, his problems and personal experience, to the spiritual condition of Israel. This is important to the understanding of his prayer.

Jabez lived the days of the Judges. Here in the first part of Chronicles we have the account of Israel in the days of the Judges. These days were times of deep spiritual darkness. Before the darkness of sin fell, during the same time of Joshua, the people of Israel had made a covenant. They had said, "God has forbidden that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods" (Joshua 24:16). A marvelous covenant! As long as Joshua lived these words were a reality. But then we turn the Judges 2:8-11, "And Joshua the son of Nun, that servant of the LORD died, being a hundred and ten years old... And another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He has done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals." What terrible words!

The land that had been given to Israel by God was still inhabited by the people they had been commanded to put out: the Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians, Hivites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and

Hittites. Though they were to be gone according to God's command, they were still there! Israel had decided she could co-habitate with them in the land that had been given to her exclusively!

How faithful would Israel be? Their faithfulness to God had begun to wear down amidst the ungodly temptations all around. They intermarried! Instead of looking for a spouse from among God's people, they looked at the people around them. Had there been a bit of spirituality about them, they might have been able to change their partner. As usually happens, however, they were pulled down. Israel went after other gods! Israel gave in to unbelief. Oh, where was the promise of God? Oh, how few even cared about this God! Sin was on every hand.

A Prayer From the Depths

Knowing this, Jabez called on God! Why? Scripture says, "Jabez was more honorable than his brethren." That is, he was more distinguished by reputation. He was different from those around him. He was godly amidst all the decay around him.

Life like this is never easy. This we know! Seek to be faithful to the Lord, and on every hand are those working against God's Truth, and against us! Too often, we find this to be a convenient excuse to say, "Well, I will just go along with it. It is much easier that way."

What happened among God's people then, happens among us today, as well. When we no longer live antithetically, that is, as people of the antithesis, separated unto

God, there is trouble. Forgetting that we are set apart unto God brings trouble.

Apparently, Jabez knew what it was to serve the Lord. He knew what sin was and what grace was. He was "more honorable than his brethren". So he prayed, because he knew his weakness. He knew that because of his sinfulness he could bring pain. He did not want to do that. Rather, he wanted to be faithful to the Covenant God. He knew that he could not change the overwhelming circumstances around him. He had no power to do that. And so he prayed. Where else could he go?

***When we no longer
live antithetically,
that is, as people of
the antithesis,
separated unto God,
there is trouble.***

Notice what the Scripture says: "Jabez called on the God of Israel." Not just on God, this God of Israel had wrought deliverance from bondage for His people. He brought them through the Red Sea upon dry ground, brought them across the Jordan. Stones were piled up as testimonies of what God had done and what God had promised. He had delivered them from the enemy.

Jabez, knowing all this, pled with God, the God of Israel, for help. This God had the power. He was not like those miserable, sniveling Baals. They had mouths, but they

could not speak. They had ears, but could not hear. They were nothing! He went to his God, the God of Israel, and poured out his heart before Him!

A Prayer For Blessing

Indeed, the prayer of Jabez was a prayer of faith—faith in God's Covenant Promise. In the words of Scripture we have a mini-biography. We have all we need to know about this man in the distant past of the Old Testament. If we read this prayer very carefully we find that all four petitions have to do with God's covenant in some way.

Jabez began, "Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me indeed." This is a cry of faith, a cry of trust. This is from one who is so far in the depths of darkness that it is closing in on him. He is crying, "I can't live without Thee. I need Thee every hour." It is a cry of faith to that Covenant God who has promised us ever so much. And he adds that word "indeed". In Hebrew this word is like putting five exclamation points after the words "bless me". That is how important this was to him. He is crying out to his God: "Oh, how I need Thy blessing—that blessing which was promised!!!!!"

A Prayer for Faithfulness

He says, "...and enlarge my coast"—or, territory. Please do not forget that the land upon which Israel was placed was very significant. It was an evidence of God's hand, His care, and His faithfulness. Israel did not have the evidence of the resurrection nor all the other blessing which we have in Christ. They could not pick up a Bible and say, "Here is the word of God."



How then would they know that God's promise was true?

God set them down upon a pledge of land. That piece of land was the evidence that God is faithful. The land was a physical blessing like the Tabernacle and the Temple. It said that God meant what He said.

What Jabez prays here is something like this: "Oh, that Thy kingdom and Thy power may be seen. Look what I see all around me: Thy people who are supposed to know and love Thee turn their backs on Thee and go their own way. Oh, that Thine enemies might be brought to nothing. May Thou been seen as God!" How important it is that God may be seen for what He is! That His promises might be expounded by all of this evidence.

A Prayer for Protection

Jabez continues: "that Thine hand might be with me." Of course, we all know that God does not have a hand, for God is a spirit. Calvin reminds us that when God speaks of His eye, His hand, His mouth, His feet, He is using language we can readily understand in our weakness. Neither you nor I can possibly understand the greatness of God as Spirit. We can say this is true; we can get some understanding of it. But how can we explain God's care or His actions? Calvin says that God uses those words about Himself, not because He has these features, but because He will speak to us where we are.

God's hand speaks of His power and His protection. And so Jabez pleads: "Powerfully lead me and

guide me so that I will be faithful to Thee. I live in the midst of a wicked society. Thy name is covered over by sin."

The church must pray this also, for we live in such a wicked society. Jabez is saying: "Keep me, in spite of my weakness, in spite of the departure from Thee that I see all around. Keep me. I know my weakness; I know that I can be tempted, and I know that I can fall. Keep me. Let Thy hand be with me!"

A Prayer for Guidance

Finally, Jabez pleads: "that Thou wouldst keep *me* from evil, that it may not grieve me!" "Keep me from

Jabez knows he needs God so that in his life God would be seen.

pain" is perhaps a better translation. He pleads this because he knows how easily he can react in pain. "I am so weak and so afraid. I know I can not get along without Thee. I need Thee every hour. Help me to testify of Thy greatness, even in this present darkness." Remember what Jesus said: "Let your light shine so bright that men may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." This is Covenant living!

In the midst of all the decay around Jabez, he remembers the demands of the covenant and its promises. He knows he needs God so that in his life

God would be seen. He knows this because he believes God's promises. And so he cries out to God.

Later, Jesus would teach us to pray the same way. He said, "Pray, hallowed be Thy name." The Heidelberg Catechism explains this: Oh Father, "may [we] so order and direct our whole life, thoughts, words, and actions, that Thy name might not be blasphemed but honored and praised on our account." Is that not what Jabez sought?

Did not Jesus teach us to pray, "Thy kingdom come"? That is: "Preserve and increase Thy church; destroy the works of the devil, every power that exalts itself against Thee ... until the perfection of Thy kingdom arrives." "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Jesus also taught us to pray, "Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." "Since we are so weak in ourselves and since our sworn enemies, the devil, the world, and our flesh, cease not to assault us...preserve and strengthen us."

A Prayer for Today

This prayer was needed in Jabez's day and it is certainly needed by the church today. We have enemies, and not just enemies that we can see. We are often tempted to live like the Canaanites. It is so easy to sing praises to the Lord on Sunday, and the rest of the week live like the Canaanites. That's not Covenant living! Parents can not ignore the problems around us. We can not be weak. We cannot forget that the enemy is all around us!

On every hand we see opposition to God's Kingdom. We live in an age of materialism. Things are important, and so when Possibility Thinking tells us that you can gain what you desire, there is great hope. But this is nonsense!

We live in an age of hedonism. We are taught that life is to be one laugh after another. Our enemies cunningly say, "Don't you know that we are to have fun, even if it means that we use the flesh in an absolutely improper way?"

Materialism, hedonism, abortion, terrorism—this is all an opposition to God's Truth. Don't forget it. It is the mind of this age.

We in the church want the promise of the Covenant. It is wonderful! But, tragically, we do not want the demand of the Covenant. To hear about what God requires of us makes us uncomfortable. We want ease! We fail to ask God for what is necessary so that His Kingdom will come.

We seek money. But we seek it for ourselves, not so we can use it for the coming of the Kingdom. We ask for many things, but do we plead for the testimony of God's grace in our lives? Do we pray—and really mean it—"Even so, come, Lord Jesus"?

A Prayer Answered in God's Time

We read in verse 10, "And God granted him that which he requested." With these words this mini-biography of Jabez comes to an end. We can only guess how Jabez saw that God had granted his prayer in his own life.

Certainly, he saw the answer in the land. God granted that Israel was not homeless for a long period of years. Yet, her imperfections and sinfulness brought pain, grief, and finally, captivity.

The land, however, was important. To Israel the land was not merely a physical piece of property on which to dwell. It was a sign of the true homeland that was yet to come. Abraham had had that in mind. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God" (Hebrews 11:10). He was not looking for the city of Jerusalem or the Temple Mount. He was looking for eternity with the Lord.

The rest that was brought by Joshua in the Promised Land was great, but it was imperfect. The New Testament Joshua, Jesus Christ, would need to come. He would say, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not *so*, I would have told you. I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, *there* ye may be also" (John 14:2-3).

Finally, Jesus, the New Testament Joshua, came. His was quite a task! He had a battle to fight. Oh, we must fight many battles as soldiers of the cross, but He fought the one that you and I could never have fought. He fought the battle against sin, death, and against the devil. There on Calvary's cross he "spoiled principalities and powers. [Making] a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). He did that so that we would know great blessings

in Jesus Christ, and so that we could pray this prayer, just as the Lord taught us to pray His prayer.

In reality, Jabez was praying in the midst of the darkness for the only blessing there really is: Fulfillment of the Covenant in Jesus Christ. Through Him only would this blessing come.

That truth is still the same today. God blesses His church. This blessing may not be filled with all those things—those toys that make us happy. It may even be filled with poverty or persecution. These, too, however, are blessings from God. But there is one blessing we know is surely ours: that which Jesus Christ has done for us.

Lest we faint in the seemingly growing darkness enveloping us on every hand, He promises us the glorious fulfillment of all He has said in the Book of Revelation. There will be that day when the Rider on the White Horse will proclaim victory.

And then, all things will be new.

Rev. Jerome Julien is the Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America. He is a member of the Trinity URC in Caledonia, Michigan.



We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Articles 4-5: Of the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments & Of the Authority of the Holy Scripture

Does God still speak today? All Christians would agree in saying “yes.” As Reformed Christians our “yes” means something very different than the evangelical Christian world’s “yes.” The question is not so much “does God speak,” but “*where* does God speak?”

Many Christians today believe that God still speaks in prophecy, tongues, and words of knowledge. Reformed Christians have always said that God still speaks *in His inspired and canonical Word*.

Some would say that we should not argue over where God speaks because we have more important and practical things to deal with, such as evangelism and living the practical Christian life. But this question must be answered before we can deal with more “practical” matters. We need to be assured of what God is saying to us, and where we can hear His voice.

We continue this month in our study of the Belgic Confession with articles 4-5. After saying that God is “more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word”

(Article 2), which is inspired (Article 3), our Confession proceeds to say that this inspired Word is collected in a canon (Article 4), and that canon is known by two means (Article 5).

What is the “Canon”?

Article 4 speaks of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as being “canonical,” and therefore, “nothing can be alleged” against them. Our English word “canon” comes from the Greek word *kanon*, which is translated as “rule, standard.” In the ancient Greek world this was the word used for a measuring line, or what we might call today a tape measure or ruler.

In the New Testament it is used in this sense twice. Galatians 6:16 speaks of walking according to the rule of faith as opposed to the rule of circumcision and law-keeping. Philippians 3:16 speaks of walking according to the rule of maturity.

In the period of church history known as the ancient Church, the word *kanon* began to be applied to

the Scriptures in opposition to false teachers and false writings. They spoke of the canon of Scripture as the only rule or measure of doctrine and life. For example, Irenaeus of Lyons, who opposed many heretical groups, spoke of the Scriptures as “the invariable *rule* of truth.”¹ John Chrysostom, the greatest of ancient preachers, spoke of Scripture as “the exact scale, standard and *rule* of all things.”² So when we speak of the Scriptures as being “canonical,” we are saying that they alone are the measure of what is to be believed and how we are to live.

Which Books are in the “Canon”?

All would agree that God has given a rule, a measure of faith and life. But the question that arises next is, “*which* books are canonical?” Rome says that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, plus the tradition of the Church, plus the apocryphal books (which we will consider next issue) are the canon. The Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who are today’s Pentecostals, also say that the sixty-six books are canonical, but they add their “spirit-inspired” prophecies and tongues. In both of these cases, the canon is seen to be open. The “ruler” can be lengthened.

The Protestant Reformers followed the early Church Fathers in teaching that the Scriptures alone are God’s authoritative, inspired word to us. St. Athanasius summarized this when he said, “These are the wells of salvation, so that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the sayings of these. Let no one add to these. Let nothing be taken away.”

The ancient Church spoke of the canon of Scripture as the only rule or measure of doctrine and life.

St. Augustine said the Christian canon was not infinite but finite, comprehended in a “certain canon.”³

We believe that only the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are canonical, and only “these are thus named in the Church of God” (Article 4).

Why are These Books the “Canon”?

Your Roman Catholic friend may well ask you, “But why *these* books?” “How do you know *only these* books are included in the canon?” Article 5 of the Belgic Confession answers this question.

Faith or Fiat?

The way we know which books are canonical is found in one of two ways. Either we know by humble faith or Papal fiat. Notice that the Confession says that the authority of the canon is a *received* authority: *We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith* (Article 5). Receiving and accepting the word of the LORD is a Christian virtue. It is an act of faith, not an ecclesiastical determination.

The basis of our Confession is Scripture. And several of the Apostle Paul’s inspired words speak of the Church receiving the Word of God. Notice the following texts:

Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.

(I Thessalonians 1:6)

When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you

welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively works in you who believe.

(I Thessalonians 2:13)

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or epistle.

(II Thessalonians 2:15)

Receiving and accepting the word of the LORD is a Christian virtue. It is an act of faith, not an ecclesiastical determination.

The Israelites did not doubt when Nehemiah read the Law; Isaiah did not question the authority of Yahweh when He said “for the mouth of the LORD has spoken”; and St. John did not ask whether it really was Christ who spoke to Him in Revelation. The Scriptures are simply received by a humble faith.

Rome believes that the Church must decide which books are inspired and canonical. It believes that at the early Church Councils of Laodicea (A.D. 360), Hippo Regius (396), and Carthage (397) the Church decreed the books of Scripture.

Do we believe this? Here is what the Belgic Confession teaches: *We receive all these books...not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such* (Article 5). In fact, our Confession is echoing the Protestant principle, formulated by Martin Luther, that the Church is founded on the Scriptures (e.g., Ephesians 2:20), and not the Scriptures upon the Church: “the Scripture is the womb from which are born the divine truth and the church.”⁴

Herman Bavinck said of this relationship:

We must not suppose, however, that the Church made this Canon, or granted canonical authority to the writings of the prophets and apostles. Rather, those writings, from the moment they were composed, were immediately authoritative in the Church and operated there as the rule of life and faith.⁵

How Was the “Canon” Received?

So why do we receive our canon of sixty-six books by faith? Is our reception of them a blind faith? Of course not. Faith is always firmly rooted in truth, and the truth is, we receive these sixty-six books as canonical for two reasons.

The Witness of the Spirit

We receive them, first, because of the Spirit’s witness: *but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God* (Article 5). God the Holy Spirit Himself acts as an expert witness in a court of law, testifying that these books are exactly what they claim to be – God’s Word to fallen man.



Questions for Further Study/Discussion

1. Why does our Confession of Faith spend 5 of its 37 articles on the doctrine of Scripture, if all Christians believe the Bible?
2. Do we need a “canon” for faith and life? Why?
3. What are some ways that other religions and various branches of Christianity add to or subtract from the canon?
4. How does our understanding of the canon apply to such areas as worship, evangelism, and knowing the will of God for our lives?
5. How does the witness of the Spirit help us understand the sovereignty of God in the regeneration of the lost? Can the lost understand the Scriptures apart from the Spirit?
6. List some other Scriptures that testify of its own authority and inspiration.

At first, this may seem to be rather subjective. However, we are not talking here about the witness of *our* spirit, but the testimony of *the* Holy Spirit – the One who inspired prophets and apostles, the One who guided them to write, and the One who has preserved His Word in the world. He objectively witnesses in them, while we subjectively receive them. This work of the Spirit is one of His primary tasks in the life of the Church (I Corinthians 2:14, 12:3; II Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14; I Thessalonians 1:5-6, 2:13; I John 4:1-6, 5:6-13).

The Self-Attestation of the Scriptures

We also receive the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as canonical for a second reason: they testify of their own inspiration and authority: *and also because they contain the evidence thereof in*

themselves; for, even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled (Article 5).

As Reformed Christians we are so confident of the Scriptures’ own witness that we can say “even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled.” So how can even the blind perceive and where can they perceive?

Examples abound, such as the great prophecy given of His virgin birth seven hundred years before Christ was even born (Isaiah 7:14 cf. Matthew 1:23). The prophet Isaiah recorded the LORD’s word concerning Cyrus the Persian over 200 years before his birth by using his name! (Isaiah 45:1). In Genesis 15:13-16 the LORD told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves for four hundred years sev-

eral generations before it even happened. Scripture speaks of the sufferings of our Lord (Isaiah 52:13-53:12), the intricate details of His death (Psalms 22), His resurrection (Psalms 16), and the outpouring of His Spirit (Joel 2).

So be confident that God has spoken and that He continues to speak. This ongoing speech has been written for us and our children for a thousand generations. And although we hear from many, “Hear the word of the Lord,” “God told me...,” or “I heard a voice say...,” it is only in the Scriptures that we hear the voice of God: “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Luke 9:35)

Endnotes

¹*Against Heresies*, 1.9.4 (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I:330).

²*Homilies on Second Corinthians: Homily 13* (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers I*, 12:346).

³Cited in Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, v. 1.

⁴“Lectures on the Psalms,” in *Luther’s Works*, III:454.

⁵*Our Reasonable Faith*, 113.

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

Ignatius of Antioch

“You must have Jesus Christ. You cannot have anything better than that.” (Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 7.1)

The phrase “martyr complex” refers to a person who seems to delight in suffering—in fact, may earnestly pursue and revel in suffering. One inducement to this condition is fanaticism; another may be an abnormal sense of victimization coupled with a resignation to suffering.

Martyrdom for a Christian may be his or her sovereign lot. Yet the eager pursuit of the martyr’s crown is abnormal if not bizarre. Ignatius of Antioch is remembered by his identical moniker—Ignatius Martyr. If ever a believer was obsessed with pursuing his own death in the martyr’s arena, it was this bishop from Antioch.

Come fire, cross, battling
with wild beasts, wrenching
of bones, mangling of limbs,
crushing of my whole body,
cruel tortures of the devil—
only let me get to Jesus
Christ! (*Letter to the
Romans*, 5.3)

John Calvin doubted the authenticity of the letters of Ignatius. Not because of Ignatius’s martyr complex,

but because the letters endorsed unbiblical customs, especially the Roman Catholic practice of Lent (*Institutes*, 1.13.29). Later Calvinists joined the challenge to Ignatian authenticity because the letters were alleged to endorse episcopacy (but a half step from papal supremacy). When Archbishop James Usher (of “Usher’s Chronology” fame) discovered two manuscripts of Ignatius’s letters in England, he countered that the epistles were in fact genuine. Usher’s case (published in 1644) was expanded incontrovertibly by J.B. Lightfoot and Theodor Zahn in the 19th century. Today, few (if any) would agree with Calvin.

On the Way to Rome

The seven letters of Ignatius were written on the way to Rome. Ignatius was traveling to Rome to die! Ignatius had run afoul of the Roman authorities, been arrested and was being transported to Rome for death in the arena (a tacit admission that, like Paul, he was a Roman citizen). Chained to a squad of ten Roman soldiers, Ignatius was conveyed more than 1400 miles to his death.

His alleged crime? He “abused” the Emperor Trajan (98-117 A.D.) when the latter visited Antioch. The

specific “abuse” is associated with the treasonous crime of refusing to participate in the cult worship of the emperor. While it is certain that Ignatius would have merited the penalty of death had he “abused” the emperor, this attempt to account for his arrest dates from the 6th century and is therefore suspect.

Whatever the precise crime, Ignatius was led in chains from Antioch in Syria to Rome in Italy. Most likely, the prisoner traveled intermittently by ship and by foot: first by boat from Syria to Asia Minor; overland to Smyrna, then to Troas; by boat across the Aegean to Neapolis; thence to Philippi and west via the Egnatian Way to Dyrrhachium. There he took ship across the Adriatic to Brundisium; and finally overland to the amphitheater (perhaps the Colosseum) in Rome.

That Ignatius received his coveted martyr’s crown is doubtless true, though we have no record of the event. Origen was convinced that he was martyred in Rome (*Homily 6 on Luke*) as was Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 5.28.4).

The chained bishop is not chagrined by his plight. In fact, he relishes his transport as a virtual march of triumph. “My very chains which I carry around for Jesus Christ’s sake, in my desire to get to God, exhort you, ‘Stay united and pray for one another!’” (*Letter to the Trallians*, 12.2).

The Image of Christ

What fascinates the modern reader of these seven epistles is not so much the bizarre “lust for death”, but the invitation of Ignatius to his

If ever a believer was obsessed with pursuing his own death in the martyr’s arena, it was this bishop from Antioch.



readers (and hearers to whom he preached along the way) that his was a genuine *imitatio Christi* (“imitation of Christ,” i.e., Christ goes the way of rejection, arrest and death; so too Ignatius). Ignatius even becomes a player in this early Christian “theater”, for we read of advance notice sent ahead to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles and Rome that he is on his way.

The Roman empire was hostile to Christianity—at least on certain occasions and in certain places. Ignatius’s imperial lord, Trajan, is the emperor to whom Pliny (the Younger) writes his famous letter asking what to do with Christians who have been dragged before his tribunal charged with the capital offense of refusing to worship the emperor (Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96). The imperial reply was, “Spare them, if they will conform to pagan custom and anathematize Christ. Otherwise, execute them” (Pliny, *Letters*, 10.97).

Pliny’s letter and Trajan’s response may reflect only the local persecution in Bithynia and Pontus (in distinction from the later empire-wide persecution of Diocletian), but it alerts us to the viewpoint from which establishment paganism regarded Christianity. Allegiance to Christ was apostasy to the emperor.

Yet persecution during the reign of Trajan *did* reach to Ignatius in Antioch. Scholars differ on the date of his arrest and execution, but it was before the death of the emperor in 117 A.D. Most students suggest a date around 110 A.D. for the bishop’s odyssey. Ignatius indicates he was not alone in the

If Ignatius was imitating Christ on his way to death, he must have been no less pleased that he was imitating the Apostle Paul, as well.

martyr’s pilgrimage. Others from Antioch and Syria had preceded him (cf. *Letter to the Romans*, 10.2).

When he arrived in Smyrna, Ignatius was permitted to meet the church in that city. So refreshed was he by that communion of the saints that he penned four letters to churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles and Rome. On arriving in Troas, he addressed three more letters: (1) to the church of Philadelphia; (2) to the church of Smyrna; (3) and to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Transported across the Hellespont, he arrived in Neapolis and then on to Philippi (cf. Polycarp’s, *Letter to the Philippians*, 1.1; 9.1). The road from Philippi was the famous Via Egnatia on which Paul had journeyed to Thessalonica and beyond, before turning south to Athens (Acts 17:15). (compare Acts 16:11, 12; 17:1). If Ignatius was imitating Christ on his way to death, he must have been no less pleased that he was imitating the Apostle Paul, as well.

There are two coinages: one God’s, the other the world’s. Each bears its own stamp—unbelievers that of this world; believers, who are spurred by love, the stamp of God the Father through Jesus Christ. And if we do not willingly die in union with his Passion, we do not have his life in us. (*Letter to the*

Magnesians, 5).

Warning Against Heresy

Ignatius describes his journey to death in terms of union with Christ. But he also warns the churches about heretical errors creeping into the community of the saints. Foremost is docetism, the doctrine that the Son of God only “appeared” to take a human nature.

According to the Docetists, the incarnation was a myth because flesh and God cannot unite. “And he genuinely suffered, as even he genuinely raised himself. It is not as some unbelievers say, that his Passion was a sham. It’s they who are a sham!” (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 2). While Docetism may be reflected in the apostle John’s remarks (1 John 1:1-3; 4:2-3), Ignatius is the first clear post-apostolic witness to the threat of this heresy—a heresy which would grow through its affiliation with Gnosticism.

Jesus Christ, of David’s lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died, in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead, for his Father raised him, just as his Father will raise us, who believe on him, through Christ Jesus (*Letter to the Trallians*, 9).

We come then to Ignatius's doctrine of the person and work of Christ—his anti-docetic doctrine of the person and work of Christ. The historicity of the events of Christ's life are well known to him. He affirms His conception by the virgin Mary; His birth; His baptism; the Lord's Supper; His trial before Pontius Pilate and Herod (Antipas) the Tetrarch; His crucifixion, death and resurrection; His post-resurrection appearances (including eating and drinking with the disciples); and His ascension.

Furthermore, Ignatius knows these events from the record of their occurrence—surely an early witness to the canon of the New Testament. His fervent incarnational Christology argues for God (the Son) and man joined in one person. He writes, "Jesus Christ our God" (*Letter to the Romans*, Preface) in clear affirmation of the New Testament teaching of the deity of Christ. But God the Son united the flesh of a true human nature to his divine person in order to become the God-man ("flesh yet spiritual, born yet unbegotten, God incarnate, genuine life in the midst of death, sprung from Mary as well as God," *Letter to the Ephesians*, 7.2)

The incarnation is unto sinful man's salvation: "it was for our sakes that He suffered all this, to save us" (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 2); "the One who became visible for our sakes, who was beyond touch and passion, yet who for our sakes became subject to suffering, and endured everything for us" (*Letter to Polycarp*, 3.2). These statements explain the significance of the incarnation of God's Son.

Ignatius regards the union of the divine and human natures in Christ as a paradigm of the sinner's union with Christ. In fact, he is fond of the Pauline clause *en (Iesou) Christo* ("in [Jesus] Christ") which he uses nineteen times. He even cites Paul as the basis for his use of the phrase: "you have been united into the mysteries with Paul" (*Letter to the Ephesians*, 12.2).

This is life eternal—union with the death and resurrection of Christ:

***"That is whom I
am looking for—
the One who died
for us. That is
whom I want—the
One who rose for
us."***

"That is whom I am looking for—the One who died for us. That is whom I want—the One who rose for us" (*Letter to the Romans*, 6.1).

Yet the incarnation is not only a wonderful testimony to salvation offered to sinners presently, it displays the rich over-arching redemptive plan of God for believers from the Old Testament era: "And the Prophets, let us love them too, because they anticipated the gospel in their preaching and hoped for and awaited Him, and were saved by believing on Him. Thus they were in Jesus Christ's unity" (*Letter to the Philadelphians*, 5.2). There is

no discontinuity between the saving work of Christ under the New Testament as compared to the Old. For Ignatius, redemption is always solely by grace through faith in the person and work of Christ. Still, Judaism has been surpassed by Christianity "Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity," (*Letter to the Magnesians*, 10.3) because "the last days are here!" (*Letter to the Ephesians*, 11.1).

The Episcopacy

Well, what about the question of episcopacy which caused so many 16th and 17th century Calvinistic presbyterians to reject the authenticity of these letters? Is Ignatius aware of or the defender of episcopacy, i.e., the rule of the church by a singular, even hierarchical, bishop (so-called "monarchical episcopacy")?

First, it is clear that the letters of Ignatius are genuine. It is also clear that the letters refer to "bishop", "presbyter" (or "elder"), and "deacon" (cf. *Letters to the Ephesians*, 2; *Magnesians*, 2, 6, 7, 13; *Trallians*, 13). But the concept of a monarchical bishop (episcopal supremacy over the other officers, namely presbyters and deacons)—certainly present by the late 2nd century A.D.—must be read into Ignatius's remarks.

In other words, allowing Ignatius to speak for himself (without the episcopal-colored glasses of later tradition), we discover that "bishop" and "presbyter/elder" are synonymous (as they are in the New Testament—cf. Titus 1:5, 7; I Timothy 3:1, 2; Acts 20:17, 28). The title "bishop" may be used by Ignatius



as “overseer/shepherd“ (as Paul seems to use it), while the “presbyter/elder” may be used of the same office in the sense of “ruler”.

It therefore appears too contrived to find hierarchical episcopacy in Ignatius’s term *episkopos*; even as it appears tendentious to read that nuance into Paul’s use of the word. At best, Ignatius may regard the “bishop” as the convener or moderator of the gathering of officers (bishops, presbyters, deacons)—in other words, the first among equals with respect only to organization.

It is possible to find here a reflection of the *archisynagogos* (“ruler of the synagogue”) in Judaism, i.e., one elder who has a title which dis-

tinguishes him from the other elders without elevating him above them. We note also that the famous “episcopal” line in the *Letter to the Magnesians*, 2 (“he submits to the bishop as to God’s grace, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ”) may as satisfactorily be rendered “he submits to the bishop . . . *even* (Greek *kai*) to the presbytery.”

Finally, in defense of the non-episcopal Ignatius, note that his Christology equates the Father and the Son (with respect to divine essence), while distinguishing the Father and the Son (with respect to personhood). Is it possible that the office of bishop and presbyter are equal for Ignatius and yet dis-

tinct with respect to function? Does Ignatius’s devotion to Christ and the Trinity also influence his devotion to the church and her offices?

Ignatius probably did get his wish. He was delivered to the arena in order to die. While his obsession with the martyr’s crown may disturb us, his faith-union with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ assured him of eternal life. It is so for all believers—martyrs or not.

Rev. James T. Dennison, Jr. is Academic Dean at Northwest Theological Seminary, Lynnwood, Washington where he also teaches Patristics.

Wybren H. Oord

Jesus Christ as God

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

Last month we saw that Jesus was truly human and truly righteous. If Jesus was only a man, then you could safely forget about Him. However, if He is also God, as Christians confess Him to be, then you should give careful thought to Him.

In his gospel, John reveals Jesus as the eternal pre-existing Son of God who became Man in order to restore us to the Father through His own death and resurrection. John writes, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples which are not recorded

in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name” (John 20:30,31). Throughout his gospel, John reveals Jesus as the Lord of Glory, the Son of the Almighty God. He is very God of very God.

The Pre-existing Christ

How does John set forth his proofs that Jesus is God? The first thing John writes in his account of the life of Christ is that He was pre-existing. The “in the beginning” of John

is before the “in the beginning” of Genesis. John tells us as much when he reports that “all things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). John is telling us that when we begin to talk about Jesus Christ, we can only do so correctly by going beyond the beginning of creation all the way into eternity past.

John is not the only one to emphasize the deity of the Christ. The Prophet Micah informs us that the one born in Bethlehem would be “from the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2). The author of Hebrews also reminds us of Christ’s presence at creation in Hebrews 1:1, 2. And, in the Book of Revelation, Jesus claims to be the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,

the First and the Last. Through these passages and more, we can be assured that Christ was there before all things.

But that is the same thing that the Jehovah's Witnesses believe. They do not believe that Jesus is God; they believe that Jesus is the very first thing that God created. It would logically follow, they argue, that if God created Jesus first, He would be there before the creation of everything else. But it does not make Him God.

The Personhood of Christ

However, the very next thing that John writes is that Jesus was not just standing there along side of the Father as the Father created. John affirms the separate personhood of Christ within the Godhead by writing "and the Word was God". Apart from their separate tasks, everything you can say about the Father, you can say about the Son. They are equal in wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

One may well ask why it is so important to believe that Jesus is very God of very God. Understand that there are some very practical applications to this.

First of all, to say that Jesus Christ is God is to say that we can know some things about God. We can know what God is like. The opposite is also true. Apart from Christ, you can never know what God is really like. Is God the god of Plato's imagination? Is God the god of Immanuel Kant's philosophy? Is God the god of the mystics? Not if you know God in light of Jesus Christ. If you want to know more

about the love of God, the compassion of God, the goodness of God, the power of God, then look to Jesus because He is God.

The Power of Christ

Another important aspect of Jesus Christ being God comes at Calvary. Because Jesus is God, His death on the cross becomes very important to us.

If you were to make the statement that you would like to die for the sins of another person it would not do any good. You are a sinner. The only sin that you can die for is your own. Even then your death would not be enough to satisfy the justice of God. You would be utterly destroyed. Human flesh is finite. Dust we are and to dust we will return. The wrath of God against our sin, on the other hand, is infinite. No human being, no matter how strong or powerful, could ever withstand the almighty wrath of God to the finish. Because of this, God will measure out His wrath in small doses, a little bit at a time. That being the case, we would be forever burning in hell carrying the weight of God's wrath for all eternity.

How necessary for us to find a Savior who is able to withstand God's wrath; One who can endure the

punishment completely. How necessary for that Savior to be as powerful as God Himself! Only an infinitely powerful Being, very God of very God, can withstand the infinite wrath of God. That, dear readers, is what sets Jesus of Nazareth apart from all others who claim to be saviors. Jesus Christ, who is God as John points out in his gospel, can endure the wrath of God.

The Propitiation of Christ

In addition, the catechism teaches us that our Savior must be truly God in order to earn for us righteousness and life. In order for us to be right with God, we must be righteous before God. But we are not. We are sinful.

We could sacrifice animals like they did in the Old Testament, but animals are only finite creatures who cannot atone for the sins of man. Instead, there must be a perfect, holy sacrifice made for us by one who is sinless and obedient to the will of God from the very beginning. Such a sacrifice would have infinite value. It would exonerate us if we would place our hope and trust in such a sacrifice.

Such a sacrifice was found in Jesus Christ. Paul writes "He who had no sin, was made to be sin for us, so that we might be the righteousness

Q *How then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favor?*

A *God requires that His justice be satisfied. Therefore the claims of His justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.*



of God” (II Corinthians 5:21). Jesus had no sin. That made His death on the cross a sacrifice for sin. Not His sin, because He had no sin, but our sin when we acknowledge Him as our Savior.

It takes an omnipotent power to restore us into God’s favor. We need a Mediator! We need a Savior! Jesus must actually give us His righteousness. He must give us life. Out of His infinite love and power Jesus is able to give to us eternal life.

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

A Pyramid of Conventioneers



RYS National Youth Convention 2003

Reformed Youth Activities

RYS National Youth Convention 2003

By Ed DeGraaf
Director of Reformed Youth Services

Reformed Youth Services held its third annual national youth convention July 28-August 1 at Lake Williamson Christian Center in Carlinville, Illinois. Approximately 415 young people, adult sponsors, staff and speakers attended the weeklong event. A total of 35 member churches participated. About 85% of those attending were members of the United Reformed Church, with a sizable minority also coming from the Christian Reformed Church.

This year’s convention theme of “Fishers of Men” was clearly communicated by Rev. C.J. Den Dulk of Trinity CRC in Sparta, Michigan and Rev. Jason Tuinstra of Community United Reformed Church in Schererville, Indiana. The two pastors challenged their youthful audience to return home and take advantage of opportunities to witness at home, school, and at their jobs. We believe that the Lord graciously blessed their words, as the following comments by a first-time adult sponsor was typical of the feedback we received:

“Our group felt so spiritually blessed by the ministers who took their time to teach at the (convention). We were so uplifted. All of the kids want to continue coming as they were fed such



Rev. C. J. Den Dulk

spiritual food and qualities of righteousness. We were challenged not only to be disciples but also to disciple others for God’s Kingdom. We were so thankful to be part of such a group of godly young men and women who honored the name of Christ in their actions. It was such a blessing!”

Another sponsor said “We appreciated the enthusiasm of the main speakers and their message. God was truly glorified through this week.”

The young people echoed those sentiments. One exclaimed “What an awesome spiritual experience! I had a wonderful time last year with RYS. I’m going to a non-Christian college this fall and this week is going to help me prepare for evangelizing.”

Another student remarked that “It is such a blessing to go to these conventions. It has been an awesome experience!”

Ten workshops related to the main theme were also offered to the convention participants, who attended five of their choice. Some of the best attended workshops included “Actions

Speak Louder Than Words” by Rip Pratt, a youth and family pastor at Bethel CRC in Dallas, Texas; “For Your Eyes Only” by Rev. Phil Grotenhuis, pastor of Lynden URC in Lynden, Washington; and “Follow Him” by Dr. John Sittema, associate pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Other featured workshop topics were God’s sovereignty, witnessing, evangelism, careers, speech, and priorities.

Just like the main sessions, the workshops impacted the young people. One remarked that “the workshops were wonderful and very applicable to my life.”



The teens also attended morning devotional sessions led by adult sponsors. This material was written by Rev. Den Dulk and Rev. Tuinstra and also related to the week’s theme. The leaders and students ended the day by meeting together in their respective church youth groups to talk about the day’s activities and lessons.

Another highlight of the convention was the opportunity to enjoy the large lake and water-park atmosphere at Lake Williamson. Students were required to wear modest one-piece bathing suits in keeping with the convention’s dress code. Many young people also participated in our usual three on three basketball and volleyball tourna-

ments, as well as soccer and other outdoor activities.

Thanks should be given to the large and very competent volunteer committee that used their myriad of talents to put on this convention. To God be the glory! We were also blessed with wonderful weather, facilities and traveling mercies, for which we thank God.

Next year’s convention will be held, Lord willing, July 26-30, 2004 at Biola University in LaMirada, California (about a half hour away from Los Angeles). Registration brochures will be mailed out to our member churches by the end of the year. For more information about RYS or the convention, please contact RYS Director Ed DeGraaf at rys@iserv.net or (616) 667-0694.

RYS National Youth Convention

by Mary McNinch
Covenant URC
Kalamazoo, Michigan

The RYS National Youth Convention was held at Lake Williamson Christian Center in Illinois. The theme was “Fishers of Men”, taken from Mark 1:17, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The retreat was a time for reformed youth from around our nation to come together to grow in our faith, have fellowship with other believers, and to wor-



ship God. Our main speakers were Rev. C. J. Den Dulk of Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Sparta, Michigan and Rev. W. Jason Tuinstra of Community United Reformed Church in Schererville, Indiana. They both addressed the theme of the convention wonderfully as did the ten other workshop leaders.

By the end of our five day convention, we learned how to become fishers of men through discipleship and how to trust God in His will for our lives. We met many new Christian friends and also had a great time learning more about our God.

The 2003 RYS Convention was a good time for the youth and sponsors alike. We will look forward to next year as a time to reconnect with friends and another opportunity to strengthen our faith.





LOGOS 2003

LOGOS Young Adults Conference held by RYS

By Ed DeGraaf

Director of Reformed Youth Services

Reformed Youth Services held its 12th post-high singles event since 1998 this past August at the Green Lake Conference Center in eastern Wisconsin.

The LOGOS conferences and winter retreats are open to all 18-28 year-old single young adults. The summer conferences feature a main speaker and related workshops, while the retreats concentrate on a single theme and feature one speaker.

In the past six years more than 450 post-high singles have attended the RYS LOGOS events, which are held in midwest United States. Topics that have been covered by our

speakers include reformed evangelism, discipleship, apologetics, and Christian worldview.

This year's conference explored the theme of "Living a Life of Grace." Rev. Brian Vos, pastor of Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan, was the main speaker. Rev. Vos emphasized that a Christ-centered approach to the Scriptures was the key to living a life of grace as citizens of heaven now on earth.

"It was a great message that was extremely applicable to my life. Very scriptural and easy to relate to," remarked one young adult about Rev. Vos' presentations.

"Wonderful! He opened my eyes to the Scriptures and truth. I am so glad I came! I've learned so much valuable information. Thank you for providing this event!" said another.

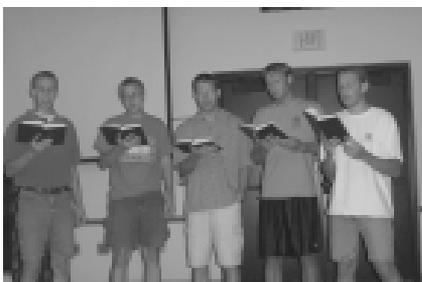
The attendees also benefited from three workshops: "Pursuing Peace

& Practicing Forgiveness" by Rev. Todd Joling of Faith URC in Beecher, IL; "Grace in the Face of Faith" by Rick Poll of Dutton URC in Dutton, MI; and "Not Hoping and Scoping" by Rev. Bob VanManen of Little Farms OPC in Marne, MI.

Some of the other comments received from this year's evaluation forms included:

- "Excellent messages. Applicable to all parts of our lives. Really gave myself (and others) a desire to hear the truth."
- "Sessions and workshops were fantastic! I was spiritually challenged and uplifted throughout the conference. It was also a pile of fun and I really enjoyed and appreciated the Christian fellowship."
- "I was presented with a lot of things to think about and that's what I needed."

We at RYS praise God for such gracious words of encouragement (a small, servant-minded committee of young adults ably assisted RYS). To Him be all the glory! The next LOGOS event is scheduled to take place January 1-3, 2004 (beginning the evening of the holiday), Lord willing, at the Shalom Retreat Center in Dubuque, Iowa. For more information about LOGOS, please contact RYS Director Ed DeGraaf at rys@iserv.net or (616) 667-0694.



URC and CanRC Church Order Committee Report

August 05-07, 2003

Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington, ON

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gulp, representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Dr. Jack DeJong of the CanRC, due to reasons of health, attended the meeting on a limited basis.

On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Br. Nordeman welcomed the committee members and introduced Dr. Nederveen who will serve the CanRC committee as an advisor on an interim basis.

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer. He welcomed in particular Dr. Nederveen. It was agreed that Dr. Nederveen would fully participate in the work of the committee. An agenda and timetable for the next three days were circulated and adopted.

The minutes of the February 13-14, 2003 meeting were reviewed. It was agreed to add to these minutes the third consideration that was used for not including an article regarding 'exceptional gifts' (Dort Art. 8) in the proposed church order. These considerations are:

1) instances of abuse of this article in the past, especially in the experience of the URCNA, 2) potential abuse in the future, and 3) the churches' requirement that every minister be thoroughly trained for the ministry, a training that at present is readily available.

The Function of a Minister

The consideration that the function of a minister extends beyond the local congregation and is available for call among all the churches of

Declaring a man eligible for call is not the task of a consistory but more appropriately that of a classis.

the federation suggests that declaring a man eligible for call is not the task of a consistory but more appropriately that of a classis. This principle will be included in the appropriate article. It was agreed that when a vacant church wishes to call a minister for the second time during the same vacancy, classical approval is required.

The Dort provision for 'recent converts wishing to enter the ministry' is adequately covered in the proposed article headed "An Ordained Minister Without a Congregation

Entering the Federation," where a requirement for "an adequate period of consistorial supervision" is stipulated.

Church Assemblies

An extended discussion took place on the division and alignment of churches, classes, and synods.

A consensus was reached that among the churches of the federation, four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the general synod. The terms "classis" and "synod" designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions. Assemblies, classes, and synods exist only for the duration of their meetings. These assemblies are deliberative in nature.

Appropriate articles were formulated prescribing that those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body, thereby receiving authorization to deal with all the matters properly placed before them; and that in all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, and only in an ecclesiastical manner.

The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. All matters must originate with a consistory and must first be considered by a classis and a regional synod before they may be considered by a general synod. Only those matters shall be considered in the broader assemblies that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches in common. Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its



proceedings.

Regarding delegation to broader assemblies a consensus was reached that classis shall choose the delegates to both the regional synod and the general synod proportional to the number of classes participating. This would ensure a better distribution of delegates from among the churches. The exact formula still needs to be determined.

Function of a Classis

Agreements were also reached on the proposed wording of articles relating to the specific function and make-up of a classis. A classis shall be held every four months, unless the convening church, in consultation with the neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

Decisions regarding Church Visitors include the understanding that classis shall appoint a number of its most experienced and competent ministers and elders to visit all the churches of the classis. At each church visit at least one of the visitors shall be a minister. A description of the specific task and function of the Church Visitors was agreed upon.

Agreements were also reached on the matters pertaining to archives, counselors, regional synod and deputies of regional synods. A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes in a region, shall ordinarily meet once per year. This synod shall deal only with such matters as are placed on its agenda

by the member classes, and with appeals from consistories or church members who have previously processed their appeals through their consistory and classis.

Reports to the churches and synods of the two federations will be composed by each sub-committee and compared to ensure that in the areas of accomplishments and recommendations they are in full agreement.

At the close of the meeting Dr. Jack DeJong informed the meeting that because of his health he can no longer function effectively as an active member of the committee. This makes it necessary for him to resign from the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity as well as the sub-committee for the church order. It is with profound regret that the committee took note of this decision. Br. DeJong was

thanked for his outstanding contribution, not only in this committee, but also for his committed efforts in the whole unity process. All the brothers wished him well. Dr. Kloosterman led in devotions and committed Dr. DeJong in the care of our faithful Father.

The press release was read and approved for publication.

In his closing remarks Dr. Kloosterman expressed his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its work. A considerable amount of work was accomplished.

After Scripture reading and closing prayer by Rev. Sikkema, the meeting was adjourned.

For the committee,
Gerard J. Nordeman

Classis Southwest U.S. Report September 16-17, 2003

The Grace United Reformed Church of Kennewick, Washington, served as the host for the 11th regular session of Classis Southwest U.S. The beauty of the Tri-Cities area and hospitality of the congregation made the trip particularly enjoyable.

After receiving the normal initial reports of convening consistory, classical clerk, and classical treasurer, the delegates took up the main business of the day: the collo-

quium doctum of Dr. Greg Bero, the minister of the Grace Evangelical Church of Torrance, California. Dr. Bero was examined in all the area prescribed by the Church Order. He sustained his colloquium doctum, and is now eligible to be called as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Churches.

The following morning, the classis, with gratitude to God, approved a request to provisionally accept into

the federation, the congregation that Dr. Bero serves.

During the second day of classis, greetings were received from ecumenical observers and visitors from six different denominations/federations. Much of the morning was spent passing two overtures to synod. The first asks for a republication of the 1976 Psalter Hymnal. The second requests that synod authorizes the formation of Classis Pacific Northwest to include ten churches from the United States and Canada. It was with a sense of joy and also loss, that this overture passed. Classis Southwest U.S. congregations will miss the fellowship we have enjoyed with our northern churches over the past several years.

Most of the rest of the day was spent conducting a colloquium doctum of Rev. John Sawtelle, who has been called to serve as Pastor of Congregational Life and Outreach at First United Reformed Church of Chino, California. Rev. Sawtelle sustained his examination, and was heartily welcomed by the delegates of classis.

The next convening church is Calvary United Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado. The classis is set to convene on March 23-24, 2004.

Respectfully submitted,

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

This is My Outlook

They told her she was fired. She had faithfully worked for them for some time, putting in overtime, always going the extra mile to help a customer, but today she was fired. Why? There were all kinds of reasons, they said. All kinds of reasons, except one. They made very clear that the reason she was fired was not because she had refused to work on Sunday. Yes, they knew that she had never worked on Sunday before; they knew that she did not want to work on Sundays but they scheduled her anyway. And so, for reasons other than that, they claimed, the same week she refused to work on the Lord's Day, she was fired.

Sound familiar? We've heard it all before, you say? Maybe. The difference here is that the place that she worked was never open on Sundays before. Part of the reason why she had applied for the job in the first place was because they were closed on Sunday. Another reason was the Christian atmosphere. After all, Family Christian Stores seemed like a safe haven from the worldly-minded places she had worked before.

This past September, Family Christian Stores opened for business on Sunday. Although they promised not to fire those who had serious reservations about working on the Lord's Day, those who refused were terminated "for other reasons." In our local Family Christian Stores, it was reported that sixty per cent of the employees were sud-

denly and unexpectedly unemployed.

One really has to wonder why a Christian Bookstore has to be open on the Lord's Day. An email to the headquarters yielded the following response:

Family Christian Stores has decided to open on Sundays after prayerful consideration and seeking counsel from other Christian leaders. We believe that opening on the primary ministry day of the week is what the Lord would have us do. While we are aware that our decision to open on Sundays invites some criticism, we must follow the ministry mission of Family Christian Stores and provide people with Christian resources that meet their needs-whenver the needs arise, especially on the day they are thinking about spiritual needs.

We understand some may question this move. However, I have been personally convicted by several verses that clearly call us to make disciples and reach people regardless of the day of the week.

- *Matthew 12:1-14, but in particular Matthew 12:12 (NIV) "... for it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

- *John 5:15-17, which speaks about Jesus healing on the Sabbath and His persecution by the Jews.*



• *Colossians 2:16-17 (NIV)*
“Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Studying this subject also reinforced that we need to support regular times of worship, which is why we will not be open Sunday mornings. We also must support and encourage regular times of rest for our staff, and our approach to scheduling will support this.

We look forward to the opportunity to minister to more guests on this day and would ask for your prayers and encouragement as we make this change.

*In Christ,
Dave Browne
President and CEO*

Yes. I understand now.

A church that suddenly finds itself short on bulletins can quickly run to Family Christian Stores and find some with a pretty scene and the words of Isaiah: “Call the Sabbath a delight.”

If, on the way to church, you suddenly remember it is Uncle Steward’s birthday you can buy a nice mug and card and give it to him at church.

A minister who is stuck for that perfect illustration for this evening’s sermon can dash to the bookstore and buy a book of illustrations to make his proclamation of the Word so much more effective.

There are just so many emergencies that Family Christian Stores can help with by being open in the Lord’s Day.

President and CEO of Family Christian Stores, Dave Browne, goes on to claim that being open on Sunday will allow them an additional day of the week to “make disciples and reach people.” I’m sorry, Mr. Browne, Family Christian Stores is a book store, not a ministry or a mission project! You cannot disciple someone by forcing them to break God’s Law.

And who does Mr. Browne think he is going to reach by being open on Sunday? Will some unbeliever driving by on her way to the mall on Sunday suddenly receive an inspiration and want to buy Dr. Kistemaker’s commentary on Revelation? If God is going to use Family Christian Stores to disciple and reach people, He will bring them into the store on a day He chooses. We cannot pretend that we are helping God when we break His Commandments.

I apologize for being sarcastic. By quoting Scripture Family Christian Stores appears to claim that they are being altruistic in their reasons for being open - doing it for the good of Christians in the neighborhood. How they can equate the healing of a man with a withered hand and the selling of merchandise is beyond me. How selling “Veggie Tale” tapes on the Lord’s Day authenticates the message and authority of the Christ, as did His miracles, is difficult for me to understand. How selling Beanie Babies and CDs is similar to pulling a sheep out of a pit (that fell into the pit on the Lord’s Day) is simply stretching the Scrip-

tures to say what you want it to say.

And then to quote John 5! If I understand the way Family Christian Stores uses this passage, they are teaching that if I do not shop there on the Lord’s Day, I am, in essence, persecuting them the same way that the Jews persecuted Jesus.

To avoid such persecution, Family Christian Stores handed out coupons for 20% - 30% off on any merchandise you bought in their store on Sunday. One might suggest to Mr. Browne that he use the coupon to buy a book on The Lord’s Prayer and that he study the petition: “Lead us not into temptation.”

The passage from Colossians can be interpreted to say that we are not to judge people simply by the day they celebrate the Sabbath. I have met people who worship on Saturday. I have not entered into judgment of them simply because the day they worship is different than the day I worship. But what day is the Sabbath for Family Christian Stores? They are now open seven days a week. They do not acknowledge any day as the Sabbath. That is not a shadow of things to come, that is living in the darkness!

Rev. Wybren Oord is pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (5)

What Does Paul Mean by 'Works of the Law'?

'Works of the Law', Human Inability and Boasting

In my previous articles, I noted that, in order to evaluate the claims of the new perspective regarding the interpretation of the apostle Paul, we need to begin by considering three distinct, though related, questions:

1. *First, what does the apostle Paul mean by the language of "works of the law" or "works," when he insists that no one is justified by them? Do the "works of the law" refer exclusively to what Dunn and Wright call the "boundary markers" of the law?*
2. *Two, does the apostle Paul oppose the teaching of justification by works on the basis of his conviction that no one is able to do what the law requires? Or, is the real and primary occasion for Paul's argument against justification by works of the law, his conviction that, now that Christ has come, the only way of inclusion among the people of God is through faith in Christ (arguing, as Sanders puts it, from "solution" to "plight")?*
3. *And third, is it correct to claim, as the Reformation did, that Paul opposed the "Judaizers" for teaching that justification rests upon human obedience to*

the requirements of the law? Does the apostle Paul oppose a "legalistic" distortion of the doctrine of justification, which taught that acceptance with God depends in some measure upon works of obedience to the law?

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Having treated the first of these three questions, we now need to take up the second and third. Does the apostle Paul argue in his epistles that the law exposes human inability before God? Does he oppose a form of teaching that expressed a kind of "legalistic" insistence upon justification by works of obedience to the law's stipulations?

As we have noted, these questions go to the heart of the new perspective's claims that the reformational reading of the apostle Paul was misplaced. The Reformation's claim that Paul taught that no one is

able to do what the law requires and thereby find acceptance with God misses the real point of Paul's gospel. Paul was not so much focussed upon the question of how sinners can find acceptance with God as he was upon the question of how the promise to Abraham now included Gentiles as well as Jews. The problem posed by his opponents was not their claim to self-justification before God but their exclusion of the Gentiles from receiving the covenant inheritance promised to Abraham.

Does The Law Expose Human Inability?

Writers of the new perspective are well aware of the apostle Paul's polemics against any righteousness before God that comes by way of the law. In Galatians 2:16 Paul insists that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the law. Indeed, if righteousness were to come through the law, Christ would have died for no purpose (Galatians 2:21). Or, to cite the familiar words of Romans 3:21, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." However we interpret this contrast between law- and faith-righteousness, Paul's clear insistence upon it can scarcely be denied.

According to the new perspective on Paul, however, the Reformation's explanation of this contrast between the law and faith misses the mark. According to the reformational view, the law principally functions (its so-called "first use") as a "teacher of sin" (*usus paedagogicus*).¹ In this understanding of the law, one of its most



important functions is to make known, even to aggravate, the problem of human sinfulness and inability before God. The law by itself serves only to expose and diagnose the problem of human sinfulness. What the law requires, no one is able to perform. The law serves the purpose of condemning before God all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who fail to do what it requires. Thus, the law leads the believer to Christ who, because He perfectly kept the law and suffered its curse, is our righteousness before God.

Writers of the new perspective offer a very different explanation of the problem with the law. E. P. Sanders, for example, maintains that Paul's primary objection to the law is based upon his Christology. Because Paul teaches that faith in Christ is the way of salvation, he rejects the law. Paul argues, in Sanders' understanding of his doctrine of justification, from "solution" (faith in Christ) to "plight" (not by the law). Paul is not arguing against the law, therefore, because he believes it is inherently defective or unable to provide a means of salvation. The problem with the law and Judaism is that they are not Christianity.²

In a modification of this approach, Dunn and Wright argue that Paul's problem with the law was due, not to the inability of Jews or Greeks to do what it requires, but to its "exclusivism."³ Those who insisted upon obedience to the law (the Judaizers) did so in order to exclude non-Jews from membership in the covenant community. Paul primarily opposed the law in its "social" function, namely, as an instrument of Jewish exclusivism, rather than its

"theological" function, namely, as an instrument to expose human sinfulness before God. Whether one takes the approach of Sanders or of Dunn/Wright to the problem of the law, neither approach leaves much room for an emphasis upon the law's condemning or accusing function. Viewed from the perspective of the progress of redemptive history, the law is deficient because it is superceded with the coming of Christ.

Without attempting to treat all of the relevant passages in Paul's writings

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that deal with this function of the law, it is not difficult to adduce several passages that support the reformational understanding of the law's function to expose human inability.

Galatians 3:10

In Galatians 3:10, a passage we considered earlier in respect to Paul's use of the expression "works of the law," the apostle writes, "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.'"

To appreciate the point the apostle Paul makes in this verse, it is critical to observe that it falls within the context of his preceding claim that no one can be justified by "works of the law" (compare Galatians 2:16; 3:5). Though no explanation was given previously as to why this is the case, Galatians 3:10 clearly intimates that it is due to the inability and failure of anyone to abide by all things written in the book of the law.

The opening conjunction, "for," indicates that Paul is now offering an explanation of the failure of the law as a means of justification. The problem lies in the impossibility of anyone doing what the law requires. To escape God's curse, it is necessary to do all that the law demands. Since no one obeys the law perfectly, no one can hope to escape the law's curse by attempting to perform what it stipulates. The conclusion, therefore, is that all who seek to obtain salvation by means of the law fall under the curse of God.

As we argued previously, when considering this text in connection with Paul's use of the language of the "works of the law," the problem Paul is outlining goes beyond the failure of his opponents to observe the "boundary marker" requirements of the law. This is apparent from Paul's citation of Deuteronomy 27:26. In the context of Deuteronomy 27-30, this passage threatens the people of Israel with the divine curse for any failure to observe the law of God.

Those who hope to obtain the blessing of God in terms of their obedience to the law's requirements, may only hope to do so by perfectly

Those who would seek to be justified by the law will only find frustration and defeat.

obeying the law. Any failure, even failure in respect to the least part of what the law demands, forfeits the blessing of God and brings the certain prospect of judgment. Therefore, if *anyone* seeks to find favor with God on the basis of the works of the law, he will undoubtedly be unable to achieve what he seeks.⁴

Galatians 5:3

Since we also treated this verse in our previous consideration of Paul's use of the language of "works" and "works of the law," we will restrict our comments here to the question of human inability. In this verse, the apostle solemnly warns his opponents that their insistence upon the obligation of circumcision carries with it the further obligation to do all that the law requires. "I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law."

When the apostle uses the expression, "again," he means to refer to something he had previously written. It is quite likely that this is a reference to Galatians 3:10, and that the point being made is quite similar. Those who accept circumcision and require it of others in order to acknowledge their inclusion among the covenant people of God, must recognize that they assume thereby *an obligation to the whole law*. Since his opponents link their justification before God with circumcision (compare Galatians 5:4), they must be warned that they have embarked upon a course that obligates them to everything in the

law. Nothing less than obedience to the law in its entirety will serve to justify those who seek to be justified by the law.

The most obvious interpretation of Paul's argument at this point would be that he believed no one was capable of such obedience to the whole law. The problem confronting his opponents is not simply that they have chosen a way of justification other than the way of faith in Christ. The problem is also that they have chosen a way of justification that cannot be traveled. Those who would seek to be justified by the law will only find frustration and defeat owing to their failure to keep the entirety of the law's obligations.

Romans 3:9-26

One of the more significant and extended passages on the subject of the law's exposure of human inability is Romans 3:9-26. This passage, which follows a lengthy treatment of the way God's wrath is being revealed against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men in Romans 1:18-2:29, presents a powerful indictment of all sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike, before the judgment seat of God.

After an opening section that outlines the privileges and advantages that belong to the Jews (vv. 1-8), the apostle Paul appeals to a variety of Old Testament texts in verses 9-18 in order to prove that "all, both Jews and Gentiles, are under the power

of sin" (v. 9). Whatever advantages the Jews may possess, including the rite of circumcision and the reception of the oracles of God, these are of no value so far as their standing before God is concerned. "There is none righteous, no, not one," says the apostle (v. 10). "All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (v. 12). Unrelentingly, the apostle adduces a variety of Scriptural passages to prove the point: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

What is especially important to our purpose, however, is the way the apostle sums up the role of the law in his indictment of human sinfulness.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (vv. 19-20).

The imagery of this passage is quite compelling and dramatic. The law is represented to function much like a prosecutor in a court of law, though the court in question in this passage is the court of heaven. So compelling is the prosecutor/law's case, that every mouth is stopped or silenced. No word can be offered in defense that would answer to the law's accusation. Thus, the apostle concludes that no human being can find justification before God by the works of the law. The law serves only to make sin known. It cannot



and does not serve to justify anyone before the judgment seat of God. Because the law is powerless to serve as a means of justification, the apostle concludes that the only way to find forgiveness and favor with God is through faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 21-26). Only on the basis of Christ's work of atonement and blood shed are sinners justified by God's grace as a gift.

The Law Aggravates the Problem of Sin

In Romans 3:9-26 and the other passages we have considered, it seems evident that the apostle Paul regarded the law, at least in one of its uses, as an instrument that exposes human inability and sinfulness. Consistent with the emphasis of these passages, there are other passages in Paul's writings that speak of the law's function *to make known* and *to aggravate* the problem of human sin and guilt before God.

In Romans 3:20, he speaks of the way knowledge of sin comes "through the law." Rather than the law serving as a means of justification, it serves as a means of disclosing the inescapable guilt of all human beings who fall short of what it requires. Remarkably, in some of these passages the apostle can even speak of the law, not only in its disclosure of human sin, but also in its *stimulation* of further sinfulness.

In Romans 5:20, for example, we read that "the law came in to in-

crease the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Similarly, in the well-known and much-disputed passage on the law in Romans 7, Paul, while affirming that the law is "holy and righteous and good" (v. 12), notes that the law is powerless to effect what it demands.

Due to human depravity and sin, the law's demands only "make sin known" (v. 7) and serve to "arouse our sinful passions" (v. 5). When the law declares, "you shall not covet," it makes sin come alive and thus brings death (vv. 9-10).⁵ Because the law by itself can only aggravate and expose the reality of human sin and guilt, the apostle describes the ministry of the law (of Moses) in II Corinthians 3 as a "ministry of condemnation" and "of death" (vv. 7,9). Unlike the ministry of the Spirit of Christ, which gives life from the dead, the ministry of the "letter" can only kill (v. 6).

One of the more significant ways in which the apostle sets forth the law's function to expose and aggravate the problem of human sinfulness is his use of the expressions, "under the law" and "under sin." These expressions are used synonymously in Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

By using these expressions as synonyms, Paul suggests that to be "under the law" is tantamount to

being under the tyranny of sin. To be "under grace" is tantamount to being freed from the power and dominion of sin. In the epistle to the Galatians, the apostle also uses language that intimates a close connection between the law and the problem of human sin. For example, he speaks of those who are "under a curse" due to their failure to abide by all that is written in the book of the law (3:10). He speaks of those who are "imprisoned under sin" by the Scripture, "so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (3:22). When speaking of "Scripture" in this text, it is likely that Paul is referring to the Torah, the inscripturated administration of the Mosaic covenant. All who "under the law" (3:23; 4:4-5; 5:18), remain "under a pedagogue" (3:25), "under guardians and managers" (4:2), and "under the elements of the world" (4:3). In all of these expressions, the apostle underscores the sharp contrast between being under the law, which can only bring the curse and death due to its violators, and being "in Christ," which brings blessing and life to all who through faith are joined to him.

In the older reformational understanding of these expressions, the law's role as a "pedagogue" was primarily viewed in negative and personal terms.⁶ By means of this kind of language, Paul was understood to emphasize the way in which the law of Moses condemned all who failed to abide by its provisions.

However, among writers of the new perspective, it is often argued that this represents a failure to read Paul's argument in terms of its *sal-*

Paul suggests that to be "under the law" is tantamount to being under the tyranny of sin

vation-historical framework. According to this view, when Paul speaks of the law as a “pedagogue” or a “guardian,” he means only to stress its role at an earlier point in the course of redemptive history, namely, during the period of Israel’s adolescence or immaturity. In this period, the role of the law was primarily positive, ensuring Israel’s life and preserving her against sin until the coming of Christ.

The law functions, therefore, in a positive manner to prepare Israel for the coming of Christ. But now that Christ has come, the law has been superseded and surpassed. To remain “under the law,” therefore, would be to deny the significance of Christ’s coming and the way in which he surpasses the law. Critical to this approach to Paul’s language regarding the law, particularly the expression of being “under the law,” is that it offers a substantial alternative to the Reformation’s claim that the law’s pedagogical function was to expose the power and guilt of human sinfulness.

Though it is undoubtedly true that the Paul’s descriptions of the law and what it means to be “under the law” are shaped by his conviction regarding the progress of redemptive history, any attempt to treat the law in unduly *benign* terms does not do justice to Paul’s language. The problem with the law is not simply that it is surpassed or even displaced by the new covenant in Christ. Rather, the problem with the law is that it held its subjects “captives,” and “imprisoned” them “until the coming faith would be revealed” (Gal. 3:23; cf. v. 22).

No doubt, in doing so the law served to lead its subjects by the

hand to Christ, in whom righteousness is revealed and the promise of the covenant realized. In this respect, the law and the promise in Christ are companions, and the law as guardian serves the blessed purpose of preparing its subjects for the coming of Christ. Nonetheless, the particular way in which the law prepares its subjects for Christ is by aggravating and revealing the problem of human transgressions.

In this connection, it is important to note that Paul’s language about the

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law as “pedagogue” and “guardian” occurs in the context of Galatians 3:19, “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” When Paul uses the language, “because of transgressions,” to explain the purpose for which the law was given, it does not seem likely that he is speaking positively about the law. Though some suggest that this language expresses the idea of a “restraint” upon sin, this suggestion is not consistent with the language Paul uses regarding the law in the immediate context of Galatians 3:19ff. or, for that matter,

in the argument of the epistle. In the verses that follow Galatians 3:19, he maintains that the law captivates all under the power of sin (vv. 21-22).

In the preceding and following context of the argument in Galatians, the apostle insists that justification occurs not by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. This insistence would be buttressed by an argument that the law exacerbates the problem of sin; however, it would be weakened by the claim that the law actually served the benign purpose of diminishing sin. Such a claim could hardly reinforce Paul’s argument with his Jewish-Christian opponents that the law serves as an instrument for justification. Furthermore, a similar expression is used by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:20, “Now the law came in to increase the transgression.” Galatians 3:19 likely says more than Romans 5:20, namely, that the law incites or increases transgressions.

Endnotes

1. Writers in the Reformed tradition usually distinguish this use of the law from two other uses: the “political or civil use” (*usus politicus sive civilis*), which refers to the law’s function in restraining sin within the civil order, and the “didactic or normative use” (*usus didacticus sive normativus*), which refers to the law’s function in ordering the believer’s life of gratitude.
2. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 442-47, 474-511.
3. Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14),” in *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 215-241; Wright, “The Law in Romans 2,” in J. D. G. Dunn, ed., *Paul*



and the Mosaic Law (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 131-150.

4. I deliberately use the singular here to reject an interpretation of this passage that regards the curse in exclusively “corporate” terms. Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 137-56, who argues that Paul would have excluded himself from this predicament (after all, Paul says in Philippians 3:6 that he was “blameless” with respect to the law!). Though this argument is highly unlikely when you consider Paul’s self-testimony in other passages (Rom. 7; 1 Cor. 15:8-9; cf. 1 Tim. 1:15), it fails to do justice to the singular forms Paul uses in Galatians 3:10-13 (“everyone,” “no one,” “the one”).

5. Cf. Thomas Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 73: “Paul takes a step further ... in his theology of the law. Most Jews of his day believed that a greater understanding of the contents of the law would curb the sinful impulse and prevent sin from dominating a person’s life. Paul turns this theology on its head by saying that the law does not restrain sin but *stimulates* and *provokes* it.”

6. Hence the language of the “pedagogical” or “first use” of the law, as a means of exposing human disobedience and guilt. See fn 1 above.

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 Out and About

- Rev. C.J. Den Dulk, pastor of the Trinity Christian Reformed Church of Sparta, Michigan left on September 26 for Donetsk, Ukraine with Dr. Joel Nederhood, retired Director of Ministries of the Back to God Hour. Rev. Den Dulk will be serving as a speaker at the “Power in the Pulpit” which is a conference for lay pastors and church workers in the Ukraine and surrounding areas. Rev. Den Dulk who was scheduled to speak eight times at the conference was planning to return to the States on October 4.

- Rev. Fred Folkerts was installed on August 15 as the first pastor of the United Reformed Church in Listowel, Ontario. Rev. Folkerts had served, since his graduation from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, as the pastor of the Providence Reformed Church (URC) in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

- Rev. Barry Beukema who had been serving the Bethel Reformed Church (URC) in Smithers, British Columbia was recently installed as the first pastor of United Reformed Church of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

- On September 12, twenty-five hundred people gathered in the auditorium of one of the larger churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan to listen to a debate on the subject of common grace. The participants in the two and a half hour debate were Reverend David Engelsma, Professor of Dogmatics,

Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan and Dr. Richard Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

- Dr. Robert P. Swierenga, Jr. who holds the position of Albertus C. Van Raalte Research Professor at Hope College in Holland, Michigan was the guest speaker at the annual meeting of the Reformed Fellowship held on Thursday, September 25. Dr. Swierenga’s address was entitled “Ethnic Glue: a Three Legged Stool, the Chicago Experience.”

- Rev. Mark Vander Hart spoke on “Does the Church Still Need Free Grace?” at the Reformation Day Rally sponsored by Immanuel ORC (URCNA) of Jordan and the Zion URC of Sheffield Ontario. Dr. Joel R. Beeke spoke on “Calvin’s Piety: The Heartbeat of the Reformation” at the Cornerstone URC in Hudsonville, Michigan. Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church spoke on “Reformed Roots: Righteous in Christ” at the rally sponsored by the Covenant United Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

- Rev. Paul Murphy spoke about Messiah’s Reformed Fellowship’s ministry at Ground Zero at a dinner hosted by Immanuel Fellowship Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan.



Book Review

The Dort Study Bible: an English translation of the Annotations of the Dutch Staten Bijbel of 1637 in accordance with the decree of the Synod of Dordt. 1618-1619. Volume 1. Genesis - Exodus. Translated by Theodore Haak, edited by Roelof A. Janssen. Neerlandia, AB; Pella Iowa: Inheritance Publications, 2003. 351 pp., \$18.90 US, \$24.95 CN, hardcover. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien.

This book is a wonderful addition to a home, church, school, or minister's library. Not since 1657 have these notes been available in English, except perhaps through facsimile editions from time to time. In 1657, an English translation was made by Theodore Haak. Originally, these notes were commissioned by the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619, along with the Staten Bijbel, a completely new translation of Scripture. In a very real sense, this is probably the earliest study Bible ever produced. We might say of it that this is a short commentary of the Bible.

This volume, the first of what is planned, D.V., to be a republication of the whole set of annotations, contains an historical sketch - written most likely by Theodore Haak, and other documents from the 1637 edition. There is an account of a gold coin produced by the States General of the United Netherlands commemorating the Synod. This coin is also stamped in gold on the front and back covers. (It must be added that the binding is beautiful!) Inside the front and back covers are reprinted the title pages of the Dutch Staten Bijbel and the English translation by Haak, dated 1657.

The notes are preceded by an introduction to each Bible book, and a summary at the end of each chapter. While the notes on Genesis are much more detailed than the notes on Exodus due to the nature of the content, many insights are found on all the pages. These notes would not be what you might read in a commentary published today, but they give concise explanations of the verses. Regularly, they give cross references to other Biblical passages which shed further light on what God says in the text. Also, these notes give an historical-redemptive understanding of the Bible history. Ministers, as well as Bible students, will find helpful information here, as well as ideas to develop.

For those who might be interested, the position on creation days is "that night and day...made up one natural day together...comprehending twenty-four hours" (see Genesis 1:5). Further, the Book of Genesis lays open God's "everlasting covenant." The note on Genesis 17:7 states that it is "Everlasting for all believers in Christ..." This subject is discussed at great length in the appropriate places.

Of what value is this new, but very old, set of notes? Some scholars might look with disdain on a republication of these notes. Yet, historically they have value because we can read in English what our fathers at Dort taught and believed concerning Biblical teachings other than those well explained in the Canons of Dort. It is foolhardy to cut ourselves off from our heritage, as so many wish to do today. Now, what has been readily available in the Dutch language for the last three hundred fifty years, is in a newly translated and typeset English edition for our reading and spiritual benefit.

Further, this volume has a practical level. For those who attend church society meetings, or for those involved in Bible studies, here is a concise and helpful Reformed commentary. Its format allows it to be on the table with our Bibles, Psalters, and notes.

This is an ambitious project which Inheritance has undertaken. We must be grateful for their dedicated work. It is the hope of this reviewer that the day will come, beginning now, when this set will not only be displayed in many, many homes, but also well worn through use. In this day of seemingly shrinking interest in the Reformed faith, we and our children must be grounded in God's truth!

If you cannot find a copy at your local bookstore, it is available direct from Inheritance Publications, Box 154, Neerlandia, AB TOG 1R0, or Box 366, Pella, IA 50219.



Looking Above

A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 1:9

“I, John, Your Brother and Companion”

The book of Revelation is the final book of the Bible, the last book of the Canon, though it has not always been accepted as such. Jerome included it in the Vulgate only after some waffling on the issue of its canonicity. Zwingli, the great reformer, did not accept it as a book of the Bible. Luther said of the book: “My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book; Christ is neither found in it, nor taught in it.” In fact, in his German translation of the Bible, Luther relegated the book of Revelation to an appendix (not even Luther was right about everything!).

Contrary to Luther’s claims, however, Christ is found in the book of Revelation. In fact, Christ is central to the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation, then, belongs in the Canon; it is part of the inspired Word of God.

The Holy Spirit inspired author of the book is John, the apostle. He identifies himself as the author no less than five times: three times at the beginning of the book (1:1, 4, 9), twice at the end of the book (21:2; 22:8). Though each identification is significant, we want to consider here John’s self-identification in verse 9: “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...” John identifies himself to his readers as their brother, their

companion. He is their brother in the tribulation, kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ.

Certainly John knew what tribulation was all about. We are told in verse 9 that he was on the island of Patmos. Patmos was a small island off the coast of Asia Minor. It was a rocky, volcanic, mostly treeless little island. It was the place to which the Roman Empire sent those prisoners who were deemed to be dangerous to society. It was to Patmos that John was exiled. He was a prisoner. He was in exile. He was familiar with sorrows and acquainted with grief. He knew what tribulation was all about.

Yet in the midst of his tribulation, he rejoiced that he belonged to the kingdom of Christ. You recall that it was John who recorded the words of Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse, where Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of this world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also

persecute you” (John 15:18-20a)...“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). What a comfort these words must have been to John as he was in exile on the island of Patmos. Though he found himself in the midst of tribulation, he knew that he belonged to Christ, the One who has overcome the world.

John knew what tribulation was all about; he knew also what it meant to belong to the kingdom of Christ. Because he knew what it was to belong to the kingdom of Christ, he also had patience. He had patience because he knew that nothing could separate him from the love of Christ. Again, recall the words of Christ, which John recorded in John 10:27-29, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” John had patience because he knew he belonged to Christ.

Now, note that John says to the churches that he is their “brother” and “companion” in these things. The churches to whom John writes share in the tribulation, kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ. Recall what we said in the last issue.

Though he found himself in the midst of tribulation, he knew that he belonged to Christ, the One who has overcome the world.

As we read the book of Revelation we are reading not only of the experience of John, we are reading of our own experience.

John writes to the seven churches. The number seven represents fullness or completeness, so that as John writes to the seven churches, he is writing to the church universal - that means that he is writing to us - to you and to me. We share with John in the tribulation, kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ. As we read and hear these words, we find that we too are brothers and companions in the tribulation, kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ. We are brothers and companions of Christ.

John is united with Christ. We also are united with Christ. That means that as we read the book of Revelation we are reading not only of the experience of John, we are reading of our own experience. Even as John was ushered up into the heavenlies, as we hear and read these words, we are ushered up into the heavenlies. Even as John had the throne-room of God opened to him, as we hear and read these words, the throne-room of God is opened to us. Even as John had the council chambers of the living God unveiled to him, as we hear and read these words, the council chambers of the living God are unveiled to us. The story which we read in Revelation is our story. It is our experience. It is our life. Heaven is opened to us! The throne-room of God is revealed to us! The council chambers of the living God are unveiled to us!

We are not spectators in what is laid out for us in Revelation. To quote one preacher who put it so eloquently, "We are smack dab in the middle of the whole thing!" Revelation is describing for us the time in which we live. Revelation is describing that entire span of time from the first coming of Christ to His second coming.

That means that any interpretation of the book of Revelation that leaves out the church is sorely mistaken. The book of Revelation simply does not give us the picture of a church that is called to withdraw itself into some type of sectarian enclave that comforts itself with millennia dreams, leaving the world to perish in judgment. This book is for the church!

Incidentally, that is why the book is purposely vague in its symbolism. Contrary to what many believe, the book of Revelation is not some cryptic polemic against the Roman Empire. It is purposely vague in its symbolism in order to carry us beyond the specifics. It is a book that is relevant for the first century church, for the sixteenth century church, even for the twenty-first century church. And, should the Lord tarry, it will be relevant for ages to come. This book is written for the church, as she shares in the tribulation, kingdom, and patience of Christ, even as John shared in such things.

The focus of Revelation is not upon

John, the focus is on Christ. In this book, John decreases even as Christ increases. Like the prophets of old, John was ushered up into the very throne room of God, and there he was shown the true prophet, the final prophet, the last prophet, even the Lord Jesus Christ. In His presence, all things become clear.

This is indeed, the final book of the Bible, the last word to the church. In Revelation we reach the very pinnacle of God's revelation of Himself - beyond this we cannot go, and will not go, until Christ comes again with the clouds of glory. This is the word that God would leave with His church. This is the Word through which God builds His church. This is the Word through which God comforts His church. This is the Word through which God preserves His church. This is the final Word, the last Word, because it is not the word of John, but the Word of the Living Christ. It is through this Word that Christ draws us in, that we might lay our heads upon His breast, finding our only comfort in Him, even as we now share in His tribulation, kingdom, and patience.

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.



Sound Bites

The Outlook - 1978

January 1978

“It is tragic to see how some Christians grab frantically at every new approach that comes down the pike. Among other things, this shows that those who do so are weak biblically and theologically or that they have learned to do exegesis and theology abstractly and do not know how to use the fruits of such studies in application to every day problems of living and in counseling.”

Transactional Analysis
Jay Adams

“The increasingly total confusion about everything a Christian ought to believe and do...is the direct result of compromising and retreating from taking the Bible on its own claims and terms.”

Gospel Riches and Church Poverty
Peter De Jong

“No doubt *The Outlook* will become the new church paper. [I] would like to see it changed from a monthly to a biweekly.”

About a “United Reformed Church”
John Vander Ploeg

February 1978

“Any excursion by science beyond the observable facts must rely on theory and is thus open to question.”

“We can accept the methods and claims of science only as long as they do not contradict the higher

authority of Scripture. When such conflicts occur, we must humbly submit our thoughts to God’s Word.”

Science and Truth
John Byl

April 1978

“The present CRC apathy to the increasing erosion of our former staunch and vigorous commitment to the Reformed faith, together with open and ever bolder attacks upon it are nothing less than appalling.”

“Pity those who are always vocal among the critics of the church but are never found among the builders.”

“There is much in the PR churches that we highly esteem. Our unresolved differences should not keep us from praying and working for the ideal of a truly United Reformed Church.”

“A United Reformed Church should begin by exploring the convictions they do have in common without demanding that the first order of business must be a reconsideration and resolving of controversies of a bygone day.”

That “United Reformed Church” - an Ongoing Challenge
John Vander Ploeg

May 1978

“The church is a therapeutic healing community, but not because it has mastered the latest procedures of behavior modification theory. It heals because it shares the love of God with people who cannot live without love.”

Religion as Therapy
Fred P. Thompson

June 1978

“Recently at church, a good friend drew me aside and said, ‘The United Reformed Church is an old man’s movement.’ Then he added that he himself was going on eighty-five and that he had no more fight left in him. A bit doggedly I countered by stating my conviction that the URC is God’s movement.”

That URC - A Look Around Us
John Vander Ploeg

July 1978

“...in many cases neither the attackers of tradition nor the maintainers of it have really been going back to the Bible which is supposed to be our authority for faith and life.”

Does Our Use of the Bible Determine Its Authority?
Peter De Jong

“There never will be a ‘United Reformed Church’ of the kind you envision. It wasn’t there in Paul’s day; John didn’t find it among the seven churches of Asia Minor, and we won’t find it today. Simply because we won’t find perfection on this side of heaven.”

A United Reformed Church
Jelle Tuininga

(continued page 32)

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(continued from page 31)

October 1978

“Unbiblical decisions are the natural result of tolerance.”

What is “Progress”?
Laurie Vanden Heuvel

November 1978

“The church has lost the ability to respect the local autonomy of the churches and the ability to hear the conscientious protests of her children.”

More About Quotas
John J. Byker

December 1978

“The same prayer of our Lord that stresses unity among His people stipulates that it is a unity in His truth.”

“If division should come because of loyalty to the gospel of Christ, we should not seek to evade that kind of division. Those who are to blame for the real division in the church which is coming to expression are those who are betraying its gospel.”

*Response to
a Letter to the Editor*
Peter De Jong

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