

Inside this *Outlook*

1834 and 2004 **Rev. Wybren H. Oord** **2**
One hundred seventy years ago our fathers in the faith seceded from the organized church. The fundamental truths that forced them to leave are just as pertinent today.

Standing as the Pillar **Rev. Daryl Kats** **4**
In this meditation, Rev. Kats briefly explains that being reformed means remaining in truth set forth in God's word.

We Confess..... **Rev. Daniel Hyde** **6**
Rev. Hyde looks at Article 16 of the Belgic Confession. This article focuses its attention upon very difficult and often misunderstood doctrine of divine predestination.

Why Faith Alone? **Mr. J. Wesley White** **9**
Just how many good works do we have to do in order to be saved? Mr. White explains that because of Christ, this question need not even be asked by the Christian.

The Sovereignty of God..... **Rev. Rich Kuiken** **11**
In his series on the riches of the Reformed faith, Rev. Kuiken takes up the sovereignty of God as it is seen in creation, providence, and redemption.

Evaluating the New Perspectives on Paul (15) .. **Dr. Cornelis Venema** **16**
Dr. Venema looks at the good of good works and how they apply to our justification.

The Anointed Savior [II]..... **Rev. Wybren H. Oord** **20**
As our anointed Savior, Jesus Christ fulfills the role of being our High Priest. Rev. Oord looks at the importance of this role of our Savior.

Soundbites 1988 **21**

Looking Out and About **22**



1834 and 2004

It was 170 years ago this month that the Secession took place. In this event a group of men and women left the Established Church of Holland and willingly suffered both scorn and persecution for the reformed faith. Many of us in 2004 trace our spiritual lineage to those heroic men and women. They saw the church organization to which they belonged become corrupt and believed that the only way to stay in the true Church of Jesus Christ was to secede from that organization.

Secession is the only safe and effective way to reform a deformed church organization. There is no logic in the position that the faithful

portion of the decadent Church should remain to voice its protests and that it should never stop until the heterodox party puts them out by means of discipline. History does not defend that position. Experience proves that when the unfaithful element in a Church is in the saddle, they pay no heed to protests and they feverishly work to consolidate their position while the faithful are waiting to be ejected.

Far too many parents throughout history waited for their church to return to the faith handed down by the saints only to watch the instruction of their children undermined through the preaching of a false

and watered-down gospel. Secession does not take place for the elderly saints who are already rooted in the faith. It must take place for the young people and children who need to hear the glorious truth of the living Word.

The thinking of today that certain teachings may be true for one time but not necessarily true for another is totally false. New occasions may require a new application of those truths and may lead to a better understanding of them, but the truth itself is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That truth must forever be defended. Some say that truth needs no defense. There never was a greater fallacy than that. Human nature is hostile to the truth. A corrupt mind cannot know the truth. Only through God's Spirit



Volume 54, No. 9 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands...and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

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are people convicted of the truth that saves them. That has never changed.

One hundred seventy years ago our fathers fought and suffered for truths that are still valid today. The leaders of the Secession insisted not only on that truth, but maintained that such truth was found in pure Reformed doctrine. Leading principles held by De Cock, Scholte, Brummelkamp, Van Velzen and Van Raalte, that led to the Secession, are just as true in 2004 as they were in 1834.

Sovereign Grace

The first principle was that of the sovereign grace of our God as the only source of salvation for lost sinners. The very heart of the Reformed faith is not merely the teaching of De Cock, or Calvin, or Augustine, or even the Apostle Paul. The heart of Reformed doctrine is that our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of His people. Through His perfect obedience and death on the cross we have forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with the Father. It is a fundamental truth that the grace of God alone has made salvation possible.

The Secessionists did not merely hold this doctrine as a private conviction. They preached it with fire and with conviction. They left no room for any type of universalism, syncretism, or tolerance of contrary teachings. Still today, this fundamental truth must be maintained and proclaimed. The Church of Jesus Christ cannot tolerate anything that teaches that mankind somehow merits salvation or can gain salvation in any other way

than through the Savior sent by God.

Church Discipline

The second principle for which our fathers fought was for the faithful exercise of church discipline as an indispensable means of keeping the church pure. This, too, was not a novelty but one of the basic principles of the Reformation which the corrupt State Church of the Netherlands had utterly forsaken in the days of the Secession. Faithful reformed churches today still confess that the faithful exercise of church discipline is one of the marks of the true church.

How many churches today are loyal to this part of our spiritual heritage? All our praise for the boldness and the work of the leaders of the Afscheiding will only be like a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal unless we can truthfully declare that we also endeavor to maintain the purity of the Church by means of discipline. As difficult as it may be to discipline in a religious atmosphere where church growth is often stressed more than spiritual growth, such discipline is demanded by God from all who hope to remain faithful.

How many churches today can truthfully say that they are manifesting a holy determination to be faithful to this fundamental principle of the reformed faith?

Ecclesiastical Authority

The third principle which our fathers never grew weary of stressing was that there is no authority in the Church except that of the Consistory and the major assemblies of the Church. They themselves were

victims of a vicious system of church government in which the authority of these bodies had been usurped by standing committees. These committees acted as if they were autonomous, and, in an autocratic way, deposed the ministers who began the Secession.

It is this same ruinous board system which has strangled many other denominations as well. Standing Committees with their own agendas often are guilty of imposing their desires upon a Synod. Often such boards forget that they possess only delegated authority. By word or deed they show a reluctance to be wholly and fully subject to the body that appointed them.

Let us thank God for our fathers before us who through “dungeon, fire, and sword” contended for the faith in 1834. They have transmitted to us that holy and glorious faith, which is our most precious possession. As the fathers contended for the faith in the days of the Secession, let us today stand strong and contend against those who would take away the very principles of our Reformed faith. Our enemy is essentially the same as theirs.

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Standing as the Pillar

“Let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.”

Philippians 3:16

“Reformed from what?” “Is that like a Reform School or something?”

Have you ever been asked questions like that when you have told someone that you belong to a “Reformed Church?” “Reformed from what?” How do you answer a question like that?

I am ashamed to say I have often attempted to answer that question with an answer that follows along the line of: “Have you ever heard of the Reformation?” And, increasingly in our day and age the answer to that question is, “No.” So, then I try a different tactic, and ask, “Have you ever heard of John Calvin or Martin Luther?” And, occasionally there are those who have heard of Martin Luther, and less frequently those who have heard of John Calvin. But that still does not answer their question very well. So, then I will quickly mutter something like, “We believe in the Sovereignty of God and the authority of the inerrant Bible,” and hope that by this time their eyes will glaze over in disinterest and I can go about my business.

What does it mean to be “Reformed?” That is a multifaceted question. It cannot be answered in one article, but, I would like to direct your attention briefly to a passage of Scripture that I believe clearly portrays how we could answer someone’s queries about being Reformed.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about the church being “the pillar of truth.” A Reformed Church must be “a pillar of truth.” That, in itself would make the church stand out in an age of relativism. Francis Schaeffer once wrote, “Here’s the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely accommodation.” The church should be a pillar, not a feather, blown by the winds of change.

If the church is going to be a pillar, Paul says, we must know the truth. We can only know the truth through the infallible rule of God. In spite of being entrusted with the infallible, inerrant word of God, the majority of those within the church do not believe in absolute authority. Even among those who are “Bible-believing” Christians a majority say there is no such thing as absolute authority. How can one be a pillar of truth if one does not believe in such a thing as absolute truth?

There is a definite need to return to the basics and commit ourselves to the truth. That begins with a renewed commitment to the Scripture, which we confess to be the revealed truth of God. We must stand boldly on the tradition of those who have gone before us in defending the orthodox confession of our faith. We must believe that there are rights and wrongs; rights and wrongs that people have died for, rights and wrongs that are taught from God’s infallible Word.

All too often churches, even some Reformed churches, operate more as a democracy than they do a theocracy. We are guided by the majority, rather than following the One. It is certainly a good thing that Jesus did not allow the majority of the Sadducees and Pharisees to convince Him that their way was the best way to go. It is certainly a good thing that Martin Luther was willing to stand alone against the majority. No, it is not always easy to stand alone. In fact, often those who have stood alone for the Word have also died alone. Yet, truth is truth whether the majority believes it is or not. Truth is truth even if the majority says it is false.

That is why we, the church, are called to live the truth. Paul tells Timothy that he is writing so that “you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household.” (I Timothy 3:15). Paul is calling for consistency here. Our conduct must match our confession. Sound doctrine must lead to sound living.

Paul’s focus seems to be upon our conduct within the church, but our conduct within the church cannot help but flow into the world. Francis Schaeffer once wrote, “The true Christian is not only to teach truth, but to practice truth in the midst of relativism.” However, Schaeffer followed that with a warning such living will “bring confrontation—loving confrontation, but confrontation.”

Confrontation is something that we are often very wary of. We do not want to offend anyone. We want to be nice people, and be liked by all. So, we carry out our Christian lives



somewhat like pastel “Precious Moments” figurines; we are cute, attractive, and appealing.

We need the reminder from time to time that the Gospel is offensive. The Bible says, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” (I Corinthians 1:22,23) A bit later Paul says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (I Corinthians 2:14). That doesn’t sound like “Precious Moment” Christianity, does it?

Too often the world cannot see much difference between the way Christians and non-Christians live their daily lives. How about you? Can your neighbors see a difference in you? Are you able to stand for the truth, articulate, defend and advance an intelligent and coherent world and life view?

Abraham Kuyper once spoke a message that needs to be heard again. He said, “[Our call] is this: that in spite of world opposition, God’s holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the state for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.”

Our world calls for separation of church and state. But as a pillar of truth, the church must stand firm as a voice of unfaltering truth in our society, voicing the reign of God into

every sphere of life. That will call us to contend with our culture, and challenge the values of our society.

We know that the purpose of a pillar is to hold something up and to support it. Paul is suggesting that the church must hold up the truth in such a way that it is evident to all. Even if the world does not want to see the truth, the church must boldly hold it forth. That implies firmness, not compromise. It implies rigidity, not accommodation.

Independence from our culture is what gives the church its reforming capacity. We must apply the Gospel to our age. We must know that, while times change, the truth does not. What was orthodox at the time of Christ and His apostles is orthodox today. What was orthodox at the time of the Protestant Reformation is orthodox today. The church stands as a pillar of truth upon the Scripture and the historic confessions.

That may not appear to be the most popular message out there. It is very unlikely that Reformed Doctrine will ever be able to compete with the “Left Behind” series for popularity. However, if churches are not willing to stand firm upon the unchanging truth of God’s Word and the established moral standards of His Word, who will? We may often stand as a minority, as did the Reformers. But, stand we must!

What if Martin Luther had not been inflamed with holy passion to be a pillar of truth? What if he had given in to the majority? What if he would have concluded that there is no such thing as right and wrong? One thing is certain: the whole modern world would be distinctly different.

What does it mean to be Reformed? It means that we are a pillar of truth, as were our Reformed fathers in the faith. We are committed to the truth that is revealed in God’s inerrant Word and articulated in the orthodox confessions of faith. We have zeal to live the truth. Clothed in the armor of God we will stand firm. We live with the realization that every hour, and even every minute of our lives is lived in the presence of the holy majestic God. We will have the courage to stand firm, and to stand alone.

Only the church can stand as the pillar and foundation of truth in our world today.

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We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 16: Of Divine Predestination

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...” (Ephesians 1:3-4) I can remember hearing those words for the hundredth time, yet, for the first time hearing what it said about me, my God, and my salvation.

Paul’s words knocked me to my knees as I beheld the glory of God as He reveals it so clearly in His purpose of election. Hearing these words, how can we do anything else but burst forth in praise! How can we not get passionate about the God who chose worthless worms? Election is a truth given to us in Scripture and we are to praise God for it! It is a truth meant to comfort our hearts. It is a truth meant to inspire us to desire the salvation of the lost.

We come to the third section of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Having discussed the doctrine of God (*theology proper*) in Articles 1-13 and the doctrine of man (*theological anthropology*) in Articles 14-15, we now transition to a discussion of the doctrine of Christ (*Christology*) in Articles 16-21.

In these articles we are taken from the depths of depravity into which we were plunged by Adam’s fall and are shown the remedy – and more! After the Fall, that the Cre-

ator and Lawgiver revealed Himself as Redeemer and Father. He had already elected in His Son a multitude who had fallen (Article 16). He revealed Himself as merciful for the first time in the Garden when He promised to send a seed to crush the serpent (Article 17). In the fullness of times this “seed” came to full-flower in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God in the flesh (Article 18), who is both God and man, yet one Person (Article 19). This God-man was set forth as God’s means of redemption (Article 20) and as the only satisfaction for God’s wrath upon our sins (Article 21). Exhilarating, isn’t it? This is the drama of our redemption.

The Controversy Over Article 16

Article 16 was the point of contention in the controversy with James Arminius and his followers in 17th century Holland. The issue? The basic, straightforward words of this article: *He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works...* Election is confessed by the Reformed churches to be an unchangeable decree of God without regard to its objects’ works – including their faith.

In opposition to the Confession of the Reformed churches, the Re-

monstrants wrote five articles of remonstrance (a public protest). Article 1 of their remonstrance says

That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ His Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ, *those who, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, shall believe on this His Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith*, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as aliens from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him,” and according other passages of Scripture also. (emphasis mine)

Notice, while they affirmed the “unchangeable purpose” of God in election, it was based on the changeable wills of “those who, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, shall believe on this His Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith” (emphasis mine). The only thing unchangeable about this decree of election, according to the Remonstrants, was that God had chosen to save those who would change themselves from unbelief to belief in Jesus. So



whether He looked down the corridor of time and saw men choosing Him or whether He did not know who would choose Him until they actually chose Him in time and history, the result is the same.

Its Background

Article 16 begins in an unexpected place: with the fallen state of man in misery. Our Confession gives us the wisest approach in discussing election with our non-Reformed friends and family by beginning: *We believe that, all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents...* We often jump right into the decrees of God when someone asks us why we believe in election. This is not wise. Instead we need to begin where our Protestant forefathers, both Reformed and Lutheran, began before discussing salvation: sin.

Although Article 16 describes the *eternal* love of God which was already in place even before Adam had fallen, it discusses election along redemptive historical lines. Notice the flow of argument in our Confession: it moves from creation (Articles 12-13) to the Fall (Article 14) to the consequences of the Fall (Article 15), and then to the manifestation of God's mercy and revelation of the Gospel promise (Articles 16-17).

The Manifestation of God

...God then did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just...

So it is in light of our true spiritual condition that we discuss election. And notice that it is *we* who discuss it in that order. God's electing plan

was in place even "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). It was not that the Fall caught God by surprise or that He only began to elect sinners once the Fall happened. This is why the Confession says "God then did manifest Himself such as He is."

What is God like? What did He manifest, or, reveal, about Himself after the Fall? That He is both merciful and just. We see this in Paul's thought as he reflects upon the sovereignty to God in Romans 9. There he is dealing with the issue of ethnic Israel, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the promises made to Israel's forefathers. In that discussion he mentions that God "has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills" (Romans 9:18) and that this mercy and hardening is revealed in "vessels of mercy" and "vessels of wrath" (Romans 9:22-23). Truly we can stand back in awe with Calvin and say that this doctrine manifests *horribilis Dei maiestas*, "God's dread majesty."

A Manifestation of Mercy

...merciful, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works...

As we ponder God's predestination of some to salvation, we must stand

in reverential fear and wonder and not speculate. There is nothing more amazing than election. It reveals just how big our God truly is and just how small we really are. It is beyond our thought and reasoning as to why God has chosen any – including you and me! Before they had done either good or bad, God chose Jacob and not Esau (Romans 9:11). He has chosen us without sight of our works, so that it is freely of grace, but also in full view of our wickedness so that it would be doubly gracious! As Canons of Dort I, 7 says, the Father chose us "according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will." That's it – for His glory! As Ephesians says, God purposed this "in Himself" (v. 9) and "according to the counsel of His will" (v. 11). He has taken us as clay and molded us into "vessels of mercy" to show the "riches of His glory" upon us (Romans 9:19-23).

Often we turn this truth of grace into law. We turn election into some sort of second blessing which we must attain, which we must work for, which we doubt and despair. Beloved, election is pure gospel because, as Calvin says, Christ is the mirror of our election. If the knowledge of God's good pleasure and powerful love before the foundation of the world leaves you in doubt, because you think you have sinned too much, then look to Jesus as a mirror; gaze upon Christ and see yourself – beloved by grace!

We often jump right into the decrees of God when someone asks us why we believe in election. This is not wise.

Study/Application Questions for Article 16

1. As a review, what is the significance of discussing the doctrine of election after discussing the Fall? What must we understand about ourselves first? (cf. Canons of Dort I, 1)
2. What is the basis on which God manifests His mercy to us in election? (Rom 8:29, 9:16; Eph 1:5; CD I, 7, 9, 10)
3. Should we believe, teach, and preach the doctrine of predestination? If so, how? (CD I, 14)
4. If God has predestined some to salvation shouldn't we just "let go and let God" do His saving? How do the Canons discuss the *end* of election and the *means* of election? (CD I, 3)
5. What do we say to believers who have lost a child? (CD I, 17)
6. The Canons of Dort say that God has chosen "a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ" (I, 7). Where can you show this from Scripture?

A Manifestation of Justice

...just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

Finally, a part of the *horribilis Dei maiestas* is that God has not chosen everyone to salvation, but that He has left others to perish in their original and actual sin. May we thank God every day that He has not left us in our sin and we should pray that He would deliver so many more before Christ comes! May that "great multitude that no one could number" not even be close to its final number – for the glory of God and the salvation of the lost.

We usually call the manifestation of God's justice "reprobation", or "double predestination." Reprobation is equally ultimate in the decree of God as election. We see this a few times in Scripture. God "hardens whomever He wills" (Romans 9:18) and "makes[s] out of the

same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use" (Romans 9:21). Those made for "dishonorable use" God has "prepared for destruction" (Romans 9:22). These are also described by Peter in these terms: "They [unbelievers] stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do" (1 Peter 2:8), and by Jude in these words: "For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation" (Jude 4).

This "destruction" and "condemnation" cannot be attributed to God or blamed upon God. The basis on which God manifests His justice in "leaving" or "passing by" those He does not elect in mercy is their sin and unbelief (see Canons of Dort I, 15).

What, then, is the meaning of election for us who believe in Jesus?

Paul's doxology for the Father's electing purpose in Christ is that we bless God because He has blessed us. As Calvin says on this text, Paul's intention in Ephesians 1 was "to rouse their hearts to gratitude, to set them all on flame, to fill them even to overflowing with this thought." May God set another generation of Reformed Christians on fire for His glory and gospel!

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Why Faith Alone?

In our every day lives, we typically base our evaluations of people on how well they do. We don't think, for example, that if someone in our class at school does "D-" work on a paper that they should get an "A." Further, we don't like it when our boss says that the lazy guy is a "great worker" (when we know that we are the ones who always pick up the slack).

That is how we often think about God. We are continually tempted to think that God will not think well of us unless we do really well.

The Christian religion declares that this way of thinking is simply not true. This claim of the Christian religion is based on what the Bible declares concerning the justification of sinners by grace through faith.

The Bible teaches that what God thinks about us (or His verdict) is based simply on whether or not we have faith in Jesus Christ. This is what the Christian Church has always confessed, and this is what separates us from all other religions of the world.

Please consider, for example, these words from John Chrysostom (c. 344/354-407) in his commentary on Galatians:

[Paul] proves that he who kept [the law] was cursed, and he who kept it not, blessed. Again, they said that he who adhered to Faith alone was cursed, but he shows that he who adhered to Faith alone, is blessed.

This statement may sound very strange to our ears. Do we really want to say that he who keeps the law is cursed? The substance of Chrysostom's observation was that those who cling to the law for their justification will receive only damnation.

But that sounds a bit harsh, doesn't it? Shouldn't those who earnestly try to keep the law get something for their efforts? Doesn't the Bible even say, "Do this and live" (Leviticus 18:5)?

Chrysostom explains further in his comments on Galatians 3:12-13 why the "do this and live" formula simply will not work,

You see how he proves that they are under the curse who cleave to the Law, because it is impossible to fulfill it.

To this curse, I say, people were subject, for no man had continued in, or was a keeper of, the whole Law.

That is why Paul argued that the very phrase "do this and live" actually proves that justification must be by faith alone (Galatians 3:10-14; Romans 10:4-8). If our "doing" was that which made us worthy of eternal life, then we are all in serious trouble (because none of us has done what the law requires). Indeed, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

This is what Martin Luther saw so clearly: that all of the things that we do are inevitably tainted by sin. No

matter how hard we try, we simply cannot fulfill the law. Consequently, if we are going to be accepted by God, then that acceptance must come from another source (not our own performance, actions, or doings).

But there was something else that helped both Martin Luther and John Chrysostom to realize that our acceptance before God must be by faith alone: the greatness of what Christ has already done for us. Chrysostom wrote, "Truly the Sacrifice was offered for all mankind, and was sufficient to save all, but those who enjoy the blessing are the believing only."

Now, while we may not agree with the first clause of this statement, we must certainly agree that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save all. The Canons of Dort 2:3 put it this way:

This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, *more than sufficient* to atone for the sins of the whole world (emphasis mine).

The substance of this phrase completely demolishes all salvation-by-works based religions. Jesus Christ is the God-man, and, by His merit, He accomplishes completely everything that is necessary for us to receive eternal life.

When the Canons speak of Christ's satisfaction, it includes His active and passive obedience. His passive obedience is what He suffered for our sins. His active obedience is the

obedience that He rendered in our behalf to make us worthy of eternal life.

We must understand, though, that His active and passive obedience are not divided amongst various acts throughout His life. Every act of obedience was passive and active, though one or the other may be seen more clearly. Thus, the cross was His suffering on our behalf, but it was also His supreme obedience to the Father on our behalf (John 10:18).

In both cases, the suffering on our behalf (passive obedience) and the obedience on our behalf (active obedience) was not the obedience of any mere man but the obedience of the God-man. Consequently, it was perfect and complete in every way.

This should help us to see more clearly why justification must be by faith alone, and why it is so blasphemous to assert that it is not.

Christ's satisfaction is fully sufficient to atone for all our sins. To claim some ability to add something to His already perfect sacrifice is the worst sort of insult and most arrogant blasphemy.

Consequently, even when we do say, "justified by faith alone," we are not asserting that faith is a virtue or a good work that we offer up to God but rather that faith is merely the open hand or instrument that receives the free gift of Christ's righteousness for eternal life.

Indeed, Luther was deeply impressed with the profundity of his own sin. That is why he greatly de-

spaired of any possibility of being justified before God. But Luther, praise be to God, was eventually even more deeply and even more profoundly impressed with the greatness of Christ's perfect obedience and suffering for us. Luther explained the importance of Christ's unique work as the God-man this way:

If it were not to be said, God has died for us, but only a man, we should be lost. But if "God's death" and "God died" lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But, indeed, He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us.

The greatness of Christ and His work gave Luther the only comfort that he could possibly have in the face of his personal sin and misery.

Why faith alone? The affirmation of this doctrine rests on these two points. First, because we can do nothing that could make us worthy of eternal life. Second, because there is nothing whatsoever that we can add to the infinite value of Christ's righteousness.

This is the key to many of our controversies. First, it utterly demolishes Rome's whole soteriological system.

If Christ has given us infinite and perfect merit, then what would we ever need to pay for in purgatory? What need do we have for the merit of the saints? What merit can the Pope of Rome sell us that Christ has not already given us?

We can also apply this to the Arminian doctrine of perseverance. If what Christ has provided is in every way sufficient to satisfy God's justice and make us righteous before God, then, once it is received, it can never be lost again. This is the basis for an eternal covenant, as we read in Isaiah 54:10,

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.

Once we embrace Christ for salvation, we have an eternal life that is really eternal. It cannot be lost. Christ's infinite and perfect merit assures us of that.

Even today within Reformed

Why faith alone? The affirmation of this doctrine rests on these two points. First, because we can do nothing that could make us worthy of eternal life. Second, because there is nothing whatsoever that we can add to the infinite value of Christ's righteousness.



circles, sometimes we are tempted to think that it is not so important to emphasize justification by faith alone. We sometimes believe that it is not so important to emphasize both the active and passive obedience of Christ. Such tendencies only serve to diminish the glory of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, and His finished work for us.

Let us contend for these Scriptural, historic, and Christ-honoring doctrines, so that in our churches today the truth of God's Word and the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ might be firmly and clearly proclaimed.

Mr. J. Wesley White is a graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

The Sovereignty Of God

The Sovereignty of God, which Dr. Fred Klooster defines as that which “*expresses the very nature of God as all-powerful and omnipotent, able to accomplish his good pleasure, carry out his decreed will, and keep his promises*” is very clear when we see our Sovereign God actively at work in CREATION (ie. as our Creator); in PROVIDENCE (ie. as our Provider); and in REDEMPTION (ie. as our Redeemer).

In Creation

Isaiah 44:24: “*This is what the Lord (Yaweh – the self-existent, covenant making, covenant keeping God of Israel) says – your Redeemer, (the One who pays a ransom price to set His people free) who formed you in the womb.*” Notice the close connection between the Lord God as our Creator and as our Redeemer! I highlight this at the very beginning of this series because again, as Dr. Boettner writes, “*The harmony that exists between the various doctrines of the Christian faith is such that error in regard to any one of them produces more or less distortion in all of the others.*”

In this portion of our text, God speaks of Himself not simply as our Creator generally (ie. “v.24 b – *I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself*”), but He is also speaking here of Israel and of each and every believer specifically – “v.24a .. *who formed you in the*

womb.” Now, that is true “physically”, is it not? Indeed it is! For that is why in Psalm 139:13-14 the Psalmist David prays, “*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*”

When we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture (ie. as we apply the Analogy of Faith, as always we must), we find that it is also true that God is our Creator spiritually! Indeed, the Psalmist David says, “*Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.*” (Psalm 22:9, 10).

In similar fashion, in the New Testament, in Colossians 2:13-15 the Apostle Paul declares, “*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*”

Question: Does a baby have anything to do physically with their being conceived and born? (*of course not!*) Can someone who is

physically dead make himself alive? (of course not!) The Bible says that the very same thing is absolutely true spiritually! In John 3, Jesus said to Nicodemus, “‘I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’” (John 3:4,5).

Nicodemus knew that this was true physically! Jesus goes on to tell him that this very same thing is true spiritually “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘you must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).

In other words, physical and spiritual birth are completely “outside of our control”! To be born both physically and spiritually is the sovereign work and the saving work of the Holy Spirit of our God!! That is why, in strikingly similar fashion in Ephesians 2:1:4-5 Paul writes, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”

The Bible clearly teaches that all

people are spiritually dead and cannot cause themselves to be born again! How can our Arminian brothers and sisters profess, teach, and preach that in order for anyone to be saved they must, out of an exercise of their own free will, believe in a benevolent but ultimately impotent God who is patiently and persistently pleading with him to “please believe”.

More importantly, how can so many of our Reformed brothers

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and sisters place themselves and their children under such preaching and teaching? How can they place themselves under the teaching of those who believe that people must, of their own free will, accept or reject Jesus Christ who by His blood shed on Calvary made the way of salvation possible for everyone? Can’t they see that what is being taught is that Jesus accomplished the salvation of no one unless they personally, of their own free will, contribute the good work of their own saving faith? How does that square with the biblical teaching that we are by nature dead in our sins and enslaved to Satan?

When we follow this Arminian

teaching to its logical conclusion we sadly discover that we are worshipping a God who *sincerely desires*, but unfortunately, is *ultimately unable* to save all those whom He supposedly wants to save simply because of the stubborn resistance of frail, finite, sinful men. This, of course, represents a rank denial of the glorious biblical, Reformed doctrines of God’s *Unconditional Election* as well as of His *Irresistible Grace!* And that, for both ourselves as well as for our children, is a very serious spiritual matter, indeed.

Dr. Loraine Boettner writes, “Any system which teaches that the serious intentions of God can in some cases be defeated, and that man, who is not only a creature but a sinful creature, can exercise veto power over the plans of Almighty God, is in striking contrast to the biblical idea of His immeasurable exaltation by which He is removed from all the weaknesses of humanity. That the plans of men are not always executed is due to a lack of power, or a lack of wisdom, or both. But since God is unlimited in these and in all other resources, no unforeseen emergencies can arise. To Him the causes for change have no existence. To assume that His plan fails and that He strives to no effect is to reduce Him to the level of His creatures and make Him no God at all.”

Praise be to God that one of *The Riches of the Reformed Faith* is the realization of the fact that the Sacred Scriptures repeatedly proclaim The Sovereignty of God in our Creation – both physically, as



well as spiritually!

In Providence

In Isaiah 45, the Lord God uses the pagan Persian King Cyrus as an example of His providential power and sovereignty. This King was not yet born for some 200 years when the Prophet Isaiah penned the words of this prophecy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

In Isaiah 45:1 we read *“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of”* This mighty, pagan Persian king was nothing but a pawn in the hand of the King of Kings and Lord of Lord’s, the sovereign God of the universe! This ought not to surprise us! We read in Proverbs 21:1, *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”*

It ought not surprise us that in the Old Testament prophecy of Ezra, penned some 200 years after the prophecy of Isaiah was made, we read, *“In the first year of Cyrus King of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus King of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ‘This is what Cyrus King of Persia says: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you – may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the*

people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1-4). Glory! Glory be to our Sovereign God!

After speaking extensively concerning the great success with which Cyrus would be blessed by

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the Lord in vv.1-3, we read in Isaiah 45:7 *“I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity (Hebrew: shalom; overall peace, health and well-being) and create disaster (or, calamity).”* Certainly this does not refer to sin or evil. God cannot and does not create these things! *But God is indeed in control of all calamities – even though we may not understand such things at the time, things such as: suffering and sickness, the death of a child, the loss of a loved one; the incredible devastation of a natural disaster; a terrorist attack, and so on.* In fact, you could have the greatest Department of Homeland

Security in all the world, but rest assured that no citizen, no city, no country is safe except by the plan and power and providence of God! *...“I, the Lord, do all these things.”*

That is why in Deuteronomy 29:29 we read, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God...”*, and in Psalm 131:1 David writes, *“...I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me”*; and in Belgic Confession Article 13 we read *“And as to what He does surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into farther than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God, which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.”*

At times such as these, times when my own heart and mind are also crying, *“WHY? WHY?”* I seek to find comfort, courage, peace and assurance in verses 9 and 10 of Isaiah 45 where we read, *“Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd (clay pottery) on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter ‘what are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘he has no hands’? Woe to him who says to his father, ‘what have you begotten?’ or to his mother, ‘what have you brought to birth?’*

Allow me to illustrate this biblical truth this way:

The story is told of a pastor who went to visit one of the widows in

God is looking down from His sovereign throne in heaven saying, "It's all right my child, it's all right ...everything is coming together just fine."

his congregation one day when he found her busily weaving a beautiful tapestry. While she weaved he was recounting with her all of the heartache and hard-times of her life, and he asked her where she found the strength to carry on. She smiled and said, "Well, you see, pastor, my life – our lives – are a lot like this tapestry. If you look underneath, all you see are knots and tangles – it looks a mess! But from the top it appears that things are turning out just right!" The pastor understood what she was saying: she drew her strength from the realization that the tapestry well represents how our lives are lived before the face of God.

We are looking up from the underside, up from amidst all of the many problems, pressures and pains of earth – asking "Why?" All we see are knots and tangles. God is looking down from His sovereign throne in heaven saying, "It's all right my child, it's all right ...everything is coming together just fine."

Indeed, this is what God promises us in Romans 8:28 where we read, "And we know (though we may not always feel!) that in all things (not just some things) God works for the good for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Therefore, let us always remember to rest and to rejoice in The

Sovereignty of God in Providence as our Provider.

In Redemption

In Isaiah 45:20-22 we read, "Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it – let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. 'Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.'"

Here the Lord declares that which theologians refer to as "the external gospel call," namely, the universal call, indeed, the imperative command from the King for all people everywhere to "Turn to me (Hebrew: turning from and turning to, that is, true repentance) ... and be saved" (Hebrew: or, delivered; that is, not simply from captivity in Babylon but even more essentially from death and eternal damnation). In verse 23 we read, "By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear."

The Apostle Paul expounds upon this theme in Philippeans 2:11 "...and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" What the Apostle Paul as well as the Prophet Isaiah are both professing is not "universal salvation", but they are professing "universal submission" to our Sovereign God and to His Son, Jesus Christ, as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

As Isaiah 45 concludes, the Lord declares in verses 24-25, "They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.' All who have raged against him (and indeed, many are the enemies of the cross and Church of Christ) will come to him and be put to shame. But in the Lord (as we are united with God in Christ by grace alone through faith alone – a faith which is not of ourselves; ie., not of our own free will as Paul writes in Eph. 2:8-9, "but it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast") all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult."

Notice a few very important points concerning this portion of our text. First of all, Isaiah here is not speaking of physical, national Israel. Many of them remained idolaters and unrepentant and unbelieving. Rather the prophet is speaking of a spiritual Israel consisting of Jew and Gentile which is the Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

While many of our Arminian brothers and sisters believe that a Christian can lose their salvation by failing to maintain their faith and good works, the Reformed faith professes the Perseverance (or preservation) of the Saints! This bibli-



cal doctrine teaches that all true believers are kept in faith by the power of El Shaddai – God Almighty. Once a person is truly saved they will, by God’s grace, persevere to the end and so be saved! That is why the Apostle Paul passionately proclaims in Philippeans 1:6, “*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

Secondly, when Isaiah makes reference to “*all the descendants of Israel*” the clear implication is that God will not fail to save a single one of His elect! Not a single soul whose sins Christ paid for will perish! Imagine the gross injustice God would perpetrate if He condemned to hell those who sins had already been paid for and completely covered by the blood of Christ on Calvary! And yet that is precisely what our Arminian brothers and sisters believe and teach!

The Bible says that not a single soul whom God has sovereignly decreed to save will ever be able to frustrate His sovereign, saving purpose in their heart, soul and life! In fact, they “*will be found righteous.*” They will be justified – legally declared not guilty in God’s heavenly court because of the imputed righteousness of Christ which is credited to their account by grace alone through faith alone. The result of such a grand, glorious, guaranteed, and gracious salvation? They will *exult* Jehovah! Peter writes “*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul” (I Peter 1:8,9).

On February 2, 2003 the headline of the North Jersey Herald News read: “Columbia is Lost” – *There Are No Survivors* – “*Seven astronauts die 16 minutes shy of safe return.*” Of course, ever since this terrible tragedy concerning one of the U.S. space shuttles occurred, there have been all sorts of NASA reflections and related reports filled with such statements as “*what if*” and “*if only.*”

Let us take comfort and courage from this: even in the Columbia space tragedy, and indeed, also in all matters of *Creation, Providence and Redemption* ... there absolutely are no “*what if’s*” and “*if only’s*” with God! That is why in time and for all eternity, no matter what the particular circumstances of our lives may be at any given moment on any given day, all those can and will and well ought to rejoice who by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior profess and proclaim THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD ... one of THE RICHES OF THE REFORMED FAITH.

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Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (14)

The Reformational Answer to the Question

In order to address these questions, we will begin with a summary of the traditional reformational answer to them. During the course of the debates of the sixteenth century on the doctrine of justification, the Reformers, who insisted that the believer's justification is based wholly upon the righteousness of Christ received by faith alone, were compelled to consider how this is compatible with a final judgment according to works. Since the Roman Catholic objections to the Reformers' understanding of justification often included an appeal to the Scriptural teaching of a final judgment according to works, the subject of justification and the final judgment was an unavoidable feature of their teaching.

Rather than attempt to sort out the variety of answers provided to this question during the sixteenth century, we will take the handling of it in the Protestant confessions to be representative. In these confessions, several themes are present.

Fundamental to the reformational view was the claim that justification was a judicial act of God that *irrevocably* and *definitively* declares that believers are right with God and heirs of eternal life. Justification is not, like sanctification, a process that occurs over time as believers are renewed and conformed to Christ by the working of His Spirit. Justification is a declarative act of God in which He pronounces the status of believers to be one of ac-

ceptance and favor with Himself. This free justification or acceptance with God is wholly based upon the work of Christ, whose righteousness is the sufficient and the only basis for God's justifying verdict.

When believers come to enjoy the benefit of Christ's saving work through faith, their justification declares, *here and now*, nothing less than the favorable verdict that God will publicly confirm at the time of the final judgment. Free justification declares that all the believer's sins, past, present and future, are forgiven and covered by the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, whose life of obedience and sacrificial death constitute their righteousness before God. In this respect, justification *anticipates* the favorable verdict that will be openly declared at the final judgment. When believers are joined to Christ through faith, they become beneficiaries of the verdict that God declared already in the resurrection of Christ from the dead (Romans 4:25).

To state the matter conversely, if the final judgment were to undo or reverse the verdict already pronounced in the believer's justification, the confidence of believers that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" would be compromised (Rom. 8:1). To speak of a "future" or final justification that is partly based upon works jeopardizes the believer's

assurance of full and irrevocable justification.

The Confessions

Nowhere in the confessions of the Reformation is this more emphatically stated than in the Westminster Confession of Faith. In Chapter 7, "Of Justification," it is affirmed that "God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, *although they can never fall from the state of justification*, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance" (section 5, emphasis mine).

The language of this Confession unmistakably declares that justification is a once-for-all judicial act, which secures the believer's right standing with God in a manner that is irrevocable. No room is left by this Confession for the idea of a future justification that completes what would otherwise be an unfinished reality.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, a similar point is made, though in the express context of its treatment of the final judgment. When the question is asked, "What comfort is it to you that Christ *shall come to judge the living and the dead?*," the answer strongly insists that this judgment occurs within the framework of a solid confidence that Christ's obedience and sacrifice have *already secured*, permanently and irrevocably, the believer's freedom from the curse of the law: "That in all my sorrows



and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same Person who before has offered Himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as Judge from heaven” (Q. & A. 52). According to this confession, the final judgment does not represent a fearful prospect of loss for believers who place their trust in Christ, since Christ has secured once-for-all their freedom from the curse of the law and accomplished for them all that is necessary to secure their right standing with God (Romans 8:31-39; Philippeans 3:20; Titus 2:13).

According to the Reformation confessions, since this definitive and irrevocable declaration of the believer’s standing with God is based solely upon the righteousness of Christ, which is received by faith alone, the works that play a role in the context of the final judgment may not be regarded as the ultimate basis or ground for the favorable verdict and acquittal that this judgment publicly declares. The confessions clearly and repeatedly assert that the only righteousness that is the ground for the justifying verdict of God is the righteousness revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-24; 5:1,2,16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippeans 3:9; II Corinthians 5:21).

Since believers are justified by faith “apart from works,” the final judgment’s contemplation of the works of believers may not be construed as a justification *by works*, even though such works are the necessary and inevitable fruits of a true and living faith. Though it is acknowledged that the final judg-

ment includes a public *confirmation* of the believer’s present justification, this judgment is not described as a kind of future or final justification that completes an otherwise unfinished process. To regard the final judgment as a final justification would inevitably compel the view that justification, at least in its ultimate expression, is not a free gift of God’s grace that is granted for the sake of Christ’s righteousness alone.

If the confessions of the Reformation clearly speak of justification as a once-for-act of God, which does

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trust in Christ.***

not require nor comport with a future or final justification according to works, this still leaves open the question regarding the way they handle the final judgment and the obvious role that works play in this judgment. How, then, do the confessions treat the subject of the role of good works in the context of the final judgment?

Genuine Good Works

To answer this question, it is significant to observe that the confessions of the Reformation freely affirm the reality of a final judgment according to works. They also openly

acknowledge that the good works of believers are genuine works that please God and are accordingly rewarded by Him. However, the reformational confessions are careful to note that the good works that God rewards in the context of the final judgment have at least three important characteristics.

First, they are not the kinds of works that could ever justly deserve the verdict that free justification pronounces. Such works could never be “the whole or part of our righteousness before God,” according to the Heidelberg Catechism, “[b]ecause the righteousness which can stand before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect and wholly conformable to the divine law, while even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin” (Q. & A. 62; cf. Romans 3:9,20; 10:5; 7:23; Galatians 3:10; 5:3; Deuteronomy 27:6; Leviticus 18:5).

Second, the good works of believers are themselves the fruits of God’s sanctifying grace at work in the hearts and lives of his people. They are those good works that God prepared beforehand for believers to walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

And third, the works of believers are only “good” in so far as they proceed from faith, the same faith that finds no other basis for acceptance with God than that provided by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They are the inescapable fruits of a true and living faith, though faith alone “before we do good works” is the exclusive instrument whereby believers receive the free gift of justification (Mat-

When God rewards the works of faith, He rewards those works that He produces by His own Spirit in the lives of believers.

thew 7:18; John 15:5; James 2:18,22). The principal motive that is operative in the Christian life is that of gratitude and devotion borne out of the awareness of God's super-abounding grace in Christ (Romans 12:1). To suggest that the good works of believers constitute the basis or reason for their final acceptance and favor with God would be to transpose them into an unbiblical key. Were believers motivated to obey God by the prospect of the loss of their justification and inheritance in the covenant, their works would be performed in "bad faith," that is, out of an ungrateful denial of the perfection of Christ's work on their behalf. When God rewards the works of faith, therefore, He rewards those works that He produces by His own Spirit in the lives of believers.

Since the genuine good works of believers, which play an important role in the final judgment, are not the kind of works that could justify anyone, the confessions also insist that their reward, though genuine, is not the gift of salvation itself or the title to eternal life (I Corinthians 3:14-15). Salvation is wholly a gift of God's grace in Christ (Romans 6:13) and therefore it cannot be as a reward for good works that we are saved. The respective rewards and praise that God grants to the good works of believers are a genuine and undeniable feature of the final judgment. However, the praise of the believer's good works in the context of the final judgment is not

to be understood as though they were the basis for the believer's salvation.

The believer's acceptance with God and right to eternal life always, whether in this life and in the setting of the final judgment, remain based upon the gracious work of Christ. Were the believer's acceptance with God or inheritance of eternal life to depend upon who they are or what they have done, the assurance of free justification would be lost and works would become the way whereby believers receive their salvation, which would be a denial of justification *by the instrumentality of faith alone*.

Acceptable Good Works

Among the more important features of the confessions' treatment of a final judgment according to works is their insistence that the acceptance and reward by God of the good works of believers is *by grace and not merit*. When God rewards the works of believers, He does not reward them in terms of their inherent value, as though, strictly speaking, there would be a sense in which they "deserve" this reward. Since the works of believers are always imperfect and stained with sin, and since these works are themselves the fruits of Christ's Spirit at work in them, it is not possible to speak of their reward as a reward that is properly merited. There is no sense in which the reward God grants for such works

could be said to be "due" believers, as though this reward were like a wage that is due a worker who has satisfactorily fulfilled all his duties (cf. Luke 17:10; Romans 4:4). Indeed, however genuine and praiseworthy the works performed by believers, their acceptance and reward from God *depends wholly upon a prior acceptance of their persons for the sake of the righteousness of Christ*.

In this connection, the confessions introduce a distinction, which is also found in the writings of John Calvin and other Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, between the *justification of the believer's person* and the *justification of the believer's works*. Though present in several of the confessions, nowhere is this distinction more clearly stated than in the Westminster Confession of Faith: "Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unprovable in God's sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections" (Chap. 16, section 6).

The point of this distinction is to emphasize that whatever pleasure God takes in the otherwise imperfect works of His children, this pleasure wholly depends upon and is undergirded by His prior pleasure in their persons, which is on account of the righteousness of Christ alone. By speaking of an acceptance or justification of the works of believers, the Confession clearly



does not mean to speak of something that “completes” or complements the believer’s prior justification by faith alone. The acceptance of the work of believers is subordinated to, and only possible upon the basis of, a previous saving justification of the persons of believers. When believers come before God with their works, they come as those who are united to Christ and, in union with him, clothed with his perfect righteousness. The acceptance of their works, accordingly, is altogether gracious and unmerited. Apart from the saving acceptance of their persons in Christ, the works of believers could not possibly be pleasing to God, since, as the Confession rightly describes them, they are always “accompanied with many weaknesses or imperfections.” The acceptance of the works of believers is not a second part or chapter in the ongoing process of the believer’s justification. Rather, it is a fruit and consequence that follows from a more basic act, namely, the free justification of believers themselves on account of work of Christ on their behalf.

Within the context of these emphases, the confessions affirm that believers will not be acquitted in the final judgment, or receive the confirmation of their free justification and praise for their good works, unless their lives give evidence of the genuineness of their faith. God will not declare the final acquittal of professed believers whose lives belie or deny their profession. In this respect, it is permissible to say that believers will only be vindicated in the final judgment within the context of *an acknowledgment of their good works, which prove their genuineness of their faith.* The

good works that true faith produces are a necessary part of what belongs to the salvation of any believer (a genuine *conditio sine qua non*). But they are not the cause or reason for the salvation of any believer. In other words, believers will only be saved when they embrace the gospel with the kind of faith that necessarily produces good works. However, this certainly does not mean that we should view the final judgment as a kind of final chapter in the believer’s justification, which would determine on the basis of works whether believers are worthy of eternal life.

According to the confessions, therefore, the final judgment and acquittal of believers is “according to” but not, strictly speaking, “on account of” their good works. Because true faith is “ever accompanied with all other saving graces” (Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 11, section 2), including good works, the final judgment will openly confirm the salvation of those in whom the Spirit of Christ has worked. The final judgment will show that the faith that alone justifies is not alone in those who genuinely believe in Christ. None of those whom God justifies freely for the sake of Christ are left in the condition in which they were found. Rather, the Spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of sanctification, always and simultaneously renews believers in new obedience to the law of God. The purpose of the final judgment,

accordingly, is to vindicate God’s righteousness in declaring his justified and sanctified people to be the proper recipients of their open acquittal and praise. By contrast, the judgment of the unbelieving and impenitent will publicly declare that they remain in their sins and are deservedly recipients of condemnation and death.

Conclusion

The classic treatment of the subject of justification and a final judgment according to works in the Reformation confessions, includes several interrelated themes. All believers, whose free justification is based upon the righteousness of Christ alone received through faith alone, will be judged at the time of Christ’s coming. Because justification is a definitive and irrevocable declaration of the believer’s acceptance with God and title to eternal life, this final judgment, though a judgment according to works, is not understood to be a final phase or step in a process of justification that is still unfinished. Rather, it is a judgment that will publicly declare and confirm what is already true, namely, that Christ has removed every accusation against his people and any basis for their remaining under the curse of God. Furthermore, because the same faith that receives the gift of Christ’s righteousness for justification is also, by the working of the Spirit of Christ, a faith that proves its genuineness by its fruits, the final judgment will declare the

The final judgment will show that the faith that alone justifies is not alone in those who genuinely believe in Christ.

propriety of God's judgment in favor of believers by recognizing and rewarding the works of believers. The works of believers will not be the reason or basis for God's favorable verdict and acquittal of believers in the final judgment. Nor will the reward of these works be the gift of salvation or eternal life. The role of good works in the final judgment will be to offer the occasion for God to reward graciously, and not according to merit, those good works of believers that are the fruits of his gracious working in them. Believers will be judged "according to" their works, but they will not be saved "on the basis" or by reason of their works. Though we may properly say that believers will only be acquitted in the final judgment when their profession is confirmed by their good works, we may not say that this acquittal is based upon their good works.

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

The Anointed Savior [II]

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we possess." Hebrews 4:14

Last month we saw how Jesus, the Christ, was anointed to be our Prophet. The catechism points out that the sinner is not only in need of a prophet, that is, one who teaches us about the Father, but we also are in need of a high priest.

God originally created man good and in His image. At one time, Man loved God spontaneously. For a time, while in the Garden of Eden, we served God perfectly and lived in constant fellowship with Him. Sin, however, diverted that stream of life and polluted it. Our thoughts were no longer pure and focused on God. Instead, we became subject to sin and fell under bondage to Satan.

The Sacrifice

What we need is a priest to represent us before the Most Holy God. We need someone to make atonement for our sin and to restore us once again into God's favor. In order to make that atonement, the priests of the Old Testament were directed by God to make sacrifices for the sinner. Whereas the prophet represented God to the people, the priest represents the people to God. Only the anointed priest was permitted to approach God on behalf of man and make the necessary sacrifices required by God.

The priesthood of the Old Testament era points us to the Christ, that is, "The Anointed One." The Book

of Hebrews is full of references to Jesus as *the* Priest over the whole household of God. The priests of the Old Testament offered blood sacrifices as commanded of them by God. Those sacrifices all pointed ahead to Christ, who by His one sacrifice on the cross removed all the sin of His people.

Because of Christ there is no more need for sacrifices of atonement; there is no more need for sacrifices of blood. All that is needed is the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Anyone who insists upon making a bloody sacrifice today is taking away from the glory and the value of the once for all sacrifice made by our only High Priest, Jesus Christ. The lamb upon the early altar pointed ahead to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. It was that great sacrifice, made by Jesus on the cross, that removed your sins and made you right with God. We must now recognize Jesus as the One anointed by God as priest and thereby enabled to make the perfect sin-offering for our sin.

What a difference between Jesus Christ, the true priest, and all the priests that foreshadowed Him. The early priests all came with the blood sacrifice of an animal. Jesus Christ, our only eternal High Priest came and poured out His own precious blood for our sin. We are redeemed; our sins are paid for not



with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ who shed His blood and died upon the cross for us. I Peter 2:24 tells us that Jesus Christ, our High Priest, “bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died unto sin, might live to righteousness.” Isaiah tells us, “By His stripes we are healed.”

The Advocate

We are also told by the Heidelberg Catechism that as our High Priest, “Christ continually pleads our cause with the Father.” Satan, the Law, and even our own consciences all accuse of before God. They all point out our guilt. Yes, we are guilty of sin and therefore guilty of deserving eternal punishment.

Our Advocate, Jesus Christ, stands at the right hand of God the Father and pleads our case for us. He is

attentive to our every need. He is in the presence of God the Father every day! That is no small benefit for us! The Old Testament priests could enter into the Holy of Holies only once a year. Jesus is in the presence of the Holy One every day! That means that when our sin is brought before the Father, our anointed Advocate says, “Because of My broken body and shed blood - Not Guilty!” Only the One anointed by God to be our Advocate can say those words because He covered those sins with His own blood. They have been paid for.

What a marvelous treasure for every child of God to know that the Savior gave His life for us and that now He is in the Holy of Holies in the presence of the Father confirming the sacrifice which He made for us at Calvary.

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

Q *Why is He called ‘Christ’?*
A *Because He is ordained of God the Father to be our only High Priest.*

Sound Bites - 1988

January 1988

“I’m not afraid of the charge: You preach the Catechism, not the bible. Proper preaching of the Catechism is biblical preaching through and through.”

The Catechism as Text
Jelle Tuininga

March 1988

“It is so abundantly clear from scripture and our confessions that coming to the Lord’s table involves a confession on our part. It is itself a confession of our faith.”

Children at the Lord’s Supper
Jelle Tuininga

April 1988

“As the authority of the Bible is increasingly coming under attack in our denomination and as some lose confidence in the power of the Word preached to attract sinners, we find some preachers becoming more and more enamored with innovations and novelties. This often takes place at the expense of the proclamation of the Word which alone can fulfill the need of the seeking sinner.”

Our “Famine of the Word”
Arthur Besteman

“Not one Reformed church, ancient or modern, has ever diluted or

abandoned its Calvinism through a knowing decision based on scholarly dispute.”

*“Christian” TV:
A New Challenge*
John D. Teague

“Synod of ‘87 appointed still another committee to study the matter again...We ‘study’ things until we get our way.”

Obey God Rather Than Men
Jelle Tuininga

May 1988

“We should never justify evil by citing its prevalence, nor should we declare our intention to violate the law in the absence of its enforcement.”

Signing the Form
Norman De Jong

“Those who place the Heidelberg Catechism so high up that it even has sermon text status (just as the Bible does for the other Sermons each Lord’s Day), will only succeed in undermining what they seek to uphold.”

Catechism Preaching
G. I. Williamson

June 1988

“I have difficulty thinking that God would lead us into thinking of 24-hour days if they really had been long periods of millions and billions of years. God is a God of truth and He does not mislead.”

Whose Word Must We Accept?
Al Menninga

July 1988

“The Belgic Confession must be not just the BELGIC Confession. It must be OUR confession.”

* * * * *

“It must be a living statement of faith. It cannot function as OUR

confession if most of us do not even know what it says.”

The Belgic What?
David A. Kloosterman

“The problem with Calvinism is not that it has been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.”

A Crisis: “Commercial” Calvinism
John D. Teague

September 1988

“True unity is only by discipline which is focused on who is truly listening to God’s Word. True Christians believe the same things and that makes them one.”

What Is Our Bible?
Robert Grossman

October 1988

“Although churches which have had to break away from unfaithful denominations may have to become independent as a temporary policy, independency is no cure-all

for the abuse of church power, but is exposed to its own variety of abuses.”

Biblical Reformed Churches: Neither Hierarchical nor Independent
Peter De Jong

November 1988

“To vigorously defend the Scriptures is to run the risk of being labeled a ‘Biblicist.’ This is the rhetoric of unbelief. Far better to cultivate a childlike faith, than a perverse skepticism.”

Questioning the Scriptures
Richard Blauw

“Those who have retained their belief in the historical trustworthiness of an inerrant Bible have time and time again lived to see their own position vindicated rather than that of the ‘scientific’ higher critics.”

The No-so-Hard ‘Facts’ of Man’s Evolution
David A. Kloosterman

Silver Anniversary for Boise’s Cloverdale United Reformed Church

Not your prototypical “60’s child,” the founders of Boise’s Cloverdale United Reformed Church nevertheless trace their beginnings to the close of that turbulent decade. Although some might say the 60’s passed Idaho by, five Christian Reformed families who had moved to the area did not, and began meeting in homes for Bible studies.

Classis approval for Sunday worship came in 1976 and services began in Caldwell, Idaho, 25 miles west of Boise closer to the western edge of

the “Treasure Valley” which encompasses a 50-mile irrigated agricultural area bordered by the Boise National Forest on the northeast and the Owyhee Mountains to the southeast. Within a year, the CRC’s Home Missions Board adopted Boise as a field. Pastor Don Lagerwey was installed in February of 1978 and led the first worship service for ten families. By December the church had 12 member families and six nonmember families.

The “Cloverdale” name came about

in April, 1979 when 4.8 acres on rural Cloverdale Road was purchased with the help of Home Missions. The purchase included a parsonage. Elders and deacons were elected in November of 1979 and services continued in school gyms and a rented church building. 1981 brought the construction of the present church and the first Summer Workshop Missions Team.

Pastor Lagerwey accepted a call to Redding, California in April of 1982. After nearly a year of interim pastorship, Reverend Peter Vosteen arrived and was installed in March 1983. Pastor Vosteen initiated a period of reorganization and focused the



congregation on evangelism and church growth. Many contacts were made and the church was blessed with rapid growth, adding the east education wing in the spring of 1984. In 1985 Pastor Vosteen also began a radio ministry outreach.

Mr. Jim Stastny was hired as Assistant Pastor during this time of growth. Soon, however, the generally depressed local economy began to take families out of the area and the position was dissolved in September of 1987. Two years later, Pastor Vosteen accepted a call to serve the CRC congregation in Lynnwood, Washington.

After two years of prayer and perseverance, the congregation of forty five families extended a call to Calvin Theological graduate, Reverend Ed Marcusse. Pastor Marcusse, his wife Denise, and their four children came to us from Grand Rapids, Michigan in September 1991. The Lord continued to bring growth to our church and in summer, 1994, the north education wing was added. We can clearly trace God's hand upon us in the way He has guided us through the years.

In November of 1996 our church congregation (now 68 families) voted to leave the Christian Reformed denomination because of on-going theological disagreements. This decision made it necessary to repay the Home Missions loan, which financed our beginning. A special offering was taken in December 1996 raising the needed \$152,180.00 - Praise the Lord! After much discussion and prayer our church voted to join the United Reformed Church. A mortgage burning ceremony was held following a congregational meeting in 1997.

In July of 1998, Pastor Marcusse accepted a call to Bethel URC in Calgary, Alberta. In August 1999, after a year of interim pastors, the congregation called Rev. Daryl Kats. His wife Suzi and their two children came to us from Beaverdam CRC in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Cloverdale United Reformed Church currently enjoys a membership of approximately 90 families as we give God all the glory for a providentially blessed 25 years.

Looking Out and About

- Rev. Rand Lankheet who has served as the pastor of the Ontario United Reformed Church, Ontario, California for the past fifteen years was installed on August 5 as the pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church (URC), Toronto, Ontario. Participating in the installation service were Rev. Ronald Schreuers, Pastor of the First United Reformed Church, Chino, California; Rev. Ray Sikkema, Pastor Emeritus of the United Reformed Churches and Rev. Eric Pennings, Missionary to South Asians in Toronto and an associate pastor of the Covenant Church.

- Mr. David Klumpenhower, a recent graduate of Mid America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, Indiana has accepted the call extended to him by the United Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan.

- On Tuesday, August 3 a group of ten young people, members of United Reformed Churches in the

Western Michigan area, left for Trinidad to work with Rev. Steve McGee for two weeks. The first week of service was devoted to preparations for Vacation Bible School and making contacts in the community. The second week was spent conducting the Vacation Bible School.

- On August 3, Classis Michigan met in special session to complete the candidacy examination of Mr. Matthew Nuiver. At the conclusion of the examination the delegates to Classis concurred with the consistory of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan in declaring Mr. Nuiver a candidate for a call in the United Reformed Churches.

- On Sunday, August 1, Dr. Bastiaan Van Elderen who served for many years as Professor of New Testament Studies at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan died at the age of 79. Dr. Van Elderen was noted for his archeological work in the Middle East.

- The week of July 26 six hundred twenty young people and their leaders gathered on the campus of Biola University in LaMirada, California for the annual Reformed Youth Services Convention. Rev. Phil Grotenhuis, Pastor of the Springfield, Missouri United Reformed Church and Rev. Jason Tuinstra, Pastor of the Community United Reformed Church of Schereville, Indiana were the principal speakers. A number of workshops with leaders from various parts of the country were also offered.

(continued on page 24)

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
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Grandville, MI 49418
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THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD

By the late Rev. Henry Vander Kam

This 16 lesson study guide includes discussions on all of the more well-known and well-loved parables told by our Lord, such as “The Parable of the Sower,” “The Wise and Foolish Virgins,” and “The Prodigal Son;” and it also includes discussions on some of our Lord’s parables which are perhaps not so well-known and not so well understood, such as “The Parable of the Seed Growing in Secret,” “The Unrighteous Steward,” and “The Unclean Spirit.”

The introductory lesson of this study is, in essence, a primer on Reformed hermeneutics, how the parables can be properly interpreted and applied to our day and age. This lesson itself is worth the cost of the book.

The Parables of Our Lord would make an excellent study guide for any age group in the church, from high school on up, who seeks to better understand the main point of these masterful stories told by our Lord.

(Looking Out and About, cont.)

• On August 15, The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church held a joint service of worship at Grove City College, Pennsylvania. Dr. Carl Bogue of Akron, Ohio spoke on “What Really Unites Us”.

• With thankfulness to God the Hope Reformed Church of Pierre, South Dakota celebrated their 40th Anniversary with special worship services on Sunday, September 26, 2004. Guest speakers for the day were include Rev. Robert Grossman and Rev. Herman Van Stedum.

• Mr. Bill Konynenbelt is the new Stated Clerk for the URCNA. He can reached in one of the following ways:

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