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The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



♦ A Fruit of the Spirit ♦ What is Reformed Worship (VI) ♦ The Atonement and Jehovah's Witnesses ♦ Looking Out and About ♦ Bible Studies on Joseph & Judah
♦ Suffering on the Journey ♦ Discovering God in Suffering ♦ Looking Above: The Measuring of the Temple ♦ Revelation ♦ Celebrating the Life of the Dead

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"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, "The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon." (Judges 7:20).

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A Fruit of the Spirit

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20)

Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday in both Canada and the United States. Canada celebrates the holiday in October as the crops are coming out of the field; the United States celebrates in November after the crops have been harvested. Both nations are exhorted to give thanks to God for the many blessings and mercies shown to us by the Almighty God. As nations, we have been very prosperous, and year after year we have reason to give thanks. Even though we squander our blessings and show ourselves to be unworthy, still God continues to grant us His favor.

Isn't it interesting that we need to be exhorted to give thanks? By our very nature we are ungrateful to God. We would consider it an insult if a friend would be ungrateful for favors we have shown to him. Newspaper advice columns constantly print letters of people who are upset because someone forgot to send them a "Thank You" card for some gift they gave at a shower, wedding, or the like. It is almost as if the reason for giving the gift was so that the giver could be recognized in some way. Yet, we forget the numberless benefits and continuous blessings that we receive from God.

We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit if we truly want to know how to give thanks to God. That

is what Paul teaches in Ephesians 5. He exhorts us not to get drunk on wine but to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Being filled with the Holy Spirit reveals itself through the singing of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and giving thanks always. The Revised Standard Version of the Scriptures translated the Greek: "by making a melody in your heart to the Lord." What a wonderful phrase that is! Our hearts ought to sing in joy for the glad assurance we have that every good and perfect gift comes from the hand of our heavenly Father. Such gratitude can only be taught by the Holy Spirit and is evidence of the Spirit within us. Our giving thanks is the soul's expression of thankfulness to God for favors received. It is the heart's echo of what God has accomplished for us.

The Working of the Spirit

In order to give thanks properly, a person must realize that he has been blessed by God. Many people do not recognize the works of God. They see only the laws of science and nature. They are unable to recognize that all we receive in this life is a gift from God. Those who are blind to the material gifts from God certainly will not see the spiritual gifts He has provided. They cannot see the love of God.

It should be different for those who acknowledge the existence of the Triune God. They should readily acknowledge the physical and spiritual gifts received from God. Even so, many Christians take for granted many of the blessings that come to us from the Fatherly hand of the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. It becomes necessary for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to a whole new way of understanding. Only through Him can we realize what God has done for us. The Holy Spirit must teach us that every good gift comes to us from God.

It is not enough for us to realize that we are blessed. If we are truly thankful, we must see the blessings as gifts from God's grace. In order to give thanks in the right way, we must recognize how unworthy we are to receive any blessing from God. Because of our sin, we have given up every right to any gift that God would give us.

A person who works hard and receives wages for his labor does not need to give thanks to his boss for those wages. He has a right to them. He has worked for them and he has earned them. However, when someone gives you something upon which you have no claim—something to which you have given up your right by your own misdeeds and foolishness—and it is out of grace that you receive this gift, for this you must be thankful! That requires a humble heart. We need to be able to ask "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?" (Psalm 116:12).

The Holy Spirit must lead us to a realization of our unworthiness and how we have been blessed in spite of our unworthiness. He then teaches us how to be thankful as we fully commit ourselves to God.

True Gratitude Always

In the United States, the president traditionally exhorts the nation to set aside the fourth Thursday of November as a day of giving thanks publicly to God. Citizens are encouraged to attend the “church, synagogue, or mosque of their choice” to make such expression.

True gratitude, however, is not just giving thanksgiving because we have been exhorted to do so one day out of the year. True gratitude, according to Paul, is giving thanks always. Our whole lives must reflect a thankful heart. God demands of us a life devoted to Him in which we are always thankful to Him for His benefits to us.

It really can not be any other way. We always have a reason to be thankful. As a child of God there is never a moment in your life that there is not something for which to be thankful. Certainly, life can be cruel and unfair. Each one of us has trials and temptations. We go through sicknesses and heartaches. Yet, we have the glad assurance that our God will never desert us.

If you have placed your trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, where His blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins, then God says, “Be anxious in nothing, for

this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6). Because of Christ, neither life nor death, angels nor demons, the present nor the future can separate you from the love of God. No matter what you are experiencing in this life, you have that promise from God. You have His love because of Christ. That certainly is something for which you can be thankful!

In the Name of Jesus

At the close of this life, when we come to heaven’s door, the Christian will have opportunity to thank God for all of His dealings with him. We will see that we have not suffered one pang too many; nor have we been required to perform one duty too many. All our affliction was nothing compared to the mercy God has shown us. Every hurt was nothing compared to the love that Jesus Christ has shown to those who believe in Him, who, because of His love, faced more suffering than we could ever begin to imagine. In fact, He suffered more than we could ever have endured as He faced the wrath of God for our sin.

Too often in exhortations that we receive to give thanks, the name of Jesus is missing. While it may be politically correct to encourage people to express their thanksgiving at their church, synagogue, or mosque, it is only those who know Jesus Christ that can give true thanks to God. Through Him we are drawn into the presence of the most high, sovereign, all powerful God. Through Jesus we may call this great majestic God, our Father.

Surely, God will not accept the thanksgiving of any who come to Him through any means other than His Son.

Regardless of what month you celebrate the holiday of Thanksgiving, let there be a real day of thanksgiving in your heart. Make it a day in which you give thanks to your Father in heaven in the name of Jesus Christ. Give praise to Him for the benefits and blessings He has provided for you day after day. And more, give thanks to Him for the precious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, who poured Himself out for our salvation.

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What is Reformed Worship? (VI)

It is Joyful

With all the talk of reverence in Reformed worship, it makes it seem as though our worship is somber. This is how those new to a Reformed worship service perceive what is happening. Is our worship somber, that is, lifeless? The answer is no. Is our worship sober, that is, serious? The answer is yes. Being in the presence of the Triune God causes a sober realization of who we are, who He is, and what we are to do in response to this meeting. This is why Hebrews 12:28–29 is so important to our consideration of worship: “Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

Yet this does not mean worship is boring, cold, and stale. The Psalmist expresses that it cannot be, saying,

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Ps. 100:1–3).

In his treatise, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, John Calvin addressed this issue when he wrote,

...we do exhort men to worship God neither in a frigid nor a careless manner; and

while we point out the mode, we neither lose sight of the end, nor omit any thing which bears upon the point. We proclaim the glory of God in terms far loftier than it was wont to be proclaimed before, and we earnestly labor to make the perfections in which His glory shines better and better known. His benefits towards ourselves we extol as eloquently as we can, while we call upon others to reverence His Majesty, render due homage to His greatness, feel due gratitude for His mercies, and unite in showing forth His praise.

So what about the human emotion of joy? In this article we want to tackle this question in order to communicate to those who come to our churches from non-Reformed backgrounds so that they will understand that our worship is joyful, although it may not be what they think joy is.

Speaking of Reverence and Joy Biblically

Culturally speaking, joy has been turned into upbeat, happy feelings about God. The “joy of the Lord” has even been equated with uncontrolled “holy laughter,” as was the teaching of the so-called “Toronto Blessing” and “Pensacola Revival” in recent years. Yet, the joy of the Lord is not merely an emotional feeling of happiness, but a delight in

the Lord’s grace and goodness. Timothy Keller, a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, explains this, saying,

Psalm 130:3–4 is a famous text that proves the “positive” content in the biblical term “fear of the Lord.” Here the psalmist says, essentially, “I fear you because of your forgiveness.” This means that “the fear of God” contains joyful amazement as well as humble and sobering awe.

As New Covenant Christians, we assemble corporately on the “Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10) in joyful amazement that He would cast a pitying eye on such a people as us. We gather in order to express the biblical response to such grace and mercy. That heartfelt response is summarized best by the beautiful words of the Psalmist, who says that in worship we are to “rejoice with trembling” (Ps. 2:11). This is the paradigmatic text for the attitude of believers in worship.

In worship, reverence (fear/trembling) and exuberance (rejoice) are mingled together; as the old songbook, *The Psalter*, says, “Mingle trembling with your mirth.” It is that “childlike reverence for and trust” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 120) in God our Father that we have because of the work of Christ and the Spirit that causes the sense of transcendence, mystery, and wonder for who the Lord is and what He has done for us. “You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!” (Psalm 135:20 cf. 22:23)

Our subjective emotions must be rooted in the objective work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Objectivity and Subjectivity in Worship

When we speak of joy and celebration in worship, we must be careful to do so biblically. Joy can never be associated with unbridled emotions or with Pentecostalism. Excitement is not joy. Joy is an attitude, a quality of the heart. To be joyful is to be grateful for the Lord's deliverance of us from our guilt. This is a point we need to stress. Joyful worship will only be cultivated and expressed when people are deeply and profoundly impressed with their sin and misery.

Scripture roots joy and reverence in the knowledge of the mighty deeds of the LORD. Our subjective emotions must be rooted in the objective work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the objectivity of the Word and work of the Lord must not drown out subjective emotions, feelings, and experience.

Since joy is the subjective response to the objective works of God, it is something that cannot be mechanically produced if it is to be pleasing to God. This is in contrast to much of contemporary Christian worship in which worship leaders manufacture emotion in order to give people a sense of connection with God—all the while keeping them entertained. Joy is not manufactured, but is cultivated. It is something that takes concentration and resolve, as it is very easy to get swept up in the flow of the liturgy and worship mindlessly. When this happens, there will be no joy.

In describing our response to the Lord in worship, W. Robert Godfrey speaks of both joy and reverence in worship in these words:

Today these two responses, joy and reverence, are frequently set in opposition to one another. One kind of worship is called joyful, uplifting, and exuberant, while another kind is called reverent, sedate, respectful. However, in the Scriptures joy and reverence are not antithetical but always complementary. Worship can be joyfully reverent and reverently joyful. Joy and reverence should always be united in our worship... This combination of joy and awe may not always be easy to achieve, but it must be our goal... [R]everence does not always mean quiet, and joy does not always mean noise. Joy and reverence are first of all attitudes of the heart for which we seek appropriate expressions in worship.

Joy is also an eschatological reality because it is grounded in the once for all work of Christ, whose sacrifice ushered in the last days and the age of the Spirit: "But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

The deep emotion of joy expressed in the Psalter, rich as it is, was only

a semi-realized joy. Those who sang in the Old Covenant only sang joyfully of that for which they longed. In Christ, we have the fulfillment of all the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:20). This means that we ought to be more passionate and more joyful than the Old Testament saints who worshiped so exuberantly, yet only with the types and shadows to fuel their subjective responses. As New Covenant Christians our emotions ought to be even more palpable because of the fact that we stand on this side of the empty tomb and we have been lifted to Christ's right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 2). "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28).

Some Ways of Manifesting Joy

Realizing that joy in worship is a subjective topic, and that God has made us all different in His image (Gen. 1:26), reflecting corporately His image and likeness (Eph. 4:24), I will attempt to lay out a few ways of manifesting joy when we assemble as the church of the Lord.

The first way of manifesting joy is *coming to worship with a sense of purpose*. We come not only to give the Lord the glory due His name (Psalm 29) in serving Him, but most especially to receive His service to us of grace and mercy in the preaching of His Word and *celebration* of His sacraments. We come with this sense of purpose because we know in holy worship alone Christ Himself bends a branch of the Tree of Life into time so that we can receive a foretaste of heaven now.

Another way of manifesting joy is

coming to worship to fellowship with your fellow brothers and sisters. A sense of belonging to the community of faith is what the Psalmist expressed when he said, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” (Ps. 122:1). When we come and when we go to the house of the Lord, we ought to be moved to talking with our brothers and sisters, laughing with them, and manifesting our united joy. We need to cultivate a lively and robust fellowship with one another as well as with those who visit us and walk through our doors week by week.

Third, joy should be manifest though *singing loudly*. We need to lift up our voices in praise. Notice how Psalm 32:11 says, “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and *shout* for joy, all you upright in heart.” The context of this command is telling: it comes after the Psalmist has confessed his sins and received absolution from the LORD. This is why the bulk of singing in Reformed worship comes after the reading of the Law, confession of sins, and declaration of pardon. It is because we have something profound to sing about. Our sins have been forgiven!

Fourth, joy is manifest in *singing from the heart*. The “heart” is a biblical term for our innermost self, what we sometimes call “the depths of our soul.” Paul calls us to be wise in these evil days, shunning drunkenness for being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:15–18). Then in Ephesians 5:19 Paul explains what this looks like: “Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord *with all your*

heart.” To be filled with the Spirit is to edify one another by means of song—and sing with all of our heart, that is, all that we are. Paul also says in Colossians 3:16 that we are to sing “with thankfulness *in your hearts*.”

Finally, another way of manifesting joy in worship is in the *lifting up of hands in prayer and praise*. The Bible often reveals the postures in which prayer is offered and the lifting up of hands is one such posture.

The raising of hands is not to be falsely identified as a Charismatic or Pentecostal idiosyncrasy, but a biblical posture. In the same way that we are to be reverent in silence, bowing our heads, standing in the presence of God, and even kneeling, so too the raising of “holy hands” in prayer is an outward manifestation of joy (1 Tim. 2:8). While it must be acknowledged that this was a cultural posture of prayer, which remains to this day in the Middle East, this does not negate the fact that this posture is also a universal posture. For example, the universal posture of raising of hands is even understood in our culture when a little child raises a hand to show that he/she is petitioning up to a parent or teacher.

We see this posture throughout Scripture: Moses stretched out his hands in interceding for Pharaoh (Ex. 9:29); Solomon did so in praying a prayer of adoration at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings

8:22); the Israelite congregation raised their hands and shouted “Amen and Amen” when the law was read (Neh. 8:6); and the people called upon the priests in the Temple to raise their hands to the LORD in intercession as well as benediction (Ps. 134:2).

What is the meaning of raising the hands? We may find an answer in the instructive words of Lamentations 2:19. After calling the people to “cry out” and “pour out” their hearts to the LORD, Jeremiah says, “Lift your hands to him.” The lifting of hands is an outward expression of the heart, of crying out to God (Cf. Lam. 3:41; Ps. 28:2, 63:4, 77:2, 143:6). It is a physical way we reach out to God in our time of need. Again, think of the illustration of the little child that lifts a hand in the direction of a parent or teacher. As well, it is a visible way we call upon “Our Father *who art in heaven*.”

The lifting of hands is associated with the fact that the posture of the body is a part of the acts done in worship. For example, if we kneel or stand, it is because we recognized that we were in the presence of our holy King and want to express reverence. It is fitting, then, for us to use this posture as a way of expressing our reliance and joy in the Lord. Reformed ministers used to raise their hands when they prayed. Some still do. It is also fitting for the people of God to show their reliance upon the Lord and joy-

In holy worship Christ bends a branch of the Tree of Life into time so that we can receive a foretaste of heaven now.

fully raise their hands as well (maybe it will keep you awake!) in suitable places such as the singing of doxologies that do not require the use of a hymnal.

In whatever manner we as Reformed people respond in public worship because of the great things Jesus Christ has done for us, may it be not only with reverence and awe, but gratitude and exuberant joy.

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

The Atonement and Jehovah's Witnesses

Imagine that one quiet afternoon you happen to glance out your window to see two people approaching your door carrying literature in their hands. A few moments later you discover that they are Jehovah's Witnesses. At this point your mind may begin to race: "I know they don't believe as we do, but what is it that they *do* believe? What am I going to say to them? What shall I do?"

In this article, I hope briefly to outline the Jehovah's Witnesses' false view of the atonement. My goal is to help equip God's people to defend the biblical faith over against this sect at one of the most critical points of religion. The atonement is concerned with answering the question, "How can fallen man be reconciled with God?" My contention in this article is that the Jehovah's Witnesses' "ransom" theory of the atonement is inadequate and heretical because it underestimates two significant parts of the question just asked. First, this theory underestimates what was lost by Adam and so it misses the true *need* for the atonement. Second, it underestimates what was gained by Christ and so confuses the true *result* of the atonement.

Jehovah's Witnesses focus much attention on the teaching and philanthropic work of Jesus. They emphasize that "Jesus Christ was a Great Teacher who lived in Palestine...2,000 years ago." In addition to teaching, "Jesus...also extended practical help." Yet they do believe

that Jesus did a greater work than this. "Miraculous healing of the sick...was not the main thrust of Jesus' ministry." They also write that Jesus "willingly gave his perfect human life so that imperfect mankind would have a hope for the future." When asked *how* Jesus' death provides such a hope, the Jehovah's Witnesses answer by outlining a *ransom* theory of the atonement.

In so doing, Jehovah's Witnesses at least begin with a biblical word. The word "ransom" occurs thirteen times in the Old and New Testaments (NKJV). The three New Testament references (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; I Timothy 2:6) clearly refer to the work of Christ in salvation. Indeed, the ransom motif has, historically, been *one* way of understanding the atonement. However, the Jehovah's Witnesses' ransom theory and the traditional ransom theories must be clearly distinguished. Louis Berkhof points out that at least some of the second, third, and fourth century fathers "teach that Christ gave himself as a ransom to Satan for the deliverance of man, and then Himself escaped from the clutches of the devil by the power of his divinity." Of course, Jehovah's Witnesses do not ascribe divinity to Christ, at least not in terms that the orthodox fathers would have used. Here we begin to see the first major problem in their view of the atonement.

A Confused Need for Atonement

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christ could not have been a *divine* ransom. Instead, they suppose that if men are to be saved from death there must be an *even* exchange. A frequently appealed to text is Exodus 21:23. From this text we are told that "God's Law to the ancient nation of Israel required 'soul for soul [or, life for life].' According to this legal principle, the death covering mankind's transgressions would have to be of a value equal to what Adam had lost." Please note that this verse *is* helpful insofar as it outlines God's principle for punitive justice between men. But it is hardly an appropriate text upon which to build a doctrine of atonement. This text teaches how the human perpetrator should be punished. But our question relating to the atonement is, "how may the perpetrator be *acquitted*; how might he be restored?" Any theory of atonement must explain how a loss is recovered, something this verse does not do.

Yet if the primary reason for appealing to this text is simply to highlight God's will regarding legal retaliation, then we must point out how far the Jehovah's Witnesses underestimate the crime for which an equal punishment must be meted. The violated party in Exodus 21:23 is a finite man. The text, therefore, provides a standard to which a man must appeal when his fellow man has harmed him. He was to mete out an equivalent punishment. But regarding the need for man's atonement the violated party is the infinite Jehovah God (Psalm 51:4).

As one digs deeper into the Jehovah's Witnesses' literature, it becomes clear that their emphasis in the atonement is really not on a penal satisfaction at all. Their real emphasis is on the perpetrator and particularly what *he has lost*. Framing the discussion in this way the Jehovah's Witnesses demand that the ransom must be a man.

"Jesus, no more and no less than a perfect human, became a ransom that compen-

This man-centered view of atonement focuses on the sinner but does not emphasize the nature of his sin.

sated exactly for what Adam lost—the right to perfect human life on earth. So Jesus could rightly be called "the last Adam" by the apostle Paul, who said in the same context: "Just as in Adam all are dying, so also in the Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). The perfect human life of Jesus was the "corresponding ransom" required by divine justice—no more, no less. A basic principle even of human justice is that the price paid should fit the wrong committed." If Jesus, however, were part of a Godhead, the ransom price would have been infinitely

higher than what God's own Law required (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-21). It was only a perfect human, Adam, who sinned in Eden, not God. So the ransom, to be truly in line with God's justice, had to be strictly an equivalent—a perfect human, "the last Adam." Thus, when God sent Jesus to earth as the ransom, he made Jesus to be what would satisfy justice, not an incarnation, not a god-man, but a perfect man, "lower than angels."

This is a strictly man-centered view of atonement. It focuses on what man has lost (perfection) and how it may be regained. It focuses on the sinner but doesn't emphasize the *nature* of his sin. It is thus understandable why the principle of equality *seems* reasonable in this system. But the Bible teaches that the atonement is at least as concerned with the satisfaction of Jehovah's justified anger toward sinners.

Louis Berkhof explains that the atonement is necessary not only to recover what fallen man has lost but also, indeed primarily, to deal with the guilt of man's sin. Berkhof rightly says that one's "conception of sin will have a determining influence on his view of the redemptive work of God in Christ." The Bible presents sin as not only "an imperfection in human life, but a positive transgression of the law of God which renders man liable to punishment." The atonement, then, must make provisions not only to restore what man had lost but also to appease the eternal anger of God.

The atonement must make provisions not only to restore what man had lost but also to appease the eternal anger of God.

This latter element is strikingly absent from the Jehovah's Witnesses' view of salvation.

Their view is outlined in a tract entitled "How Jesus Can Change your Life." This tract tells us that, "As a result of this...first human sin, the offspring of Adam and Eve inherited the unwelcome legacy of death. (Romans 5:12) In order to give mankind real life, sin and death must be done away with." How does this resolution come about? Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that God traded human life for human life. Notice their further explanation:

...the Creator of mankind has the means to bring obedient humans to perfection so that they can live forever. In the Bible this provision is called the ransom. The first human couple sold themselves and their offspring into slavery to sin and death. They traded life as perfect humans obedient to God for life independent of God, making their own decisions as to what is right and what is wrong. To buy back perfect human life, a price had to be paid that was equivalent to the perfect human life that our first parents forfeited. Having inherited imperfection, humans were not qualified to provide that price (Psalm 49:7).

So Jehovah God stepped in to help. He transferred the perfect life of his only-begotten Son to the womb of a virgin, who gave birth to Jesus...With the existence of a perfect human life, the price to redeem mankind from sin and death became available.

In this entire plan no reference is made to the nature of this sin as being committed against an infinite God or to the infinite anger against mankind that resulted. The Jehovah's Witnesses' emphasis on the equality of the ransom is incapable of dealing with the Bible's plain teaching on the nature of sin. In theory, a perfect man might be able to take the place of another, but he cannot deal with the infinite sin. The life of (a strictly human) Jesus could only pay the ransom for one person, for Adam himself. Full atonement for all of the elect can only be made by an infinite being.

Confused Result of Atonement

This ransom theory demonstrates its bankruptcy not only through its misunderstanding of what was lost in Adam—peace with God; but also of what was gained in Christ—full and eternal salvation. As we have seen, this theory supposes that to gain back what Adam lost would require an identical second Adam. But the Bible reveals the shallowness of this supposition. The second Adam did not merely gain back

what Adam lost. Paul says so twice in Romans 5: "But the free gift is not like the offense" (vs. 15) and "the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned" (vs. 16). Verse seventeen likewise says, "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, *much more* those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (emphasis added). John Calvin, commenting on this text, states what ought to be obvious: "There is a greater measure of grace procured by Christ, than of condemnation introduced by the first man." Calvin goes on to say that "Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to destroy."

On this note, the Jehovah's Witnesses are left in a quandary. On the one hand, if they agree with Calvin and with Paul, they must admit that Jesus accomplishes *more* than he should be able to given their view of who he is. Remember, they insist that he is of equal personage to the first Adam: "...The Bible calls Jesus 'the last Adam'—a perfect man who could serve as a *corresponding ransom*." Jesus' life corresponded to that of "the first man Adam," whom God created as a perfect human (1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6).

Yet, by their own (occasional) admission, his atonement (ransom) *does indeed* put men and women in a more privileged position than the first Adam (which it surely does). According to *Watchtower*:

Adam's death had no value; he deserved to die for his sin. Jesus' death, however, had great value because he died in a sinless state. Jehovah God could accept the value of

Jesus' perfect life as a ransom for obedient descendants of sinful Adam. And *the value of Jesus' sacrifice does not stop at paying for our past sins*. If it did, we would have no future. Being conceived in sin, we are bound to err again. (Psalm 51:5) How grateful we can be that Jesus' death makes provision for us to gain the perfection that Jehovah originally intended for the offspring of Adam and Eve!

Adam can be likened to a father who died and left us in such deep financial debt (sin) that there is no possible way for us to get out of debt. On the other hand, Jesus is like a good father who died and left us a rich inheritance that not only frees us from the enormous debt that Adam burdened us with *but also provides enough for us to live on eternally. Jesus' death is not simply a cancellation of past sins; it is also a wonderful provision for our future.*

Surely they prove too much here! If Jesus' death not only pays for past sins but also provides for a future eternal life, then he has put us in a more privileged position than perfect Adam could have. But, of course, someone equal to Adam cannot accomplish more than Adam.

On the other hand, if all Jesus' death does is put fallen humanity back in the same position as pre-fall Adam, then he has not saved. He has merely given humanity the opportunity obediently to earn their own salvation; a conclusion contrary not only to Romans 5, but to all of Scripture.

In the final analysis this is really all Jesus can do according to this sect. In fact, this is what the *Watchtower* actually teaches. Jehovah's Witnesses' teach that Christ was offered as a ransom for those who "love God and have faith in him." "Christ died for the obedient," they say. But in the words of their own Bible we learn: "But God recommends his own love to us in that, *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8; NWT). We are told to believe that Christ traded his human life forever for the human lives of those who were obedient to Jehovah. This is not the biblical atonement.

In the end, we ought not be surprised by the false view of the atonement suggested by the Jehovah's Witnesses. The lower one's view of Christ is, the lower one's view of man's sin will be. Whenever Christ is diminished, man is exalted. As a result, man's need for Christ will also be diminished. This is evident in the response to Jesus to which we are called. We are told we must have "accurate knowledge about him," or to "[get] to know him," or "become better acquainted with Jesus Christ."

This feeble call to faith in Christ will be dramatically altered when the true need for an atonement and the true result of the atonement in Christ are understood. The atonement indeed involves a transaction. But the transaction did not involve a mere perfect man. The Psalmist says, "God himself will redeem my soul from the hand of Sheol" (NWT). God did not do this by

trading in one "creature" for another. Rather, as Paul says, God purchased his church "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28) This reality cannot be explained by a mistranslation (see the NWT) but by the mystery of God in flesh.

Imagine the surprise your visitors would experience if next time you greeted them this way. "Hi, I'm glad you came today. With God's help I would like to help you understand how your view of the atonement is biblically unacceptable. First of all, you miss the eternal character of each of our sins. Only the eternal Christ can atone for sins against an eternal God. Second, you miss the perfect and eternal nature of the satisfaction of Christ's death. Christ did not die to give us all a second chance but to purchase eternal life for his elect. Only an eternal Christ can purchase eternal salvation for sinners. This is the picture of the biblical atonement in Christ. Will you repent of your sins and submit yourself to this perfect God and perfect man Jesus Christ?" God willing, maybe next time they will be the ones asking, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

Mr. Bill Boekestein is a graduate of the Puritan Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is a candidate for the Ministry in the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Someone equal to Adam cannot accomplish more than Adam.

Looking Out and About

- Rev. David Jolman, who has served the Hanley Christian Reformed Church of Grandville, Michigan since his ordination in 2001, has accepted the call to be the pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

- Mr. Don Overbeek, a recent graduate of Puritan Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has accepted the call extended to him by the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Church of Burgessville, Ontario to serve in Bradford, Ontario.

- Mr. Nicholas Alons, a graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, has begun his interim service at the newly established United Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

- Rev. Al Bezuyen of the St. Cathrines United Reformed Church has declined the call to the Sanborn United Reformed Church in Iowa.

- The Pine Creek Christian Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, which was organized in 1895, held its last service in August 2007. The pastor, Rev. Jeff Voorhees, has been declared available for call and is heartily recommended to the churches by the former Consistory of Pine Creek.

- Mr. Robert Den Dulk, whose long career with Westminster Theological Seminary began with his graduation from that school in 1964, died on August 2, 2007. Dr. den Dulk has served as president of

Westminster Seminary, Escondido from 1989-1994. The funeral service was held on August 6, 2007 at the Trinity Christian Reformed Church of Sparta, Michigan. A memorial service was also held at the United Reformed Church of Escondido, California on August 9.

- The Board of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, met on September 20 and 21, 2007. One of the main items on the agenda was the reappointment interview held with Mr. Keith LeMahieu. Mr. LeMahieu's appointment as Director of Development was extended for four years. The Board also took note of the twenty-fifty anniversary of the ordination of Dr. Cornel Venema, president of the Seminary.

- Redeemer University College in Ontario, Canada celebrated 25 years of existence in September of 2007. On Saturday, September 29, 2007, the college hosted a Celebration Service acknowledging God's provision through the years. Redeemer College has grown to 2,700 alumni, 850 students, and 45 full time faculty.

- The Free Reformed Youth retreat was held at Pierce Williams United Church Christian Centre near St. Thomas, Ontario from August 3 to August 6. The ninety-six young people that attended heard Rev. James Greendyk of the Emmanuel FRC in Abbotsford, British Columbia and Rev. Neil Pronk, Pastor Emeritus of the Grace FRC in Brantford,

Ontario, speak on the theme, "In the World, but Not of the World."

- LOGOS 2007, sponsored by Reformed Youth Services, saw its largest ever attendance in June 13-16 in Elgin, Illinois. Eighty-two single young adults from eleven states came to hear Dr. Nelson Kloosterman of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Rev. Larry Johnson of the Doon, Iowa United Reformed Church, Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen of the Bethel URC in Jenison, Michigan, and Rev. Talman Wagenmaker of the Waupun, Wisconsin URC speak on topics related to a Christian Worldview.

- The Dutton United Reformed Church announces that Mr. Bill Boekestein has passed his candidacy exam and is eligible for call. Mr. Boekestein is a graduate of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

- The 14th Annual Reformation Rally hosted at the Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, will be held on October 26, 2007. Dr. Joel Beeke, President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homeletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary is expected to speak on "Is the Reformed Faith Evangelistic?"

- On Wednesday, October 31, 2007, Rev. Daniel Hyde, Pastor of the Oceanside URC in Oceanside, California, will speak at the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia. His topic will be: "Being a Pentecost Church in an Age of Pentecostalism."

Bible Studies on Joseph and Judah

Lesson 5: Joseph is Tested in Egypt

Read Genesis 39

Introduction

Genesis 38 was a necessary chapter that fits perfectly in the story of Jacob's family. Joseph is chosen by God for some special purpose (to rule?), but his brothers sell him to merchants on the way to Egypt (Gen. 37). Then Judah moves away from his own family and settles in Canaan (in more ways than one). Canaanite culture and worldviews threaten to swallow up Judah (and perhaps the rest of the family). Even Judah's family line is threatened until Tamar deceives her father-in-law in order to secure a child and thus raise up seed (and a name). Still, something must happen to move Jacob's family away from Canaan lest the church of God, Jacob's family, be lost among Canaanites. God has a great plan in mind, and Joseph will be the agent in that plan.

The LORD blesses Joseph in Potiphar's house (39:1-6)

The text somewhat abruptly switches back to the Joseph story, basically picking up where it had left off at the end of chapter 37. Joseph is sold to an Egyptian official named Potiphar. He is described as "the captain of the guard," which suggests that Potiphar headed the security teams that surrounded the Pharaoh, a kind of leader of the Egyptian "secret service." Some have wondered whether there were Asiatics who were temporarily in charge of

Egypt at this time, thus allowing Joseph to be well received in Egypt. However, the name "Potiphar" is Egyptian, and an Egyptian Pharaoh would not have employed a non-Egyptian to be his chief bodyguard.

In any case, there is a significant statement made in verse 2, and its truth is repeated in this chapter several times. "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered." See verses 3, 21, and 23. Joseph is in the house of Potiphar at first, and then later he is in prison. But no matter where he is in the events of this chapter, the covenant God is with Joseph with a noticeable result: prosperity and blessing are experienced. This is a very important notice, because in some versions of telling this story, the accent or emphasis falls on "how Joseph resisted temptation." The suggestion is that Joseph's story in Genesis 39 is told to present first of all a model to us of "good Christian behavior." And the application would then be, "Go, and do likewise." While it is true that we certainly commend Joseph's response to his several situations, in Potiphar's home and later on in prison, the key to Joseph's "success" is the very presence of the covenant-making and

covenant-keeping God. The Name of God used here is the one that will later be given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). That same God is not stranded in Canaan with Jacob's family, but He chooses in His grace to be with Joseph through everything. "The LORD was with Joseph"... and that will make all the difference!

What's more, the Lord's blessing upon Joseph is evident to his master Potiphar. While it is too much of a stretch to say that Potiphar becomes a true believer, we can say that the Egyptian official is convinced that the God of Joseph is with this young man, and that is a good thing. Joseph is given grace to hold on to this God, and his response is to take his responsibilities and duties seriously. This leads to promotion for Joseph in the household of Potiphar. Literally, Potiphar puts everything into Joseph's "hand" (see verses 3, 4, 6, 8, 22, 23). Blessings begin to flow into the entire household (verse 5) "because of Joseph." The text says that these blessings could be seen in both the house and in the field. Did the birth rate pick up among Potiphar's servants? Did his fields yield a bumper crop? The text is silent on these matters, and yet we are tantalized to wonder how the blessing of the Lord became physically evident to them.

Furthermore, the providence of

The key to Joseph's "success" is the very presence of the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

God is such that this young, strong Hebrew is not sent out to work in the fields, but he is kept in the house where his abilities are put to work. Potiphar will trust him (much like father Jacob had trusted him) so that he will not be bothered with the details of the household: Joseph is in charge, and he knows what he is doing.

Joseph flees immorality (39:6-20)

Joseph is the son of a very attractive mother, Rachel. While we do not know what Jacob's physical appearance is like, we read in verse 6 that Joseph is both well-built and handsome. (Similar things will be said about David and Esther later on.) Keep in mind that he is still a young man, and he is all alone in terms of having no family around to help him, support him, or protect him. Even Daniel had his three friends in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, but Joseph is isolated in the sense that he has no community of like-minded believers around him.

He is thus prey to abuse by those in authority over him, and he catches the eye of his master's wife. The story reads like a modern TV soap opera, but the result is much happier than the silly soap opera. Yet Joseph will not have an easy time of it, and his faith and moral fiber will be sorely tested.

Joseph is a young and attractive man. This catches the eye of Mrs. Potiphar, and she desires an affair with him. "Lie with me!" she orders. This is not a one time incident: verse 10 tells us that her sexual invitations were a daily

The chapter's refrain (verses 2, 3, 21, 23) is so important to keep in mind: "the LORD was with him."

temptation to Joseph. Her lurid enticements were a kind of sexual harassment that was uninvited and unwanted. Scripture includes the speech of Joseph in verses 8-9 in which he lays out the reasons why he will not go to bed with Mrs. Potiphar. First of all, Joseph points out that he is placed in charge of everything in Potiphar's house. Humanly speaking, Joseph is at the top; only Potiphar's wife is off-limits to him. Secondly, and much more importantly, the adulterous affair that she wants with Joseph would be sin against God. Joseph not only knows God's will, he embraces it as his own. Adultery is a "wicked thing" in the eyes of God, and it brings misery to all who practice it.

Joseph's resistance to these enticements is no slight thing. As a servant, he does not have a lot of room to maneuver. It is not the case that he can quit his job and apply elsewhere. Is he going to go to a local court and file a complaint against this woman? Not likely! In a way he is trapped in the situation, and we may well imagine that the power of temptation for a virile young man, a servant no less, would be enormous, almost overwhelming. But, here is where the chapter's refrain (verses 2, 3, 21, 23) is so important to keep in mind: "the LORD was with him."

Potiphar's wife attempts to force

him into adultery, but Joseph flees this immorality. He leaves behind his cloak in her hand. It is his clothing again that becomes important! His special coat, dipped in blood, suggested to Jacob that Joseph was dead. Now, in Mrs. Potiphar's hand, his coat is the evidence, the "smoking gun," to both servants and Potiphar alike that this "Hebrew slave" was not as good and virtuous as he seemed. Joseph is falsely accused, and the wicked woman's story seems believable indeed. When no one was around, this slave took advantage of the situation and tried to rape this poor, defenseless woman! She screamed when he had disrobed and attempted to rape her. Her screams (no tape recording available, of course) had frightened young Joseph to flee. This is her story to the other servants and to her husband.

What is interesting to notice, however, is that Potiphar, while very angry, does not kill Joseph. After all, since Joseph is nothing more than a servant, what rights would he have? And attempted rape against the official's wife? Death, of course! Yet God is with His people, even in the valley where death casts a shadow and where false accusations are made, and that is no different here. The fact that Potiphar does not kill Joseph but instead places him in a place for royal prisoners suggests at least two things: first,

Potiphar must respect the accusation of his wife against Joseph at some level; he must “save face,” both for himself and for her. So he must do something. But second, one wonders if Potiphar does not fully believe his wife’s story, and so in his heart he really has no desire to kill the young man Joseph. Potiphar must do something with him, but he spares his life. The jail for royal prisoners would not be the worst spot at all. God protects His own! Joseph survives another near death experience.

Joseph prospers in prison (39:20-23)

The story of Joseph in prison seems to be a repeat performance of what had happened earlier in Potiphar’s house. Again, “the LORD was with him.” The Spirit of Jesus Christ is so effective in the heart of Joseph that he applies himself and his God-given talents to the work in the prison. God softens the heart of the jail’s warden so that Joseph is assigned responsibility over the other prisoners. Just as Potiphar was so confident in Joseph and his work, the warden now takes the same attitude. Joseph, though accused of attempted rape, is viewed as completely trustworthy by the prison officials. The LORD is not only sanctifying the heart and life of Joseph, He is prospering Joseph’s work in such a way that many others around him notice it.

The thoughtful Christian who reads this story should not respond by saying, “O St. Joseph, pray for us!” That would keep our attention upon man. The good news that the text keeps before us

is that our faithful God the LORD is with Joseph. God is working, even in Egypt, even in events that are sordid, unseemly, and quite unfair. The praise and glory goes to that covenant-keeping God.

He has great things in store for Joseph, his family, indeed for the coming of the Kingdom of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through this family.

Lesson 5: Points to ponder and discuss

1. Daniel and his three friends are taken away as captives to Babylon (see Daniel 1). What are the similarities (as well as differences) between Joseph’s situation and that of Daniel and his three friends?
2. When people are in positions of authority, they have power that belongs to that position or office. What are the dangers of having such power? That is to say, how can power be abused? How are people without power in danger of being abused and mistreated?
3. Is the emphasis in this chapter on what the LORD is doing, or is the emphasis on Joseph’s courage and moral strength? Is Joseph being held up in the text as a “good example?” Why or why not?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Check a Bible encyclopedia about what the city of Corinth was like morally. Have things changed much today? Paul says, “Flee from sexual immorality.” Joseph had to flee physically from Potiphar’s wife. Our bodies and our sexuality are wonderful gifts from God, but how has our society distorted those gifts? Where are the temptations to immorality today, also in our homes and communities?
5. To an unbeliever who reads Joseph’s story, he appears to be a victim of “bad luck.” But Christians know something much better and quite different about this story. Trace how the hand of God has kept guiding the destiny of Joseph, so that in peril of being killed, he instead is preserved and even promoted.
6. Read Psalm 1. This wisdom psalm describes the truly blessed man. It notes the two ways of life that a person can follow and the outcomes for each way (Ps. 1:6). How did Jesus Christ fulfill what this truly blessed Man is? How can this be seen in Joseph in Genesis 39?

Bible Studies on Joseph and Judah

Lesson 6: Joseph Interprets Two Dreams in Prison

Read Genesis 40

Introduction

Joseph escaped death from his brothers when in the pit earlier, and he has escaped death with the false accusation of Potiphar's wife. God's presence has certainly blessed him, and not just with barely escaping death. He had positively prospered in Potiphar's house, and he prospers again in prison. But we could well imagine that this young man wonders what God's wisdom and plan in all these events might be. If God is with him, then the route God has chosen has been a real roller-coaster!

New prisoners placed with Joseph (40:1-5)

This prison was not the worst place to stay. It was for criminals of "upper society," so to speak. What are called the "cupbearer" and "baker" in verse 1 are later called the "chief cupbearer" (verse 9) and "chief baker" (verse 16). When I was growing up and heard this story, the first character was called the (chief) "butler," a word that made me think of an older gentleman who wore a dark coat (with tails), who answered the door, and who spoke with an English accent! In fact, what older translations called the "butler" was, in fact, the cupbearer of the king. This was a very important position. Cupbearers had the responsibility of serving wine or beer to the Pharaoh, ensuring that it was not only safe to drink, but that

it was of the highest quality. Cupbearers in the ancient world often became confidants of the ruler, and if the cupbearer was wise and trustworthy, he frequently provided advice to the monarch.

Bakers were also important officials for the Egyptian rulers. It is likely that he oversaw the preparation of food for the Pharaoh on a daily basis. We must remember that the Egyptians believed that the Pharaoh was a living god, and therefore, he must receive the best and healthiest of foods. Bread was an important element in the Egyptian diet, a staple that was a central part of what Egyptians from all social classes would eat. In some written records from ancient Egypt, there are references to over twenty different kinds of breads and baked goods that Egyptians ate, including pastries and cakes.

Both of these important royal officials offended the Pharaoh in some way, but the text does not tell us what their offenses were. Did he get food poisoning? Bad wine? Burnt toast? Or, was the Pharaoh suspicious of something much more sinister? We do not know. The text keeps us focused on the important matters. Being imprisoned in the royal prison suggests that this was an incarceration to allow the Pharaoh to decide what to do with each man. The prison is only holding them for the time being.

Each man had a dream (verse 5).

Scholars who have studied ancient Egyptian culture and religion tell us that the Egyptians believed that dreams were messages from the gods to tell the dreamer about future events. The ancient gods used dreams as a medium of revelation about what was soon to happen. But without interpretation, the cupbearer and the baker were discouraged.

The cupbearer's dream (40:6-15)

Dreams had proved to be troublesome for Joseph earlier in his life (see Gen. 37). Dreams, in fact, are important in the entire Joseph story. They will typically come in pairs as well. Two dreams in Genesis 37 revealed that Joseph would rule over others, including his own family. Two dreams in Genesis 40 reveal events concerned with "lifting the head" in three days. And Pharaoh will have two dreams later about seven cows and seven heads of grain. God brings double dreams in these stories in order to confirm His revelation to those who are receiving it, whether such people are His own (like Joseph) or whether they are pagans. God speaks to people where they are. And "two or three witnesses" confirm that the message is true.

Joseph notices that the two important prisoners have discouraged looks. When they confess to having had dreams, but lack interpreters, Joseph makes a very important statement in verse 8b: "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams." In other words, interpretations do not come from your pagan magicians or superstitious priests. True revelation comes from God and God alone!

And Joseph sets himself up as being the interpretive “point of contact” between the cupbearer’s and baker’s dreams, on the one hand, and God Himself, on the other hand. Joseph will receive God’s explanation of the dreams, and he will then relay that message. Here in the prison, Joseph is a kind of “prophet” of God.

The first dream uses garden imagery: a vine with three branches produces grapes. The cupbearer in the dream takes these grapes, presses the juice into Pharaoh’s cup, and offers the cup to the Egyptian king.

Joseph knows its meaning: in three days, the cupbearer will be restored to his important position in Pharaoh’s court. Good news for the cupbearer: release from prison in three days! But Joseph is not done talking. He includes a protestation of his innocence. He recalls his earlier kidnapping (“forcibly carried off”) and his more recent arrest on false charges. He once was in a “pit” before being sold as a slave, and now he is a “pit” again! Prison is no picnic; it is a “hole.” He knows that the facts are on his side, and he hopes that the cupbearer will take his case to the “supreme court” of Egypt, to Pharaoh himself.

The chief baker’s dream (40:16-19)

The baker is encouraged by Joseph’s explanation of the cupbearer’s dream. But he will not hear a good explanation. Three baskets on his head represent three days as well. But the bakery items and delicious pastries in the top basket are food for the birds. While the cupbearer’s “head was lifted”

(i.e., restored to office), the baker’s “head will be lifted” as well, but in a different way. The baker will be hanged on a tree, and his body will be eaten by the birds. For an Egyptian, whose burial practices included mummification (as least for important people), such an end to his life would be utterly disgraceful.

Dreams fulfilled, but Joseph forgotten (40:20-23)

The third day comes, a birthday celebration for Pharaoh. It proves to be a restoration day for the chief cupbearer, but it is a day of devastation for the chief baker. Both men

The story of dreams in the royal dungeon is part of a pattern that links us to the other dream stories.

have their heads “lifted up” but in decidedly different fashions. The cupbearer resumes his service to the Egyptian monarch, while the baker is executed by hanging (or, by impaling his body on a sharp pole).

Joseph may have entertained the hope that the cupbearer would take his story to the proper person, and he might soon be released from prison. But the days dragged on. Likely he would have realized in a few weeks that his situation was not going to change soon. Here is a test of faith, a trial of his personal confidence in God and His providential care. We recognize that the

text of Genesis 40 does not reveal to us Joseph’s inner thoughts, but it would be a long two years of prison (see Gen. 41:1). How is it possible for a man to forget the young slave in prison who so accurately interpreted his dream? Was it a matter of racial or social snobbery, that is, royal officials really don’t care for slaves placed in prison? We are not told. But the words are a sad conclusion to the chapter: “The chief cupbearer... forgot him.” It is as if he thinks, “I got my break; too bad for you, Joseph.”

Two dreams... again! Joseph had caught the drift of meaning in the dreams he had when he was 17 years old (Gen. 37), and he will later interpret the two dreams of Pharaoh in Genesis 41. The story of dreams in the royal dungeon is part of a pattern that links us to the other dream stories. The first set of dreams got the young man in trouble with his brothers. The dreams of this chapter speak of life and death, but his interpretation would be forgotten until later. The dreams of Pharaoh would convince the Egyptian ruler that Joseph was the man in touch with God Himself, when he correctly interprets them. In this way, Joseph is a kind of prophet, someone with true knowledge of God and His plans for the future.

God still moves in a mysterious way

Joseph again has shown to people around him—and to us readers—that his confidence in God is met with God granting to him understanding of dreams, the ability to interpret them correctly. There is nothing magical in Joseph’s soul: it is God who gives interpretations to

those He chooses. This is still true today: where God has deposited a record of His will, a written testimony of His heart and mind, we do well to listen and obey. That is found in His Word, the Bible, an inspired text that is necessary, clear, sufficient, and fully authoritative. Those who drink in its message are modern day “prophets” who have the mind of Christ, able to address the questions of our day and age with the will of God.

In Genesis 40 the stage is set for the great developments of Genesis 41. Chapter 40 is pivotal for the career of Joseph in Egypt and for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Even in prison he is successful. Surely God is with him so that he continues to rise toward the top. Consider the following: he is not murdered; he is sold to Potiphar; he is not executed but only imprisoned. Truly God is with him. That fact does not spare him from occasional harsh treatment or temptation. “The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.” Could Joseph see that truth? Can our faith grasp such things still today?

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Lesson 6: Points to ponder and discuss

1. God spoke to the covenant people before the coming of Christ in a variety of ways (Hebr. 1:1,2). Besides dreams, what are some of the other ways that God spoke to His people in Old Testament times? Does He sometimes speak in these ways today?
2. In Jeremiah 23:25-32 the LORD denounces the false prophets who preach their own dreams and prophesy lies. A true prophet should stand in God’s council, because then he hears and knows the true revelation of God (see Jer. 23:16-18, 21-22). How can Christians today know that the preaching they hear is truly God’s Word (see 1 John 4:1-6)?
3. By explaining the two dreams, Joseph is showing the light of God’s Word to these Egyptians. What can we say about Joseph gaining confidence in a role of bearing the light to Egypt, for Israel (later)?
4. Joseph is innocent, a victim of injustice, first from his brothers and then from Potiphar’s wife. How did our Lord respond when He was falsely accused before the Sanhedrin? How should Christians respond today when they become the objects of false accusations, trumped-up charges? How did Paul and Silas respond in Acts 16 when they were arrested? (Note what they say on the morning after the earthquake when the authorities want to release them.)
5. This chapter marks the low point in Joseph’s life: he is imprisoned. Release comes in the next chapter. Describe how Joseph responds to his situation, both in Potiphar’s household and now in prison. Do we ever sense any bitterness in Joseph? His diligence and attention to responsibility is “rewarded” in both situations in what ways? Do believers always see similar results? Is there a kind of Biblical principle at play here? See Luke 16:10-12.
6. What place do honesty and hard work have in the Kingdom of God? Are not unbelievers also honest and hard-working at times? How can we make a greater impact for the coming of God’s Kingdom by how we act, speak, and work in the places of our occupations?

Suffering on the Journey

Believers in Jesus Christ must expect tribulation and suffering in this world. Many of our difficulties are brought on by the mere fact that we must live with the consequences of the transgression of Adam, the “one man” through whom “sin entered into the world, and death through sin.” The guilt of Adam, the representative head of the human race, was imputed to his descendants: “Through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19). Thus, “death spread to all men, because all sinned.” But we should keep in mind an additional truth: the rebellion of Adam was in one sense the actual rebellion of every man and woman who would descend from him by natural generation. When Adam ate of the tree, we all partook of the forbidden fruit, for we were in his loins (cf. Heb. 7:9-10). We must therefore live with the consequences of our evil decision: “By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground” (Gen. 3:19).

Until we return to the dust, we must live with the ongoing process of physical decline in which we slowly and steadily and irresistibly move in a downward direction. “Our outer man is decaying” (2 Cor. 4:16). Paul—like all of us, to one degree or another—knew what it was to get sick. Writing to the Galatians, he reminded them of the past: “You know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time” (Gal. 4:13). He knew what it was to have a physical malady—probably related to his eyes. He reminded

the Galatians of their previous manifestation of love for himself: “If possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me” (Gal. 4:15).

Suffering also comes to us simply because we are the children of God. The Book of Acts documents the miseries experienced by the apostles as a consequence of their preaching. One of the more noteworthy incidents occurred in Lystra on the first missionary journey. Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. He never forgot what happened to him. In his long lists of ordeals recorded in the Corinthian epistles, Paul refers not only to being “beaten times without number,” but he also alludes to what happened in Lystra. His horrific suffering is remembered in the terse declaration: “Once I was stoned” (2 Cor. 11:25). Even after the passing of many years, in his last letter, in the shadow of martyrdom, Paul referred to his “persecutions and sufferings” which happened to him at Lystra (2 Tim. 3:11).

The Renewal of the Inward Man

What is remarkable about Paul is the perspective which he had, even as he wrote about being “afflicted in every way...persecuted...struck down...constantly delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:8-11). In the midst of such incredible suffering, he declared, “We do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:16). He would not give up. He would fight the good fight. He would look to the future with hope. How did he do this? His outward,

material body was declining with every advancing year. He had no reason to believe that there would be any let up in the persecutions he would face in the days to come. What was the basis of his optimism and good cheer?

Paul knew in the first place that the work of God in sanctification would continue to progress in his life in the days to come. There would be a real compensation for his increasing loss of physical stamina: “Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). Even while his physical body went down hill, his immaterial soul increasingly resembled the moral image of Christ, the Son of God. This renewal would go on day after day, week after week, and year after year.

What was true for Paul is true for every person who turns to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:16). As we discipline ourselves to look within the mirror of Scripture, we behold the image of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Mysteriously and supernaturally, we “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” This powerful work of moral renewal is “from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18), but it occurs in connection with our human responsibility to devote ourselves to Scripture, the vehicle which brings the vision of Christ to our hearts. No doubt, many of us, have seen in some of our brethren the reality of the phenomenon described in 2 Corinthians 4:16. Even as their outer man was weakening, the inner man was being renewed. Such grace brings a godly radiance to the

life of the believer. In them, we sometimes think that we see more than a man or a woman. The renewal of sanctification seems to bring into the life of a person the face of an angel (Acts 6:15)! Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he reminded the Galatians that they had received him “as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself” (Gal. 4:14).

The Eternal Weight of Glory

There was a second reason for the optimism of Paul concerning the future. The tribulations that he experienced as a disciple of Christ had a beneficial outcome: “For momentary, light affliction *is producing for us* an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). Here, Paul contrasts the present age and the age which is to come. The afflictions of the present are set against the glory which is to come. While the glory to come is eternal and weighty, the difficulties of the present age are just for a moment and are comparably light. Keep in mind that the afflictions of discipleship are not meritorious. They do not merit the reward of eternal glory. Bearing the cross of discipleship, however, will be followed by glory. If there be affliction, there will be glory. If we will meditate upon the incomparable glory of the coming age, we shall sense that our crushing burdens will bear down with less weight upon us.

Looking at the Unseen

Another thing that enabled Paul to endure the decline of the outward man and the afflictions of persecution was that he had a proper focus. “We look not at the things which

are seen,” he declared, “but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4:18). Perhaps the best commentary on this statement is found in Hebrews 11. It is true that the patriarchs were promised the land of Canaan as their inheritance. Under Joshua and later David, the land that the Lord had promised finally came into the possession of the sons of Israel. But Abraham lived as “an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob” (Heb. 11:9).

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While Abraham moved from place to place in ancient Palestine, he beheld the land pledged to him and his offspring by divine covenant. His ultimate focus though was not upon “the things which are seen.” He was focused upon the things which he could not see. “He was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). In this sense, Paul was no different. He embraced the same outlook, and he even articulated the rationality of such a principle: “For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). Like Paul, we must remember that everything that we see is temporary. On the day of the Lord “the heavens will

pass away” and “the earth will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Out of this eschatological furnace, a new world will come forth refined from all dross and impurity. We shall inherit “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13).

Examining Where We Stand

You and I are on a journey. We are moving toward our final destiny. On which road do you find yourself—on the broad road that leads to destruction, or on the narrow road that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14)? Jesus exhorted us to get on the narrow road in the appropriate place. “Enter through the narrow gate,” he said. The narrow gate is the gate of faith and repentance, the gate of the embrace of Christ and the renunciation of sin.

Like Paul and Abraham before him, we find—as believers in Christ—that grace has placed us on the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). As we journey onward to the city designed and constructed by God, we are called upon by Scripture to assess our spiritual condition. Am I in a healthy spiritual state? This is the question which we must ask ourselves. But how can we assess our spiritual health? A theologian from the patristic church is of great help at this point. Augustine declared, “For a man is never in so good a state as when his whole life is a journey towards the unchangeable life, and his affections are entirely fixed upon that” (*On Christian Doctrine*, 21).

The words of the Bishop of Hippo impinge upon our consciences. As we journey onward, are our affections entirely fixed upon that un-

changeable life that awaits us? May we take heed to the words of John the Apostle: “Do not love the world nor the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). The question of Jesus comes to us who claim to be his disciples: “Do you love me more than these?” May we be able to answer him in the affirmative: “Yes, Lord: you know that I love you” (John 21:15-17).

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Discovering God in Suffering

Luther: A Theologian of the Cross

“God can only be found in suffering and the cross.” Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote these words in 1518 as he was preparing for the Heidelberg Disputation, a discussion of his “new” evangelical teachings. At Heidelberg, Luther used the terms “theology of glory” and “theology of the cross.” From there, although his theology developed, Luther never moved away from these two major themes. At first glance, perhaps both of these terms sound right and reasonable to use as we discuss the Christian faith. Does not Scripture declare what happened on the cross, and is not God a God of glory? For Luther, however, only one of these two terms was reserved for Christians. The other was the theology of the devil.

Once we understand the difference between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, we will gain deeper insight into the rest of Luther’s theology. If we want to appreciate Luther entirely, we *must* understand these two themes of his. Negatively, we might say that you cannot fully understand Luther’s theology unless you understand his distinction between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory. This article will argue as much: *the distinction between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory was so essential to Luther that it pervaded all of his theology.*

We do not have the space to dis-

cuss how the aforementioned two themes affected every aspect of Luther’s theology, so for the purposes of this article we will focus only on three aspects. After defining the terms, I will demonstrate that the distinction between the theology of the cross and glory permeates Luther’s dislike for reason, his high view of Scripture, and his law/gospel distinction. Before doing so, however, it is essential to define relevant terms.

Terms Identified

In Luther’s day, as well as him, some Scholastics and other theologians were religious and philosophical speculators. They attempted to figure out who God is in Himself (*in se*), using reason and speculation. Luther waged war against such theories: “nothing is more dangerous...than to build one’s own road to God and to climb up by our speculations.” Climbing up to God on this ladder of speculation and mysticism will bring a man to *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God who, apart from revelation, is a terrifying Judge and holy King who condemns.

For Luther, the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) was a theology that did an end run around Christ directly to God. The theologians of glory were attempting to peek at God in the nude (*Deus nudus*)—God outside of His revelation in Scripture, in Jesus Christ. Luther claimed that the medieval scholastics “set out to scale heaven

and find the *Deus nudus*.” In short, the theologian of glory bypasses God’s revelation in attempt to go directly to God as He is in Himself. The theologian of glory does not understand that man cannot experience God in His own nature.

Yet man *can* find and know God, Luther adamantly maintained. “He deserves to be called a theologian...who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering on the cross. God can only be found in suffering and the cross.” The theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) seems weak, helpless, foolish, and even stupid to those who do not believe in the gospel (1 Cor. 1). But this is exactly where we can find and know God: in weakness and suffering, the God who reveals Himself (*Deus revelatus*). For Luther, the Christian must begin and end with Christ. He is God in a manger, an infant in diapers, an unattractive man who died a shameful death on the cross.

“The *theologia crucis* is a theology of revelation, which stands in sharp contrast to speculation.” The glory of God “is not something we see or experience right now” as pilgrims on earth. A theologian of the cross, for Luther, is one who sees the hidden yet revealed God on the cross. As mentioned above, one permeating aspect of Luther’s theology was the theology of the cross, but we cannot think of the theology of the cross apart from Luther’s concept of *Deus revelatus*. “The idea of the hidden God is most intimately connected with Luther’s theology of the cross.” Jesus Christ

If reason is a person's final authority, according to Luther, it has no place in Christian theology. It belongs in the devil's book of theology.

on the cross is God hidden in suffering, and at the same time revealed in suffering. The merciful and loving God cannot be found outside of His "hidden" revelation, Christ on the cross. Here we begin to see how foundational the cross—the theology of the cross—was for Luther.

Reason: A Very Slippery Thing

"Whenever one abandons the Word and speculates without and apart from the Word, reason becomes a very uncertain, slippery thing." Some have criticized Luther for his hatred of reason when he called reason "a big red murderess," "the devil's bride," "a blind guide," "the enemy of faith," and the "greatest and most invincible enemy of God." Luther's dislike for reason also appeared in his small catechism, the third article, where he wrote, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." In part, Luther's negative view of reason was in response to the volumes of speculative philosophy he had read and which was prevalent in the medieval Roman church.

Luther's definition of the *theologia gloriae* and his distaste for reason go hand in hand; they are inseparable. Reason is the authority for a theologian of glory. He speculates on the mysteries of God apart from His Word, His revelation of Himself. The theologian of glory does

not bow to Scripture, but climbs the ladder to God using reason and speculation. His reason expects God to reveal Himself in gusto and strength, in glory and in splendor. He cannot understand how or why God would reveal Himself in a suffering and dying man on a cross.

On the other hand, the theologian of the cross bows to God; his reason submits to the authority of God's Word, His revelation. Reason that submits to Scripture is a gift of God that we should not despise, Luther said. Indeed, the believer must *think* about the gospel and Scripture using reason. At one point, Luther even asserted that reason serves faith. The *theologia crucis* is theology where reason is not authoritative, but Scripture, God's revelation. This theology is one that sees God on the cross, revealed yet hidden, in suffering and tears. The theologian of the cross knows of these things not by reason, but by *faith alone*. Furthermore, he knows that the creature can never know the *Deus absconditus*, so he stays at the cross, where he finds *Deus revelatus*. This phrase shows how central the theology of the cross was for Luther: "*Crux sola est nostra theologia*" (the cross alone is our theology).

In summary, then, the theology of glory is theology where reason is authoritative, where faith serves reason, and where reason brings a man to God. If reason is a person's final authority, according to Luther,

it has no place in Christian theology. It belongs in the devil's book of theology.

The theology of the cross, however, is theology where reason serves faith, and where faith brings a man to God as He reveals Himself on the cross. If we would approach Luther's discussion of reason without presupposing his distinction between the theologies of glory and the cross, we could not see the essence of his argument. As always, Luther approached every topic as Scripture defined it.

That Word Above All Earthly Powers: Scripture

The *theologia gloriae* is not theology derived from Scripture, the Word of God. The theologian of glory has no primary place for the Word of God. When Luther preached, he often reproved the Roman church for trampling on Scripture by making decrees of man equal to the Word. He rebuked the Roman church and her leaders for setting up idols and condemning true evangelical preaching. Notice how this goes hand in hand with the theology of glory. The theologian of glory, with his Bible closed, considers who God is and what man can do to get to Him. Thus the theology of the Roman church with her indulgences, merits of the Saints, purgatory, relics, cowls, monasteries, tonsures, pilgrimages, and so on, advocated a theology of glory.

"We should...allow Scripture to rule and master us, and we ourselves should not be the masters, according to our own mad heads, setting ourselves above Scripture." Luther's passionate emphasis on

Scripture comes through in this statement prior to a sermon on Matthew 11:2-10:

Rightly to worship our Lord God on this Sunday and holy day in keeping with his express will of how we are to serve him, we need to sanctify this holy day by hearing Christ's Word, the Word that sanctifies everything. For it alone is holy, and for that reason we speak it, preach it, and give heed to it.

Phrases like these are quite common in Luther's preaching. He constantly emphasized his dependence on the Word, and exhorted his congregation to regard it highly. Why? Because nowhere else can a man find God; nowhere else does God speak words of life to us.

The *theologia crucis* is a theology centered on the Word of God. Yes, it is foolishness for God to speak salvation through the preaching of a God hidden on the cross—in Jesus Christ. But it is all we have, so we must cling to it, and see God in it. A discussion of Luther's *theologia crucis* without a section on Scripture would be incomplete, because where else do we learn about Christ on the cross? Where else can we turn to find God? This essential: the theologian of the cross is a theologian of the Word. Such was Luther. His understanding of the theology of the cross and the theology of glory was accurate because it was rooted in Scripture itself.

Law and Gospel: Glory or the Cross?

To bring together Luther's law/gospel distinction and the theology of the cross and of glory may seem

like a stretch. What do glory and the cross have to do with law and gospel? By way of reminder, Luther often pointed out the difference between the law and the gospel in Scripture. With the demands of the law God makes us answerable; with the promise of the gospel He makes Himself answerable. The law says, "do this or die," while the gospel says, "Jesus has done it all; you will live." Luther preached on this distinction repeatedly because the Roman church actually mixed them: Christ was a judge (law) who could be appeased by works (gospel).

No doubt the theologian of glory did not make the proper law/gospel distinction. The theologian of glory, in attempting to find God, does so on his own terms. This is law, that a man says he can discover who God is on his own through works, meditation, philosophy, speculation, or nature. But what the theologian of glory finds apart from the gospel is, as mentioned above, God without a mediator. God outside of Christ is *not* loving and kind; He is a consuming fire.

Luther put this fact clearly in Thesis 24 of the Heidelberg Disputation: "He who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for *works* and wisdom and does not give credit to God" (emphasis added). The theologian of glory is proud, self-glorifying, and takes credit for good works, as if the

works of sinful man can merit anything with God. Clearly, the man who prefers works to suffering prefers anything but the cross, anything but salvation through suffering rather than works.

In contrast, the theologian of the cross is a theologian of Jesus Christ, a theologian of the good news of salvation proclaimed in Scripture. The theologian of the cross knows that the law condemns and kills while the gospel promises and gives life. The gospel is what Jesus has done to save his people completely. The gospel preached seems like weakness and foolishness to unbelievers, while it is God's power and glory to the Christian.

The distinction is clear: the theologian of glory makes the law the gospel and the gospel the law while the theologian of the cross does not confuse the two. Once more, we see how fundamental the theology of the cross is, how it even deeply affected Luther's correct distinction between law and gospel. The cross alone was Luther's theology—not glory and law, but suffering and gospel.

Conclusion

An interpretation of Luther's theology with no explanation of his distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross is incomplete. The statements concerning the theology of the cross versus the theology of glory in the Heidelberg disputation "actually

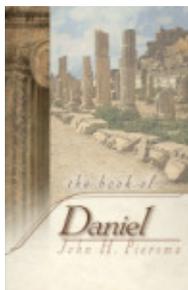
Nowhere else can a man find God; nowhere else does God speak words of life to us.

encapsulate the heart of Luther's theology." The theology of the cross permeated his theology in three areas: the use of reason, the authority of Scripture and the law/gospel distinction. How accurate would an evaluation or discussion of Luther be if one would approach him without knowing about the theology of glory verses the theology of the cross? Again, we must remember this: *the distinction between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory was so essential to Luther that it pervaded all of his theology.* Luther preached Christ on the cross—the cross alone truly was his theology!

"The center of Luther's understanding of Christianity is the proclamation of a God who is both hidden and revealed." The center of understanding Luther's theology is the cross. Indeed, you rightly understand Luther when you stay at the cross, acknowledge the authority of Scripture, know that reason serves faith, and that the gospel (not the law!) is the good news of Christ bleeding and dying in shame on the cross.

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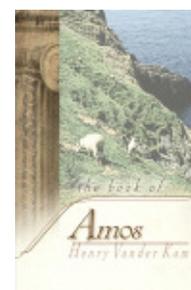
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Looking Above

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Revelation 11:1-2

The Measuring of the Temple

The mighty trumpet blasts of Revelation 8 and 9 have been sounding. They have been sounding since the time of Christ's first coming. As they blast forth, the created order is shaken and undone (trumpets 1-4), the hordes of hell are unleashed upon the inhabitants of the earth (trumpet 5), war and rumors of war ravage the earth, killing a third of mankind (trumpet 6).

The trumpets have been sounding with increasing intensity. Natural calamities seem to be increasing upon the face of the earth. The spiritual assaults of the evil one seem to be escalating upon the inhabitants of the earth. War seems to claim more and more lives with every passing year. The trumpets have been sounding with increasing intensity.

The trumpets have been sounding and will continue to sound, with ever-increasing intensity, until Christ comes again. For these mighty trumpet blasts are harbingers of the last trumpet that will sound on the great and terrible day of the Lord, when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

We find ourselves living, then, in the midst of the trumpet blasts. We find ourselves living between the first coming of Christ and His return. We find ourselves awaiting the last trumpet. As we live in the midst of such things, it is good for us to be reminded of the identity and life of the Church. God has graciously

given us such a reminder in the great interlude of Revelation 10:1–11:14, which sets before us the identity and life of the Church as she lives in the midst of the world between the first coming of Christ and His return on the clouds of glory.

Recall what we have seen in chapter 10. There John beheld the risen and exalted Christ, the Lord of Glory, coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud, a rainbow on His head, His face shining like the sun, and His feet like pillars of fire. He saw Him with a little book—the gospel—open in His hand. He set His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land. He cried out to heaven with a lion-like voice, raising His hand to heaven, swearing an oath that there should be delay no longer. In other words, Christ Himself has sworn that the next great act of God is His coming at the last day to judge the living and the dead. In God's conception of things, there is no delay! It is as though the skies were about to be rolled back! It is as though the trumpet were about to resound! It is as though Christ were about to descend!

John is then commanded to take the little book—the gospel—and eat it. It must become part of him, so that the message that he brings is none other than the gospel. John eats the book. It is sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach.

Sweet, for what can be sweeter than the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Bitter, for the world hates that gospel, and seeks to persecute and even kill those who would bring it.

Understand, then, the significance of the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is preached under the impress and weight of the coming day of the Lord! The next great act of God is His coming again to judge the living and the dead. It is under the weight of that fact that you are to hear the gospel's call to repentance and faith. It is with good reason the Scriptures say, "This is the day of salvation!" Indeed, there may not be another. Christ is coming to judge, and soon!

That is chapter 10. Now as we come to chapter 11, we learn that as the gospel is preached, a separation is made. "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty two months.'"

The Temple of God

John is told to measure the temple of God. This is not the literal Old Testament temple that John must measure. That temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, John is writing around the year A.D. 95. The temple in view here is not the literal Old Testament temple.

The temple in view here is the Church of Jesus Christ! Numerous times in the New Testament the Church is referred to as the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." 2 Corinthians 6:16: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" Ephesians 2:19-22: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Again and again the New Testament sets before us the Church as the temple of God. The Church is the dwelling place of God. God dwells in His Church through the Spirit. The Church is the temple of God.

The Altar of God

The temple of God is the Church of Jesus Christ, and John is commanded to measure it. But that is not the only thing John must measure. He must also measure the altar. Once again, in view here is not the Old Testament altar. This is not a literal altar that John must measure. That altar was destroyed, along with the temple, in A.D. 70.

The altar in view here is Christ and His cross. Here the book of Hebrews is most instructive. "Christ offered up Himself as our sacrifice once for all" (Hebrews 7:27). "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb. 9:28). "And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:11-14).

Is not all of this pushing us to see Christ as the sacrifice, as the altar from which we have the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting? "Indeed, we have an altar from which those who service the tabernacle have no right to eat!" (Heb. 13:10). The altar, then, is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. By that sacrifice we enter the presence of God.

The Worshipers Measured

John is commanded to measure the temple and the altar. But that is not all. He is also commanded to measure those who worship there. Those who are measured together with the temple and the altar are those who, by union with Christ,

have been brought into the presence of God. This means that all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are in view here. As Christians, we have been bound to the altar, united to Christ and His sacrifice for us. Through His sacrifice, represented by the altar, we are brought into the very presence of God and bound to the temple. We are measured together with the temple and the altar. God knows those who are His.

The Outer Court

The measuring also effects a separation, verse 2: "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles." The measuring is not solely for dimensional purposes; the measuring is for separation. A distinction is being made, a separation if you will, between the true Church and the false church.

In terms of Revelation 11:1-2, the temple is the true Church (known unto God); the outer court is the false church. Notice that the false church is pictured in terms of the outer court. That is significant! Where was the outer court, but in front of, even surrounding, the temple itself. In other words, the false church approaches the character of the true church. The false church appears religious. The false church has a form of godliness, though she does not know the power thereof.

The Church is the dwelling place of God...The altar is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ...We are measured together with the temple and the altar.

In the visible church here on earth there is a mixing of those who belong to the true Church and those who belong to the false church. There are members of the church here on earth who are not members of the church in heaven. There are members of the church visible who are not members of the church invisible. They are not all Israel who are of Israel. They are not all the Church who are of the church.

What is it that separates those who belong to the true Church from those who belong to the false church? The altar! The altar by which we enter the presence of God. In other words, Christ! Those who belong to the true Church are members of the true Church only by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Those who do not belong to the true Church have not been united to the Lord Jesus Christ, though they may belong to the church here on earth.

The outer court belongs to the Gentiles, the Gentiles here signifying those who are Christian in name only. And what do they do to the church? "They tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." The holy city is again a reference to the true Church, the people of God.

The true Church becomes the object of the world's scorn and hatred. Yes, tragically it becomes the object and scorn, even of those who profess to be Christian but who are not Christians at all. Through such nominal Christians the world invades the church, even seeking to take possession of it, that they might make it like the world. Those who belong to the false church would seek to make the true

Church become like the world. How do the wolves come? They come as wolves dressed in sheep's clothing! How does Satan work? He loves to masquerade as an angel of light! How subtly the false church works to make the true Church like the world!

This condition will continue for forty-two months, until Christ comes again. The number forty-two is significant. One commenta-

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tor points out that the number forty-two is the number of 6×7 . The number six is the number of man. The number seven is the number of perfection. In view here, then, is man's complete and total effort to build a kingdom and a church unto himself.

Here is the outworking of the gospel, that bittersweet gospel. It is bitter: those who believe the gospel and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ have tribulation in the world. That tribulation is, at times, very bitter, as we shall see in the remainder of the interlude. But it is also sweet: those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ have the sweet assurance of knowing that they belong to God Himself,

and are even now under His protection.

Look back once again to verse 1, and the binding of the temple, the altar, and the true people of God. Christians are bound to the altar, bound to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and thus brought into the temple, the very dwelling place of God. But what happens to that temple in the new heavens and new earth? In the new heavens and new earth, there is no temple! When John sees the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, he says, "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple! The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Rev. 21:22-23). There is no temple in the new heavens and new earth. God Himself is the dwelling place of His people; God Himself is all in all.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you are bound to the temple, you are bound to the Presence of God, you are bound to God Himself! You are bound to God Himself even now! The finality of the age to come has, in principle, broken into the present. Even though you now dwell on earth, you are a member of the heavenly community; even now you are under God's protection; even now you are bound to God Himself.

The trumpets have been sounding. But, dear child of God, He has given you the ears to hear. By grace, you have been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. And in Him, you have the assurance that nothing can separate you from the love of God in

Jesus Christ: not the first trumpet, not the second trumpet, not the third trumpet, not the fourth trumpet, not the fifth trumpet, not the sixth trumpet, not even the last trumpet.

This interlude sets before you the identity and the life of the Church. This interlude, beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ, is for your comfort. And you do cherish it, do you not?

Rev. Brian Vos is the Pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.

Celebrating the Life of the Dead

Increasingly, the emphasis at funerals and funeral related events in recent times is to focus on the deceased and to celebrate that person's life. To some extent, this has already been the practice by some, including churches that seek to eulogize the deceased, or as is often said, "preaching them to heaven." To accommodate the celebrating of the life of the deceased, a funeral provider in the area where this writer lives in Michigan, has initiated a registered service called Life Story Funeral Homes.

The two funeral directors who designed and instituted Life Story about three years ago, are actively engaged in soliciting other funeral providers to join this network of funeral homes. The establishments that are part of this network are growing throughout Michigan and Indiana and possibly other states, as well. As these two men pursue their ventures, this phenomenon may well spread throughout the country affecting many more of us. Undoubtedly, some of these trends are already being practiced in other areas of the country as well.

In our area, and perhaps as a result of Life Story, other funeral homes have also begun focusing on the life of the deceased with the use of photographs, videos, and other memorabilia. Frequently they refer to funeral services as a "celebration of life." Most of the emphasis on the deceased takes place as displays in the funeral home include a

variety of photographs and a captioned video presentation of pictures from throughout that person's life; Aunt Jennie's violin prominently leaning against the casket; and grandpa's bib overalls or old favorite hat hanging on the coffin lid.

Funerals are ceremonies held for a dead person before burial. Various cultures and religions have their own way of conducting funerals. In Reformed circles, a funeral is not considered a service of public worship but a family matter and, therefore, not subject to the oversight of the Elders. Since the kind of funeral desired is at the discretion of the family, it is suggested here that there are considerations for the Christian in regard to funerals that focus on the life of the deceased and celebrate that life.

It is only natural for family and friends to reminisce and reflect on the life of the departed at the time of death, and there is nothing wrong in doing some of that. Even in times past, funerals have sometimes been referred to as memorial services. However, the premise of this critique of present trends in funerals, is that these things have come about to meet the needs of secular society. The event of a death brings about a time of vulnerability in making decisions concerning funeral arrangements and especially at such a time Christians may follow the trends of the day without giving it much thought.

Focusing on the life of the dead

Those who live without the hope of Jesus Christ do not want to think about death. For them, there is no hope and all.

would be the natural thing to do for secular society. Those who live without the hope of Jesus Christ do not want to think about death. For them, there is no hope at all. They see is the sting of death and its hopeless finality. There is something about their conscience that wants to block out the reality of death.

“O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 15:55-57). The sting of death is sin because death is the result of sin. Sin is a very unpopular subject in our day, even in many pulpits. For those outside of Christ there is nothing else to focus on but the life as it was lived by the one now taken in death. By focusing on the life of the dead, the reality of death and sin is obscured by the pleasant thoughts of the good things remembered about the deceased.

Life Story Network states that they “have pioneered a new form of funeral service, far removed from the staid, sterile, traditional services that have been the norm for over a century.” They describe doing this “by focusing the service on the life lived by the deceased and not on the death; by utilizing emotive, vibrant video and professional writing, by keeping memories alive through a meaningful service.” They claim to take the emphasis off “overpriced caskets and unnecessary

merchandise to remain competitive while offering something more memorable and valuable to families.” This includes “a lasting legacy, preserved in digital film, print, and on the web, so it can be passed on from generation to generation.”

Life Story Funeral Homes also feature rooms “that are comfortable and that feel like home where the families can gather, with kitchens and patios, and plenty of space for family and friends.” It appears that great pains are being taken to create a diversion from the reality of death. Life Story Funeral Homes give the option of three caskets to choose from with a stated package price accordingly. Their stated price includes all the Life Story features with no option. When pressed, it was admitted that it is possible to have a funeral without those features and that it would then also minimize the price of the funeral package.

In interviewing one of the Life Story designers by email, the following explanation was given: “We as funeral directors have become very lazy. Funeral directors hope that people will continue selecting overpriced caskets and burial vaults, and continue to have the pastor do all the work. We don’t feel that it is reasonable for a pastor to do all the work and we feel that the person’s life story should be recorded and passed down. Because of our society, we don’t

know our neighbor – worse yet, if families don’t learn and preserve life stories of ‘their own’, then we will be permanently disconnected. So the person’s story, and working to help families design a service that is truly meaningful to them is our mission – not selling caskets and hoping that we can find a pastor to do our work.” From this, it would seem that Life Story Funeral Director’s desire would be to conduct the funeral service in the place of pastors, and perhaps for unbelievers that is the way it should be.

The focus for those who have that victory over the sting of death, through Jesus Christ is quite different. A Christian funeral is a time to reflect on the victory over death unto eternal life through Jesus Christ for the comfort of the bereaved that the one taken out of this life now has that victory.

Overshadowing everything else, a Christian funeral must be a time to focus on one of even greater importance than mere man. Rather than celebrating the life of a person, it is a time to focus on Jesus Christ to the glory of God. “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

The life story of the Christian is not what that person’s life was all about, but what Christ did in and through him or her. In a Christian funeral, by placing an emphasis on the life of the deceased, God is

robbed of the praise due only to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. “I am the Lord, that is my name; I will not give my glory to another” (Isaiah 42:8a).

Whatever we as Christians might have accomplished in life is as a result of Christ working in and through us. Our accomplishments may seem noble to man and worthy of praise and remembrance, but that is not what God sees. “For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (I Samuel 16:7). Also, we are told in Luke 16:15, “And He said to them, you are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” Also, Psalm 49 gives reference to those who have wealth, those who think their houses will last forever, and those who name their lands after themselves, “For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not descend after him. Though while he lives he congratulates himself – and though men praise you when you do well for yourself – he shall go to the generations of his fathers; they shall never see light.” Verses 17-20.

In bygone years many more people lived in more humble obedience in faith to God and in awe of His holiness. It was reflected in all of life. Funerals were a time to reflect on man’s mortality and on God’s incomprehensible greatness and the accomplishment of His Son, giving comfort from God’s Word. Most funerals were held in churches and were treated more as if they were worship services. In today’s soci-

ety, even much of the church has lost the meaning of a Holy God who is also a jealous God, and in heartfelt appreciation for the unthinkable sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And so, funerals have become a time of praise of man instead of praise of God through Christ.

In revealing to one the founders of Life Story that my inquiries were for research in doing a critique from a Christian and Biblical perspective, he replied as follows: “When writing your critique, think about where we would be without Jesus’ life story, the disciples, and how we learn from the Bible. It is our feeling that our work embraces faith. One of our core goals is to help restore connections in people’s lives. If they don’t understand the true meaning of the word ‘neighbor’, how are they to grasp the concept of loving thy neighbor as thyself?”

That, Mr. Funeral Director is precisely my point! It is not so much Jesus’ life that we celebrate as it is His death. It is through His death that we have life, even everlasting life beyond death. Also, those who sit under the preaching and teaching of the Word of God where it is rightly divided know who their neighbor is. They do not need funeral homes to exemplify that concept.

A Christian funeral is a time to reflect on death and not on life, except eternal life. It is a time to reflect on

Christ and the assurance held by the believer who has died; the assurance of salvation through the death of Christ, and the hope of eternal life through the resurrection of Christ. It is a time to comfort those left behind with that glad assurance. The funeral service must also inform those who do not have that assurance that they too can have it through Christ. It is a time to give praise to God, in the name of Jesus. Let secular society celebrate the life of the dead. We as God’s people have a greater legacy and something much greater to celebrate than our mortal sinful lives.

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A Christian funeral must be a time to focus on one of even greater importance than mere man.

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