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# The Outlook

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*"Exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*  
—Jude 3

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*About the cover:* This old Reformed church building in Kalamazoo still stands, even after a tornado passed right in front of it back in 1980. For many years, it silently observed the early Dutch settlers faithfully pass through it's doors.

**“He asked, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?” The man was speechless.”  
—Matthew 22:12**

As we read Jesus’ parable of the wedding banquet, we can well understand the king’s reaction to the first group of people invited to the wedding. In Luke 14, where Jesus tells the parable of the great banquet, those who cannot come make excuses. One has just bought a new field, another has bought five yoke of oxen, and the third has just gotten married.

All of these people had received great benefits from the king, but they quickly made excuses so that they did not have to come to his wedding banquet. Not only did they refuse to come, but they also mistreated and killed the servants who brought the invitations. And so it is rather easy to understand the king’s reaction to the first group of people he had invited to the feast.

His reaction to the second group, however, is a little more difficult to understand. The king has invited the poor and the downtrodden—anybody he could find—to fill the wedding hall with guests for his son. Then he becomes furious because one of the people he invited isn’t wearing the right clothes. What was it about that one poor man that causes the king to pour out his anger upon him?

### **God’s Holiness**

To understand the king’s reaction, you have to understand something about the customs of the day and the king. The king in the parable represents God. If there is one thing you must know about God, it is that He is holy. Of all the attributes we study about God, His holiness is the most significant of them all. In Isaiah

6 the prophet describes the song the seraphs were singing: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

You will notice the angels do not sing “almighty, almighty, almighty” or “eternal, eternal, eternal.” They don’t even sing the attribute we cling to the most: “faithful, faithful, faithful.” It is “holy, holy, holy.” The holiness of God sums up all that God is. Psalm 111:9 says, “Holy and awesome is his name.” Moses sings in Exodus 15:11,

Who among the gods is like you, LORD?

Who is like you—  
majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory,  
working wonders?

The word holy means “set apart.” When the Bible teaches us that God is holy it means that God’s very being—His character—transcends everything else. He is not subject to the same kind of frailties and limitations that we have. He is all powerful. He is outside of time. He is all knowing. He is everywhere present. He is totally other. The only things that we can



know about God are the things He reveals to us about Himself in His Word.

One of the things that God reveals about Himself is that He is perfectly pure. He is without sin. God doesn't just conform to a holy standard; He is the standard. He is entirely righteous, utterly perfect, and absolutely without sin. The prophet Habakkuk says this concerning God: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing" (1:13). God is so holy that He will not permit anything tainted with sin to come into His presence.

That brings us back to our parable. God is the king. He sees all these people beautifully arrayed—except one. All the others are dressed properly for the wedding, but one is not. He sticks out like a sore thumb. The king asks him, "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?"

The man is absolutely speechless. He is without excuse. We tend to make excuses for him today. He was poor. He didn't have any wedding clothes to put on. That shows how little we know of the customs of the day.

When those who were wealthy held a wedding banquet, they provided the robes that their banquet guests were expected to wear. The king would have his servants stationed at the entryway handing out the robes to the guests as they arrived.

I am reminded of the kindness that King David showed to the son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth. Even though Mephibosheth was crippled, the king invited him to sit at his table. Everything I have read says that he sat in such a way that no one at the table could see that he was crippled.

Here at the banquet of the king, the king supplies the garments for his guests so that no one can see their handicaps, poverty, or misery. No one would know the economic status underneath the clothes given to them by the king. "Come, feast with me regardless of social status and regardless of who you are."

### **False Holiness**

The man in the parable very deliberately avoided the obligation to wear the robe the king provided and required his guests wear. He refused to wear it! It was not as if he was ignorant of the customs of the day or was too poor to buy his own robe. Rather, he was convinced that his own clothes were good enough. He did not need what the king had to offer.

I remember years ago watching an interview on television. The host was interviewing a man who owned several nightclubs. The man also boasted that he was very religious. The interviewer asked him how he could be a religious

man and own these clubs. His reply: "Me and God, we got a deal." Then he went on to explain all the charities he gave to and the services he proved to the community.

Let me tell you something: God doesn't make deals with sinful people.

There are all kinds of people who think He does. The Pharisees in the New Testament, for example, thought they were right with God because they did so many wonderful things. A lot of people today think that way. In the video 180, all kinds of people are interviewed, and all kinds of people think they are alright with God. "Why should God be angry at me? I'm not angry with Him." "Why wouldn't God let me into heaven? I'm an okay person."

Are you?

What people think really doesn't matter. What God thinks is what matters. And remember: God is holy. He cannot stand the sight of sin. He will not allow it to come into His presence.

Have you ever told a lie? Yes? Sorry, you're out.

Have you ever taken God's name in vain? Yes? Sorry, you're out. You are not holy. God can't stand the sight of you.

God said to Abraham, who was called the friend of God, "Walk before me and be holy." No deals. When David, the man after God's own heart, fell into sin, he prayed and fasted, hoping that God would spare the life of his child. God said, "No deal."

It doesn't matter how righteous you may think you are; it doesn't matter how many changes of clothes you may have or how many good works you do. They are just one filthy rag after another before God. God says, "No deal. You are a sinner." You cannot enter God's presence wearing your own garments of self-righteousness.

## True Holiness

Just as the fig leaves were not enough for Adam and Eve, so that God provided clothing for them, whatever it is you are wearing is not enough, so that God must supply the garment for you to wear to the wedding feast. And the amazing thing is, He does. Not because of some kind of deal that we

can make with God, but because of His grace, kindness, and mercy.

How can a God who cannot look upon sin look upon you and me when we live in the filthy garments of our sin? Well, take a look at Adam and Eve and see what God did there. The Bible says they sinned against God. Filled with shame, they covered



**...the fig leaves were not good enough. God, the king, had to supply garments made out of skin to cover their sin. Something had to die so that they could continue to live.**

themselves with fig leaves and tried to hide from God. God comes into the garden and confronts them with their sin. He promises that one will come who will crush the head of the one who tempted them—the great serpent, the devil.

Before He drives them out of the garden, however, God makes garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothes them. In other words, the fig leaves were not good enough. God, the king, had to supply garments made out of skin to cover their sin. Something had to die so that they could continue to live.

Throughout the Old Testament the sacrificial system required animals to die to cover the sins of the people. The day the Lord instituted the Passover, a lamb had to be killed. The blood of the lamb was placed upon the doorposts and doorframe of the house. When the angel of death came to Egypt, it would pass over any house that had the lamb's blood on the door, sparing the firstborn inside.

After God freed the Israelites from their bondage to Egypt, He made a covenant with them. He gave them the Ten Commandments and spelled out for them what His people should look like and how they should live. They were to be a holy people—a people set apart by God, for God.

As a symbol of this, here is what Moses did:

Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Ex. 24:5-8)

Half the blood was on the altar, the other half of the blood was sprinkled on the people. It linked the people to God. It linked God to the people. The clothes that the people were wearing were symbolic of their sin. Their filthy rags were now covered by the blood of the bull. Because the filthy rags of their sins had been covered by the blood, the most holy God could look upon them and say, "You are my people. I have set you apart. I have made you a holy people."

I, for one, am thankful that we do not do things that way anymore. I dare say that most church custodians are probably even more thankful. But let me say this: if we did do it that way and I could have the glad assurance that my sins were forgiven because I had the blood of the bull all over

my clothes, I would want to be in the front row. I can't get into heaven clothed in my own filthy rags. My sin is too great. I need forgiveness from God.

How about you and your sin? Can you stand before God dressed as you are, knowing He is a holy God and demands absolute holiness of you? No? Then get in the front row!

Now here is the most amazing part: those of you who are members of the church were here in the front row at one time. Most of you were there as infants. Some may have come as young children or teenagers, or even adults. It happened when you were baptized. You entered into a covenant relationship with God. We don't use the blood of bulls any more, thankfully. We use water that points us to the blood.

They received garments that were washed in the blood—not of bulls or rams, but the blood of Jesus Christ. The garments in the parable that the king gave to his guests represent the righteousness of Jesus Christ—a righteousness that God freely provides to all who truly repent of their sins. Those who desire to come to the great wedding banquet of the Lamb must wear the garments of God that have been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. With the robe of Christ's righteousness upon you, all your sins are covered. Only then will you be able to stand before the King, the most holy God.

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# The Office of Christian Man: Applying Christ's Threefold Office to Men

Rev. William Boekestein

If modern television sitcoms were the litmus test for masculinity, our expectations of men would be minimal. For most of the last half century, television has depicted fathers as incompetent buffoons often featured only to keep the laugh track greased. Besides bringing home a paycheck (sometimes), the TV dad's responsibility is mainly to stay out of the way of his much better half. This portrayal has had a negative influence on the men that God intends to lead the home, the church, and, to an extent, society. However, in contrast to cultural expectations, the Bible calls men, like all believers, to reflect Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.

The Protestant Reformation laid the ax to the root of the notion that only kings and clergy discharged an important office. The Reformers understood the profound implications of the Spirit's anointing of Christ to be God's officer, fulfilling the three Old Testament offices. Beginning at Pentecost, Christ poured out this same Spirit upon his people (Acts 2:17), calling and equipping them to continue on earth his prophetic (Matt. 10:32), priestly (1 Peter 2:5), and kingly work (Eph. 6:10-13).

By living out the threefold office of Christ, our fathers, future fathers, and other single men will distinguish themselves and inspire the respect and reverence of those they are called to lead.

Strive  
*to Communicate*

Teach the  
*Bible*

Model an  
*Evangelistic Lifestyle*

*Be Involved in Your*

CHURCH

**Pray for Your People**

**Be Approachable**

**Be Decisive**

*Beware of Ruling*  
as the Gentiles

*Honor Your Wife*

## The Christian Man as Prophet

The prophet of Israel was a man (or occasionally a woman) chosen and equipped by God to speak on his behalf to the people. The prophets couldn't say anything unless it was God's will. Even ungodly Balaam knew this. "Balaam said to Balak, 'Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak'" (Num. 22:38). "Thus says the Lord" was the prophet's most basic and sacred motto.

Christ came as the ultimate prophet. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). Christ "fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 31). God calls men to follow Christ's lead as prophets.

### *Strive to Communicate*

At a basic level, the prophets were communicators. Fulfilling this role can be challenging for the male gender, for whom actions often come easier than words. Thankfully, Jesus and the prophets communicated in a variety of ways. They spoke publicly and privately. They preached sermons and told stories. But theirs was a word-based calling. Godly men discipline themselves to communicate, especially when they feel like retreating.

### *Teach the Bible*

In most cases God calls men to be the leader in family worship. Not every family wants to worship at home. Busy family schedules may not make collective worship easy. Both scenarios have always existed. But as God's prophets to their families,



fathers must be sure that they have a church in the home and that what they teach in the home is biblical, not just an expression of personal whim.

### *Model an Evangelistic Lifestyle*

For all our talk about the importance of witnessing, too few believers have ever had a positive example of what it actually looks like. The best way to equip the next generation to propagate the faith is to show them how; the bravery of others is emboldening. Families need fathers to model evangelistic zeal.

## The Christian Man as Priest

The priests were the regular spiritual leaders of Israel. They served in the tabernacle and later in the temple. As counterparts to the prophets, the priests spoke to God on behalf of the people and offered sacrifices for the people's sins.

In fulfillment of the testimony of all the other sacrifices of the law, Christ offered up himself once for all for our sins (Heb. 7:27). After paying our penalty, he ascended into heaven, where he labors as our sympathetic high priest. God calls men to reflect Christ's work as priest.

### *Be Involved in Your Church*

The priests were regular fixtures in the Jewish church. They weren't "Sunday Christians" (or, in those days, "Saturday Jews"). Instead, they invested their lives in the service of God for the benefit of his people. Not all men will be as involved in the church as the ministers and elders. Still, God expects men and fathers to play a vital role in the spiritual life of the covenant community (1 John 2:12-14). God has laid on men the responsibility of leading his church (1 Tim. 3:1-2). But unless a new generation of young men sees older men invest in the church, inadequate male leadership may be the result. Men, those around us, especially our families, need to know that we prize and prioritize our relationship with the local church.

### *Pray for Your People*

Paul identifies men, especially, as the intercessors of the church and family (1 Tim. 2:8). Godly men learn to pray for their families, and not just during scheduled, traditional times (e.g., before or after meals). Instead,

**It's no special distinction to become a father; all that is required is siring a child. The true honor is to reflect Christ by living out the office of Christian man.**

maintain an ongoing ministry of intercession on their behalf. Pray for their salvation. Pray for their holiness. Your pleadings will find an audience in God's ears as they also change your attitude toward your family.

#### *Be Approachable*

Jesus is a sympathetic high priest (Heb. 4:15). He understands our weaknesses and sins. He also invites us to come to him (Matt. 11:28), promising that he will not turn us away when we do. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Some wives and children are afraid to approach their husbands and fathers with their failures. While there may be multiple reasons for this communication breakdown, the responsibility always falls at the leader's feet. Of course, it's possible to become so approachable that your children feel comfortable mocking and contradicting, but the opposite is no better.

#### **The Christian Man as King**

The kings of Israel, too often contrary to appearances, were God's gift to his people to provide them with security, protection, and order. The king was to be a benevolent dictator under God.

His authority was real, but it was to be married to love and compassion.

Jesus Christ, our eternal king, perfectly balances strength and tenderness. He "governs us by his word and Spirit and defends and preserves us in the salvation he obtained for us" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 31). From his heavenly throne he subjects his enemies and protects his people. God calls men to rule under Christ as kings.

#### *Be Decisive*

When it comes to biblical leadership, men are as tempted to abdicate as women are to usurp. Men must resist caving in under the pressures of leadership and capitulating to the winds of egalitarianism and pure democracy. Men must not shrink back in response to past failures.

Many women are not satisfied with the level of their husband's spiritual decisiveness, and often rightly so. The best way to nurture spiritual leadership is to receive and affirm it. Prayer and support, not nagging, will encourage your husband to be a Christlike king.

#### *Beware of Ruling as the Gentiles*

The rulers of the Gentiles "lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them" (Mark 10:42). In God's eyes, the best leaders lead without being oppressive. They don't holler and pound their chest, making sure that everyone knows they are the papa, like Tevya from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Instead, they are kind and respectful, open to new ideas, and willing to be wrong. The uncaring king is aloof, failing to meaningfully enter the lives of his dependents. The benevolent king truly knows those he is called to lead (John 10:14).

#### *Honor Your Wife*

Adam was created as the first prophet, priest, and king of this world. After receiving Eve as a wife, he speaks of her with the utmost appreciation and admiration, as if she were his queen (Gen. 2:23). The godly man's wife is his queen. We sin when we treat our wives as children, servants, or worse.

The gospel calls men to the office of Christian man. The gospel also equips us for this calling. But until we are brought home to glory, we will fail in our mission. Our success in faithfully discharging the office of Christian man depends on our closeness to the chief prophet, priest, and king.

It's no special distinction to become a father; all that is required is siring a child. The true honor is to reflect Christ by living out the office of Christian man.

**Rev. William Boekestein** is the pastor of Covenant Reformed Church in Carbondale, PA (URCNA).

## Part 4

**“All men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with [this holy congregation] . . . submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ.”**

**–Belgic Confession, Article 28**

Christ's submission to the Father's will is integral to the gospel. Without the Son's submission to His Father's will, the cup of wrath that was before Him would have passed back to us, to our eternal shame and everlasting destruction (see Matt. 26:39–46). As we read the Gospels, though, we see that our Lord's struggle in the garden to obey His Father was the pinnacle of this submission, but not the extent of it. In fact, starting with the humiliation of His incarnation, our Lord submitted to everything that the Father set before Him.

One remarkable instance of this is found in the account of Christ's trial before the Sanhedrin. There we read of our Lord submitting to the authority of the high priest, who puts Him under oath to answer if He is “the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). Instead of remaining silent, Jesus undertook that oath, stating, “It is as you said” (v. 64). What condescension on the part of our Lord, the eternal Son of God, to be bound (however briefly) by the authority of the one appointed to lead God's people!

Indeed, Jesus' submission here highlights something that He had instructed His own disciples about earlier in Matthew 23. He told them that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (v. 1), which essentially meant that they had a rightful claim to authority over Israel. Our Lord tells His disciples: “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do” (v. 2). Thus, even in His unjust, ungodly trial, Jesus sets an example for us all: submit to those who are in authority over you. This principle brings us to the subject before us in this article, namely, the fourth aspect of the Christian's bond to Christ's church as set before us in article 28 of our confession: submission.

First, let us first consider to whom or what we are submitting. Ultimately we are submitting to Christ. This is why the first article of the Belgic Confession on the subject of ecclesiology begins by proclaiming “Christ [as] eternal King” whose subjects we are (art. 27). Obviously a king has many subordinates who rule in his name, but they will all, in the end, answer to him as the final, supreme sovereign. So the church (whether considered individually in terms of congregations or wholly in

terms of the whole assembly from every age) is called to submit to the Lord Jesus and His rule over her.

But just as Christ recognized and even validated the earthly authorities of His house (Heb. 3:6), we ought to do the same. We see in article 28 that this means that we first submit ourselves to the doctrine of the church. The doctrine of the church is nothing less than her teaching of the truths from Scripture about essential and eternal matters of our faith.

We see right away, then, that this submission is limited to spiritual matters. The government of the church exists that “the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated” (art. 30). Church government in elders and pastors (the consistory) does not exist to tell us how to live every aspect of our lives but seeks to equip the saints for service: to edify the body that the unity of the church may become more and more Christlike and not manipulated by those who would use false teaching to destroy her (see Eph. 4:11–16).



## CHRIST'S CHURCH

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account

Many are surprised that a kind of egalitarianism is implied in this submission. The Reformed confessional heritage is that all the people of the congregation submit to these doctrines, including the member who has not taken the oath of office. Yes, it is true that there is a different level of submission that each party adheres to: the member, in the oaths of baptism and public confession of faith, assent to this doctrine, but the office-bearers have a particular calling to defend and proclaim these truths. Indeed, this places the ultimate responsibility of doctrinal purity on the shoulders of the consistories. However, members who are not in office are not excused from this responsibility, for they, too, say they believe the things taught in these confessions. They, too, will promote these truths in their homes, among their children, as they promised. They may even bind the conscience of a leadership that goes astray from the principal doctrines of

the Three Forms of Unity and teaches contrary to them.

In our corporate submission to the church's teaching, we gain a helpful insight into the nature of biblical doctrine. Often we have a false division in our minds: doctrine is either what I believe or what we believe. But this false dichotomy does not exist in Scripture. It exists only in various church communions. So, in the extreme, Rome calls her followers to believe because the pope or the councils of the church say (or have said) so. At the other extreme, non-confessional evangelicals may believe what they want because their hearts tell them so.

But we see that both the individual and corporate aspects of doctrinal belief can be satisfied even as we examine the contents of the earliest creeds. For example, the Apostles' Creed uses the first-person singular "I" when it summarizes everything that is "necessary for a Christian to believe" about God's promises in the gospel (Heidelberg Catechism,

Q. 22). Undoubtedly, due to the rise of heresies and errors concerning essential matters of Christianity, the Nicene Creed uses the first-person plural "we" to carefully define the parameters of orthodoxy.

Thus, doctrine can never be a mindless repetition of what we have been told but rather must be the truth of Scripture that we confess together from our hearts. It is true that only you really know what is in your heart. And no person can force another, inwardly, to believe what he really does not believe. This truth exposes the internal, personal side of faith; our preaching must instruct that we strive for it and live out the implications. We do not want dead orthodoxy (in this case, confession for the sake of confession).

But we also do not want disunity or chaos, for God is the author of peace and order, not confusion (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). The church is required to confess a unifying faith that binds us together in Christ, lest individual members, in the name of freedom, go off on a tangent and get lost in the doctrinal maze that deceives and destroys (2 Peter 2).

When Paul, Peter, and John write their letters to the churches they do not say, "Here are some helpful tips to make the church relevant or attractive to the world; here is how you attract young people or any other group of people inside or outside the church." No, the essence of their letters is this: "This is what we as Christians believe because Jesus has given us this office to teach and proclaim (see Matt. 28:19–20). With the passing of the apostolic age, we have their writings only in Scripture, not in some unknown or unfounded tradition.

But we do strive to submit to the doctrine they have passed on to us within these writings.<sup>1</sup> This requires a confession, for in confession we openly acknowledge that we hold to this truth and not what is false.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, we need to see this submission to doctrine as a beautiful thing. For the source of all true doctrine is not of man but of God; it is divine. The prophet Isaiah predicted that one day, the nations would come to the Lord's house, for "He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths" (Isa. 2:3). In a sense, this prophecy is fulfilled every time God's people are instructed and grow in the eternal truths of Scripture.

You will notice that this promise extends not only to what we believe but also the way we live. The teaching is about "His ways" and "His paths." This brings us to the second part of the submission Christians make as they participate in the life of the local body of Christ's church: submitting to its discipline.

The matter of church discipline—its limitations, purpose, and goals—are more fully explained in article 32, so I will not say much about this issue here. What I do want to focus on, though, is helpfully summarized for us in the fourth question of our first Form for the Public Profession of Faith:

Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

Why do we promise this? Is it because our church tells us to do so? Is it because the elders say we must? Notice that our confession, as we saw in the case of doctrine, points us

to the rule of Christ. For submitting to the discipline of the church is equivalent to "bowing [our] necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ" (art. 28). "The yoke of Jesus Christ" is an obvious reference to Matthew 11:29–30, where Jesus invites us to come under His sovereign protection, guidance, and care, even as we find that His yoke is easy and light to bear. That is, there is no other master that we would want to belong to, as He alone can save us from our sins and redeem us body and soul (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 34). Do we trust Him? Then, as Guido De Bres implies, we must also trust His church, and even its government to which we promised to submit, as He has commanded us (see Matt. 18:17–20).

But, you say, the church is fallible and the elders are sometimes wrong.<sup>3</sup> So be it; she is fallible and the elders are wrong. But how does that change our submission to Christ? How does that alter His commands to office-bearers to admonish, correct, and rebuke, all of which imply that we must heed them? It doesn't, and we know that well. We know that all authorities in life have a limited sphere of responsibility, but we are called to obey them just the same. They must answer to the Lord for what they have and what they have not done, but we are called to obey them.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, if the congregation, with our consistories, are diligent and faithful in the selection of faithful men to the office of elder, then we have to trust that the Lord will bless their guidance of us. Christ tells us in His Word: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). They watch out for our spiritual lives. They do not do so as perfectly as the

Great Shepherd, but, nevertheless, we listen, we heed, we submit to their wise counsel because they want to the best for us. And we should want the best for them as they strive to fulfill their office, so we submit, and by submitting to this lawful authority, we find it most profitable to us all.

Yes, let us learn from Christ, who submitted to His heavenly Father in all things that He may make the church His bride. Let us remember His love and faithfulness as not only our example but also our motivation in seeking to submit to His body, so that others may wonder at our Lord, who said of Himself: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

1. Including, of course, the rest of the canon which is "profitable for doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

2. See 1 Timothy 6:12–13. It is striking that Timothy is required to confess his faith, not just as an example for the church (3:5) or so that he might follow in Paul's footsteps (1:12), but because Christ *Himself* did so before Pilate (6:13).

3. That sinful office-bearers may abuse their authority, which they sometimes do (3 John 9–10), is an argument for their censure or removal, not the removal of the office and its authority.

4. Heidelberg Catechism, Q.104: *What is God's will for you in the fifth commandment?*

A.: That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I obey and submit to them, as is proper, when they correct and punish me; and also that I be patient with their failings—for through them God chooses to rule us.

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Celebration

# 450

Years of the Heidelberg Catechism

## Putting a Staff in the Shepherd's Hand Using the Heidelberg Catechism in Pastoring, Training, and Evangelism

Dr. John R.  
Sittema

**W**hen the editors asked me to write on the pastoral uses of the Heidelberg Catechism, I was grateful for the opportunity for two reasons. First, I love the old catechism so very much. It is a tender yet strong articulation of the biblically Reformed faith, and my use of it and appreciation for it have both grown immeasurably over the years of my ministry. Secondly, I was eager to put on paper some specific thoughts about the value of the catechism in certain target areas of the life of the Lord's church such as pastoral work, education/training, and evangelism. First, I offer a couple of true stories to introduce my discussion of the catechism.

This article first appeared in the April 1995 issue of *The Outlook*.

1 Q. WHAT IS YOUR  
IN LIFE AND IN

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When the editors asked me to write on the pastoral uses of the Heidelberg Catechism, I was grateful for the opportunity for two reasons. First, I love the old catechism so very much. It is a tender yet strong articulation of the biblically Reformed faith, and my *use* of it and appreciation for it have both grown immeasurably over the years of my ministry. Secondly, I was eager to put on paper some specific thoughts about the value of the catechism in certain target areas of the life of the Lord's church such as pastoral work, education/training, and evangelism. First, I offer a couple of true stories to introduce my discussion of the catechism.

"George" is a psychologist with a PhD from a state university in Texas. He is seminary trained, but his training was in a thoroughly Arminian theological school that was dispensational to boot. I met him when I was

researching Christian counselors in the area. During the course of our visits together, he inquired about our church, never having heard the name Christian Reformed before. One thing led to another, and we began to talk about creeds. He was critical at first, of course, because he had been trained to be. Then I brought him a copy of the Heidelberg Catechism. A week later he called. Not only was he reading it and learning more about biblical teaching than he ever had in seminary, but he was also using it as an outline for family devotions with his wife and teenage children. It's been many months now, and the family is still learning and growing. He still says it's the best thing since sliced bread.

"Bob" and "Billie" came to our congregation not too long ago. Both had been very involved in discipleship ministries in a previous congregation, having been instrumental in teaching and nurturing inquirers to the faith

and training new believers unto mature faith. But only recently had they themselves become Reformed. And, with a bit of theological disorientation, they were trying to grasp the depth and breadth of Reformed theology and covenant living. Every new insight brought smiles of joy, as they began to lay hold of the marvelous heritage so many Reformed believers take for granted. But when they saw the Heidelberg Catechism, first in worship, then in a booklet we gave them, they marveled. They were already devoted students of Scripture. But never had they grasped as clearly the unifying principle of all sound doctrine as when they laid hold of the Heidelberg Catechism and came face to face with Lord's Day 1. Bob said it well: "If I'd studied this years ago when I first was saved, I would have been able to avoid so many problems. It would have saved me and some of my subsequent disciples so much confusion, sloppy thinking, and resultant sloppy living."

I could tell you enough stories like these to provide encouraging and inspirational reading for months. I tell these two because we live in an age in which it is very easy for the people of God to take for granted their creedal heritage, an age in which Reformed believers will even say aloud that such creeds as the Heidelberg Catechism are outdated and irrelevant, and they ought to be kept in the unused back pages of the hymnal. The stories dispute that attitude. In fact, it is my contention in what follows that the Heidelberg Catechism is a wonderful tool Reformed people can and should use for a wide range of pastoral care and nurture within the body of Christ. By it, we can open the door for our people to know the depth and breadth and height of the scriptural truths we hold dear.

## The Catechism and Pastoral Care:

### Some Specific Suggestions

Lord's Day 1 is so rich, isn't it? I marvel at its wisdom and depth every time I confess it anew. I find it provides such a great overview of the daily worldview of the believer that I encourage all Reformed people to commit it to memory. And it is, accordingly, very beneficial for elders and ministers in pastoral uses. First of all, consider how it serves as an unshakable foundation for pastoral care. By suggesting that the touchstone for understanding biblical doctrine rightly is comfort, Reformed churches have avoided the extremes of a faith that exhibits cold intellectualism on the one hand and pure emotionalism on the other, aiming scriptural truth directly at the heart. In the real world of sin and misery, of brokenness and failure, of hurt and pain, we confess that we are comforted by our relationship to Christ. What an encouraging truth in an increasingly secular and hostile world and a great starting point for an elder visit to an individual or family that has recently struggled with the pains of life.

Further, think of the content of the comfort we confess: that I belong totally to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Several immediate pastoral crises our churches face today are addressed in these biblically shaped words. Think first of the reductionism of religion to a corner of life that this secular world foists upon us. Here is full-blown, all-of-life faith, a totalitarian surrender of the person to the sovereign majesty of our God! Then, note that wonderful word *belong*. In a world infatuated

with self-image and self-esteem, we confess that our very existence and purpose arise apart from ourselves in Christ. That's a great corrective for people wrestling with such issues. Finally, notice the verb tenses: "He *has* fully *paid* for all my sins . . . *has set* me free." That is wonderful stuff for the ongoing struggle of the Christian life: the desperate quest for assurance of salvation. Lord's Day 1 opens the curtain to a wonderful biblical perspective on that issue.

Before leaving Lord's Day 1, take a quick look at question and answer 2. Don't miss the threefold structure established there. Now, without overemphasizing the neat alliteration we sometimes use (sin–salvation–service, guilt–grace–gratitude), please note how honest to life such a breakdown really is. This is truly the experience of everyone who believes in Christ! It's not artificial, merely academic, or intellectual. All of us who are in Christ have come to know our sin and the resultant misery; all of us who are in Christ have found in Him all things necessary for our salvation; all of us who are in Christ understand that living the Christian life is ever and always only a response of gratitude, never a means to obtain anything. And simply by keeping the proper order, the sensitive elder will help God's people avoid a whole host of chronic pastoral problems surrounding the issues of works-righteousness, legalism, spiritual laziness, and the like.

#### *Lord's Days 2 and 34*

While I want to comment only very briefly on these Lord's Days, I do want to call your attention, as elders,

to the importance of being accurate on the use, or role of the law, in the life of the community of believers. I believe, with all my heart, that the error of the Pharisees is alive and well among us: we still deal with many people who are convinced that salvation is a fruit of obedience rather than the other way around. Being able to use the Catechism as a tool for the maintaining of pastoral balance—both for yourselves and for your people—is an inestimable blessing that enables us to avoid both legalism and its ugly stepsister, antinomianism.

#### *Lord's Day 7*

The definition of *faith* contained in these words is most helpful to people wrestling with the vitality of their own. Additionally, it is most helpful for elders who must deal with stubborn and rebellious individuals who are under discipline, yet claim faith, and thus thrust and parry with them. Herein we're reminded of that crucial biblical connection between faith and the Word. In other words, one cannot claim they are acting in faith if that faith makes any break with "everything God reveals in His Word."

#### *Lord's Day 9–10*

Can you think of a more beautiful way to assist God's people in expressing their deep-seated trust in God's providential care? These words are a precious confession with which you can join voices with the suffering; they are a rock-solid foundation to set beneath the fearful and timid as you seek to be an encouragement; and they are a strong corrective to those who dabble in games—and attitudes—of chance or gambling. Possible uses could include reminding

## These students grasp the spiritual principle that all of life is religion...

or reciting these words with believers who are struggling with bitterness because of financial reverses. I love one pastor's idea: he has questions 27–28, complete with textual support, drawn up in calligraphy (or perhaps on a computer and a laser printer), then framed and presented to every couple he unites in marriage. Hang it on the walls of your house.

### *Lord's Day 12*

These days, the word *Christian* is cheap. I watched a documentary on used car sales procedures the other night. A crook in Atlanta was pawning off lemons onto the buying public, and he knew it. But he was so sincere and convincing, in part because he told his potential pigeons that he was a “born-again Christian.” In a world like this, what a great tool Lord's Day 12 is to shape our use of the word! A comprehensive and thoroughly biblical view of life as office, life lived under the commission and mandate of the one who is our Lord and Master. And that truth is absolutely essential to set before your high school students and college-aged young people, wrestling as they are with the overwhelming issues of vocation and career choices at the ripe old age of eighteen or so.

Of course, I could go on and on with Lord's Day after Lord's Day, developing the pastoral/eldership uses of this wonderfully pastoral confession. Perhaps someone will commission just such a work. But for now, allow these few references

to stimulate you to do your own further study and exploration. Let me reiterate my basic point: We who are Reformed believers live within a confessing community of believers to whom God has entrusted a rich faith heritage. The Heidelberg Catechism is central to it. It would be foolish for those of us who are elders not to use this tool

- as a means to help our people give articulation and daily shape to their biblically founded faith in Jesus Christ
- as a corrective to the chronic struggles of the faith long ago addressed by our spiritual ancestors
- as a pastoral tool with which to encourage faith, confidence, and comfort for people who live in a world hostile to the kingdom of God

### **The Catechism and Education of God's People**

In his excellent high school (and adult) catechism textbook titled *Before the Face of God: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism*, Louis Praamsma summarizes well the reasons for the church to have and use creeds: (1) as a brief, concise summary of what the church believes; (2) as a refutation of all heresy; (3) as a teaching handbook for children and young people.

But is the Bible not sufficient? Certainly! The Bible has everything we need to know. The need for confessional writings can perhaps be best explained through an analogy. The Bible is much like a huge country through which we travel. It is so

large, in fact, that it is useful to have a map that shows direction to the most important places.

Many faulty maps have also been made of the Bible. Each false teaching has its preaching. Confessional writings warn of these dangerous teachings. The Catechism, then, has no other purpose than to mirror the main points of Holy Scripture. These words provide a good understanding of how creeds have historically been viewed among many confessionally Reformed churches. Consequently, I don't expect that I need to convince you that the Catechism is useful for education and training, both for children and adults. Nor do I expect that readers of *The Outlook* will need much of a reminder of the value of thorough indoctrination in the Catechism as a crucial means of developing faith within our youth.

However, I want to make a couple of practical points in this section. First, I want to make the observation (based on rather subjective criteria, I'll acknowledge) that the most spiritually mature young people I've met are young people who know well and can formulate their faith according to the concepts and themes of the Heidelberg Catechism. Several college professors I know who teach at Christian colleges tell me the same. The freshmen who enter their Bible (or philosophy) courses who have been thoroughly trained in the Heidelberg Catechism are head-and-shoulders above the majority in both comprehension and integration of faith and life. (And contrary to popular belief, the professors and I agree that students who are well-versed in the Catechism are the rare exception, not the general rule.) These students already know the fundamental life principles of Scripture, because the Catechism is based upon them. They already know the underlying fundamentals of a Christian worldview, because the Catechism builds upon such in

Lord's Day 12. These students grasp the spiritual principle that all of life is religion, in contradistinction to modern dualism, because the Heidelberg Catechism articulates a biblical faith that is as broad as life itself. In short, the Heidelberg Catechism is a wonderful and hearty confession of a Calvinistic worldview.

Second, a thorough knowledge of the Heidelberg Catechism provides students with a working apologetic. That is to say, it equips the students to articulate, explain, and defend the Reformed faith over against challenges, opposition, and questions. Where I live, the Reformed faith is always on the defensive against the aggressive challenges of anti-Calvinistic Arminian dispensationalism; and biblical Christianity of any confessional formulation (and especially Calvinism) is always on the defensive against the unbelieving challenges of modern post-Christian secularism. In all my years of ministry, the only Christians I've known who have been genuinely effective apologists for the Reformed faith are men and women who have been thoroughly shaped by the Heidelberg Catechism or a similar Reformed creed. And by that, I mean that they have been, on the one hand, articulate and persuasive in convincing non-Reformed Christians of the biblical basis of Calvinism, and, on the other, they have been effective in explaining in a clear, concise, and unified way the biblical Christian faith to those outside of it.

Why is that? I suspect it is so because of the inner strength of the Catechism, namely, a simple reproduction of biblical basics. As you know, the Heidelberg Catechism is an extraordinarily simple document, linking explanations of the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. These explain the content of saving faith, the shape

of covenant living, and the focus of biblical piety, respectively. But the educational genius of the Catechism also lies in the introductory questions to these main sections. Lord's Days 1–6 are indispensable to lay open a person's heart prior to any discussion of real faith and what it believes. Lord's Days 32–33 are a penetrating articulation of the whole matter of the relation between faith and works and of the nature of true conversion, both essential prerequisites to any instruction in obedience to God's will as new converts) and as a checkpoint for elders, who must ascertain the presence of genuine faith as they open the table of the Lord to true believers. And, not to be missed is the Catechism's insistence that genuine religion is *of the heart*, Calvin's marvelous biblical emphasis that will not allow for the mere construction of a religious formalism, but lays claim to all that a man or woman is, does, thinks, feels, and says. Indeed, keeping that point central in the Catechism forces elders to keep it central as they pastor people from the heart, to the heart, for the heart.

*Second, the Heidelberg Catechism is a wonderful tool for training new disciples.* As I suggested in the previous section, I believe its comprehensive doctrinal scope, as well as its apologetic usefulness, equips new disciples to know and defend their newly confessed faith. New disciples of Christ often face inordinate challenges from their former unbelieving life—including friends, relatives, and sometimes

even immediate family members. Careful training in the Catechism equips them to answer these doctrinal challenges and, at the same time, bear careful witness to these beloved people to the faith in Christ that now lives within them. I have used it to train people one-on-one. A class in the Heidelberg Catechism for adults is a high priority of our local church ministry, which has an aggressive evangelistic setting and focus. It is simply a marvelous tool!

Furthermore, the Catechism confronts head-on the main idol enthroned in the heart of every human: the self (see LD 2, Q. 5; 3, Q. 8; 5, Q. 12–14). By so doing, it serves as an effective tool to penetrate and transform people who have been locked in the loop of their own unbelieving way of thinking (note the importance of this in Romans 12:1–2).

Finally, the Catechism provides thorough grounding in the biblical basis for the doctrines confessed. And, make no mistake about this, the citations of Scripture printed as footnotes to the Catechism are crucial for those being disciplined. It establishes the fact that the clear basis of doctrine is Scripture rather than the church—this particular church, this particular minister, or anything else.

*Third, the Catechism provides a careful articulation of the proper place and role of the law in the life of the Christian.* So many people first hear the good news of Christ with ears accustomed to hearing the legalism

of counterfeit Christianity. They've lived their entire lives hearing how they must become better in order to get right with God. They've agonized, as did Luther, over the curse of God upon their sins, and even come to hate the God they view as so horribly unfair. How remarkably fresh and liberating the true gospel must sound! And to be able to point them to a carefully worked out confession that is nearly a half-millennium old is of great comfort, because it assures them that they are not, in fact, wandering from the faith (even if they've been in a church), but are, in fact, just now tasting the joys of life in Christ, which true believers throughout all the centuries have celebrated!

*Fourth, I must say a word about teaching and learning language and hermeneutics. Those of us who grew up in Christ learned the language of Zion in our homes. That is, we learned to speak of faith, of unbelief, of sin, salvation, the gospel, conversion,*

justification, sanctification, the law, the means of grace, Christian piety, and prayer. For those who did not grow up in such an environment, such language must be learned somewhere else. It is, frankly, difficult to learn a coordinated and unified theology from the straight reading of Scripture. It is also difficult to read Scripture without a theological vocabulary. Learning the language of God's Word from such a tool as the Catechism aids greatly in learning how to read the Bible. Again, learning how to approach the Bible as the Catechism approaches it and uses it aids greatly in teaching a method of reading and approaching the Bible, thus teaching a Reformed hermeneutic right from the start.

*Finally, we must understand the critical role the Heidelberg Catechism plays in forming a consciousness of the church within the heart and mind of each disciple. Remember, the "church consciousness" of most North American people is thoroughly unbiblical. They view the church as optional, a human*

invention, a voluntary association. How spiritually invigorating it is to shape a new disciple's faith with an understanding of the church as the living body of Jesus Christ, which He is gathering according to His Word and Spirit and equipping with His gifts to accomplish His mission on earth! The confessional material set forth in Lords Days 21 and 48, for example, develops a deep commitment to Christ in and with the local body of believers, and, at the same time, an abiding love for the church universal of which every true believer is a living member. And that's a fresh component of the transformed mind of all who are new in Christ.

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Lord's Day 21

Q & A 54

Q. What do you believe concerning "the holy catholic church"?

A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith.

And of this community I am and always will be a living member.

Q & A 55

Q. What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?

A. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and joyfully

for the service and enrichment of the other members.

# Bible Studies on Romans

## Lesson 24: A Remnant of Israel Remains

### Romans 11:1-24

Rev. Wybren  
Oord

All the benefits and blessings that the Jews received had led them to make certain assumptions about their salvation. They became apathetic about God and took greater interest in their customs and traditions. They sought to obtain righteousness through works rather than grace, by position rather than promise. Having rejected the promised Messiah, they failed to obtain what they believed they already had. Paul has already neatly summarized all the benefits the Jews received in Romans 2. He has declared that such benefits do not guarantee salvation to the physical descendants of Abraham. God has not bound Himself. Does that mean that God has rejected His people?

When Jesus was presented to them as the king of the Jews, they shouted, “Crucify Him!” When Pilate declared Jesus to be innocent of any crime, they shouted, “His blood is on us and on our children!” (Matt. 27:25). After the resurrection, God’s punishment came upon those who refused to acknowledge that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. This Messiah had been promised in the very books the Jews held dear: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Paul quotes from all three (Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Psalms) to make certain that his readers understand how serious their rejection of the Christ is. Paul ends by quoting from Psalm 69, pointing out

how the hearts of those who reject the preaching of the gospel are being hardened:

May the table set before  
them become a snare;  
may it become retribution  
and a trap.  
May their eyes be darkened  
so they cannot see,  
and their backs be bent  
forever.

—Rom. 11:22–23

This quote from the Psalms should have pricked the hearts of many Jews who knew that in this passage David called upon God to punish his enemies. Paul applies the prayer of David to the people of Israel. Those who were familiar with the event that took place on that first Good Friday would quickly recall the words that came before Paul’s quote: “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst” (Psalm 69:21).

Yet the situation was not hopeless. Paul explains that God, who is rich in grace, had not excluded all the direct descendants of Abraham from His salvation plan. As a nation, they had rejected the One whom God had sent to save them; as individuals, the Holy Spirit was drawing in the elect from every tribe and nation, including men and women from among the Jews. For

proof, Paul points first to himself. He was a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. God had taken special measures to convert Paul the Jew to Paul the Christian. If God had rejected the Jews completely, He would not have confronted Paul on the road to Damascus and given him the task of spreading the gospel.

In addition, Paul directed his readers to the Old Testament and the prophet Elijah, who had just challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Certainly the God of Israel had shown Himself to be superior to Baal. Even so, Queen Jezebel remained unconvinced and threatened to kill Elijah. Fleeing to Horeb, Elijah thought he was the only person left who was faithful to God. Paul reminds the Jews of Elijah’s appeal: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me” (Rom. 11:3). Paul asks, “And what was God’s answer to him? I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (Rom. 11:4). God assured Elijah that there was still a remnant—seven thousand men who had not bowed down to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Paul mentions this example to show that even in the darkest days of Old Testament Israel, God still had a remnant of people who served Him.

And finally, Paul needed but to look around to see that even in his day, thousands of Jews were turning to

## **We must have an awareness of the depth of our sin and misery, a hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and a turning to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for reconciliation with God.**

Jesus Christ for salvation. As you read through the book of Acts, you cannot help but marvel over how God draws a people unto Himself. Despite the rejection of Israel as a whole, many individual Jews responded to the apostles' preaching. They are the remnant chosen by grace, the elect who have received the right standing with God that Israel as a whole sought but failed to find. Paul is very quick to point out that salvation comes to the Jews by grace, not as something they can claim as a right. Neither works nor heritage can play any role in salvation. It is all by grace alone through Christ alone.

### **The Hardening of the Heart**

The elect among the Jews received the grace of God and believed the gospel message. The others were hardened. As we saw in Romans 1, in hardening individuals God is dealing with fallen sinful creatures—not with innocent people. The hardening of their hearts is a judicial punishment where God abandons the sinner to his own corrupt, depraved nature. “The LORD works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster” (Prov. 16:4).

God has two “lets”: “Let the righteous turn to Me,” and “Let him who is filthy remain filthy.” Even as the sun melts wax and hardens clay, so the preaching of the gospel either draws a person to receive Christ or turn away from Him. Those are the only two responses.

Unfortunately, the church often finds itself in the same position as the Jews in Paul's day. Both in the pulpit and in the pew, we have grown apathetic in our Christianity. We make certain assumptions that if we go to church, support Christian schools, attend an occasional Bible study, and live decent lives, then God will have no reason to be angry with us. We assume our salvation because we made profession of faith somewhere years ago, and we believe in the perseverance of the saints. While we may hold fast to the doctrines of the Reformed faith, they, in and of themselves, are not guarantees of salvation. Just because you believe in the perseverance of the saints does not make you a saint. We must have an awareness of the depth of our sin and misery, a hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and a turning to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for reconciliation with God.

Fortunately, there is hope for those who have been hardened to the gospel. Paul writes that one of his goals in preaching to the Gentiles is so that some of the Jews might turn to Christ: “Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them” (Rom. 11:13). God used Israel's rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah to scatter converted Jews. They, in turn, brought the gospel message to the Gentiles. The hardening of Israel worked for the good of the Gentiles. In the Old Testament, the only way for a Gentile to become a follower of Jehovah was to become part of Israel with all her customs, traditions, and

laws. When the gospel was proclaimed to the New Testament Gentiles, they were no longer required to become entangled in the bondage of Judaism. As Christians, and not as proselyte Jews, they freely came to Christ believing His finished work on the cross as sufficient for salvation. Grace alone, without works!

### **Broken Off Branches**

Paul then explains a most unnatural event: the grafting of branches onto the olive tree. Certainly grafting is common enough. What is uncommon is that Paul describes the branch of a wild olive shoot being grafted into the cultivated, good tree. Then he goes on to describe branches that had been broken off being regrafted into the same tree.

Although this may never happen in any greenhouse, Paul explains this is what God has done by bringing into His church believers from both the Jews and Gentiles. Paul compares the Jews to good branches growing on a holy tree. They are being nurtured and fed by the tree's holy roots. If the root is holy, so are the branches. As a nation, the Jews had been broken off from the Tree because they rejected Jesus as the Savior. As Paul pointed out earlier, not all Jews rejected Jesus Christ, and God, in His grace, grafted individual believing Jews back into the Tree: “If they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Rom. 11:23).

The Gentiles were never part of the Tree. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). Gentiles were part of a wild olive tree growing elsewhere. God, in His grace, brought the message of salvation to the Gentiles and grafted them into the Tree so that they, too, might have eternal life. God was converting the Gentiles into fruit-bearing branches. Both Jew and

Gentile branches have been brought into the church. Both Jew and Gentile branches feed from the holy root. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Paul warns his Gentile readers not to consider themselves superior to the Jews: “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches” (Rom. 11:17–18). It could become a great temptation for a converted Gentile to boast in his position. After all, God had cut from the tree a Jewish branch and grafted in its place a wild, Gentile branch. Gentile Christians should remember the rich heritage into which they had been grafted: the Old Testament and the covenants.

Even more important, both converted Jews and converted Gentiles should remember that both are branches within the church of Jesus Christ only by grace. Neither branch has any cause for boasting. God is the keeper of the orchard. He is the very source of their lives.

If God would not spare the natural branches when they became boastful of their position and rejected His grace, neither will He spare those whom He has grafted into the Tree if they do not continue in His kindness. They may have confessed their faith;

now they are called to persevere in that faith by bearing the fruits of it. If they begin to live contrary to their calling as followers of Christ, they, too, shall be cut off.

What a warning that is for the Christian church today! We have been given a rich heritage and all too often assume that entitles us to the blessings of God. We do well to remember that it is by grace alone that we are saved, not by works. May we ever strive to bear good fruit as we keep our focus on the cross of Jesus Christ, lest we, too, be cut off from the Tree as were the majority of Abraham’s descendants.



## Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. What was Israel trying to obtain? How did they go about trying to obtain this? What was the result?
2. Do you think the cry “His blood be upon us and our children” came true?
3. Contrast Romans 10:14–15 with Romans 11:8–9.
4. Give three proofs that God has not rejected the Jews entirely.
5. Is the hardening of the heart a sin or a punishment?
6. Does the church today find itself hardened as the Jews were? How can we avoid this?
7. Is there hope for the hardened ones?
8. Is there a parallel between the hardening of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:16) and the hardening of Israel? Why were they hardened? What was the result?
9. Explain the root/tree/branch metaphor and its explanation.
10. Was the warning of verses 18–21 necessary then? Is it now?

# Bible Studies on Romans

## Lesson 25: The Salvation of Israel

### Romans 11:25–32

Rev. Wybren  
Oord

What is the role of the nation of Israel in the world? What is the role of Israel in the church? What will be the role of Israel in the end times? These questions are a great mystery and have been debated through the generations. Surrounded by countries that would like nothing more than its annihilation, Israel has long enjoyed the status of being an ally of the United States. Although at times she seems capable of defending herself quite well, the backing of a world super power has certainly been beneficial.

Televangelists often express a great interest in Israel—especially when they speak about the great apocalypse. Therein lies the mystery. Paul writes that “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:25). Paul opened the chapter by describing the judicial blindness that came over all but the elect of the Jewish nation. It was, then, a partial hardening of the direct descendants of Abraham, not a hardening of the entire nation. What Paul reveals in this section of Romans 11 is that this is the way it will continue until the Lord returns. Each new generation of Jews will prove God’s divine truth: they have become hardened to the gospel—but only partially so. There will always be a remnant whom God will graft into the olive tree according to the election of grace until “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

### Three Views

Commentaries disagree about whom “all the Jews” are who will be converted when the number of the Gentiles is completed.

1. *All the Jews without exception.* Those living in Paul’s time and all the generations that follow will be saved, including the millions of Jews living today. It is obvious that Jews today, as in the days of Paul, find the cross to be an offense. They continue to deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised to their forefathers. By failing to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, they also reject the Father who sent Him. “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came here from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me’” (John 8:42).

According to this view, the Jews, both during Paul’s time and today, are, as a nation, still in some way beloved of God. God had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of whom they are physical descendants. Through this connection, God still regards the entire nation as His people whom He loves.

This interpretation seems to ignore the context of the passage. The “they” who are elect and loved by God in verse 28 are those Paul had already referred to in the preceding verses. They are the “all Israel” that God in His grace has called out of their hardened state and by the Holy Spirit led to confess Christ as Savior. Repeatedly the Bible insists that no one is righteous, no not one. Repeatedly the Bible insists that the only way to

become righteous is by being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Interviewer Larry King’s oft repeated question “Do the Jews need Jesus?” must be answered with a resounding yes! There is not one way of salvation for the Jews and another for Gentiles. They must place their faith and hope in the fulfilled promises given to the patriarchs. If not, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for them (Matt. 10:14–15).

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica:

For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last (1 Thess. 2:14–16).

The Jews whose hearts God has hardened are not loved by God. On the contrary, they displease God and will face His wrath.

2. *The Jewish people as a whole will be converted to Christ in the last days.* This seems to be the view of most Pentecostal and Baptist churches. Just before Christ comes again, there will be a great awakening among the nation of Israel, and all Jews will call upon the name of Jesus Christ, seeking their salvation through Him. Once converted to Christ, the great battle of Armageddon will take place, and Christ will return to rule the world from Jerusalem.

This view is certainly more in line with the context of the passage, as it interprets “all Israel” to mean every Jew living in Israel just prior to Christ’s return. Contrary to the first view, in which all Jews will be saved regardless of what they believe, this view insists that salvation must come through Christ. Those seeking to usher in the kingdom of God would make missions to Israel a huge priority.

However, it is difficult to understand why only end-time Jews would be loved by God “on account of the patriarchs.” Why would God pass over the innumerable generations that perished in their unbelief in all the centuries prior to Christ’s return, converting only those in the last days? They, too, were children of the patriarchs. It is difficult to see how this particular generation of Jews living just before Christ’s second coming could be called “all Israel.” Just think how miniscule their number is compared to the many generations of millions of hardened Jews that have passed into eternity without Christ for the last two thousand years.

Finally, Paul writes in the present tense. “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies. . . . They are loved” (Rom. 11:28). Paul is addressing the situation as it exists not only in the future but in the present as well.

3. *Jews are being saved in Paul’s generation and in every generation that follows for as long as the world shall last.* These Jews were at first enemies of Christ, calling for His blood to be upon them and their children. Children brought up in the Jewish religion are taught that Jesus may have been a good teacher, but He is not the promised Messiah. They still seek the fulfillment of the promises given in the Old Testament. Paul had known a time when he hated the gospel and persecuted the followers of Jesus Christ. In God’s grace, he learned to love the gospel. He had learned that it was the power of salvation.

In the context of Romans 9–11, those whom the Father calls to Himself out of the nation of Israel are loved for the patriarchs’ sake. God’s word to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has not failed (Rom. 9:6–27). His promise to them has been fulfilled (and continues to be fulfilled) in their descendants, whom God calls by His grace. They are the elect of God, chosen already before the foundations of the world. They are the loved of God. Certainly that can be said of only those whom God has graciously chosen to be His people through His Son, Jesus Christ.

This interpretation gives a more satisfactory meaning to the word “so” in verse 26. Earlier Paul had written that “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Rom. 9:6). In the Old Testament, not every Israelite was saved—only those who believed in the promise yet to be fulfilled. Paul pointed out earlier that there was at one time only a remnant of Israel that remained faithful (Rom. 11:4). Now the promise has been fulfilled in God’s Son’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. By calling out of every generation of hardened Jews a remnant unto Himself and declaring them to be the true Israel, God is ever faithful to His word.

Grafted into the true Israel are all who believe the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christ. They are the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Because they believe the promises, all Israel shall be saved—not some of them or even most of them, but all of those to whom God has shown mercy.

## **Objects of Mercy**

Paul goes on to remind the Gentile Christians that they, too, are objects of God’s mercy. Once they had been disobedient; they had been transgressors of the law. Salvation was granted to them not because they were better than the Jews but because they also are objects of mercy. It should humble us to think that we who are wretched sinners are saved by the grace of God. It is nothing in and of ourselves, whether Jew or Gentile. Through the disobedience of the Jews, the gospel came to the Gentiles that, through the gospel, they might be saved.

How great is the mercy of God! Although the vast majority of Jews and Gentiles remain hostile to the gospel, God calls His church out of them. He sets apart from the world a people unto Himself out of every tribe and nation to be His. Let the Gentile Christian never forget that God’s purpose for showing mercy is that through them the Jews may be reached and saved (Rom. 11:11–15).

## **The Doxology**

Paul began Romans 9 with a deep sorrow over the many Jews who rejected God’s grace by rejecting God’s Son. He ends this section rejoicing over the way God has made salvation possible for both Jews and Gentiles.

In Romans 11, Paul clearly explains how Israel's belief is partial in that some will be saved (vv. 1–10); it is purposeful for the conversion of the Gentiles (vv. 11–16); and it is temporary, as by God's grace many may come (vv. 25–32). All this leads Paul to burst into praise to God for His incomprehensible character:

Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments;  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever!

Amen (vv. 33–36).

Both *wisdom* and *knowledge* are specific terms. Both are infinite, and we catch a small glimpse of them in God's dealings with the Jews. We can only stand in awe of a great God who, by hardening the Jews' hearts, brought the gospel to us. In His wisdom, God used His infinite knowledge to work out a means for our salvation.

Paul quotes from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Job to support his claim that no one can fathom the mind of God. Nor can any human teach God or claim that God owes them anything. He concludes his doxology by declaring that all glory be given to God forever, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

Soli Deo Gloria!



**Rev. Wybren Oord**

is the co-pastor of Trinity United Reformed Church in Lethbridge, AB, and the editor of *The Outlook*.

## Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. What is the great mystery that Paul refers to in the opening verse of this passage?
2. Explain the three approaches to this passage. How do they fit in context with the rest of what Paul has written?
3. Explain how each interpretation of this passage would affect the way those adopting it would view the nation of Israel.
4. How do you understand the little word “so” in Romans 11:26?
5. What dual purpose do the Jews have for the Christian church?
6. What connection do you see behind man's disobedience and God's mercy?
7. Can we make any claims on God? Do we possess anything that we have not received from God?
8. In what different ways does Paul describe the greatness of God in his doxology?

# A Full Size Ark and It Floats!

## An intrepid Dutchman builds his second floating ark; this time it's humungous!

Frans  
Gunnink

**T**In 2008, I interviewed Dutchman Johan Huibers for *Creation* magazine.<sup>1</sup> He had built a floating replica of Noah's ark, which, though only half-size (so it could traverse Dutch canals), was still considered immense by most people who saw it.

Revisiting him some three years later, it turns out that this was, in his view, only a "practice project." Johan has been busy for the last three years with his real project, envisioned from day one—a *full-size* floating ark. It was almost done when I saw him; by the time this article appears, it should be ready to launch.

Johan Huibers is a man with considerable charisma. Anyone who meets him will not readily forget his down-to-earth but enthusiastic way of explaining the gospel and his vision behind his ark, which has remained undimmed. As he often says—God does not ask if you are fit for the task, just whether you are available. And that is what Johan lives by. The owner of a construction business, the fact that his vision of the first ark replica was realized meant that his local bank was prepared to finance this second one, for which the costs will be considerable. However, the first ark drew 600,000 visitors in almost three years, no mean feat considering the population of the Netherlands is a mere 17 million. Johan made no effort to market it, either, apart from a life-size polyester model of either a giraffe or elephant at several of the entrance roads of the town where the ark was moored, along with a large sign. Local churches supplied volunteers to help man the exhibit.



Johan Huibers

Johan says that only about half the visitors were Christians, and that it would sometimes lead to great conversations. Johan recalls a talk with a group of firemen who came to survey the security/safety issues at the ark: "They were tough guys, the type who dare to enter a burning house to rescue people. But, I asked them, 'are you *really* courageous? Do you dare to kneel tonight in your room if God wants to show you who He is? I'll bet you would not dare to do that,' I challenged them! They had to laugh, but you don't know what God does and how or whether He will use it. I leave that part in His hands."

The difference in size has a big effect; Huibers's first, smaller ark was built using 1200 trees, while the new one requires 12,000 Swedish pine trees. (Huibers says that some translations of the Bible say that God ordered it to be built of "resin wood," which he thinks was pine.) His ark, to comply

with bureaucratic restrictions, has been built on 21 floating transport barges which measure 18.75 x 9.5 metres (60 x 30 ft.). They were welded together, two on top of one another, and then joined.

Huibers kept to the general dimensions in the Bible but had to adapt some of the details. Instead of three floors, he installed seven so as to use the space available. The massive vessel, as high as a three-story building, is 138 meters (450 ft.) long, matching the biblical description using a common cubit of about 45 centimeters (18 in.). The width and height (30 x 23 meters) are somewhat bigger, even, than would make it the exact proportions of the biblical ark for that cubit scale (about 138 x 23 x 14 m., or 450 x 75 x 45 ft.). Asked whether this degree of inexactitude mattered, he answered in his usual friendly and disarming manner: "The people who know the proportions better than I do already know all about Noah's ark. I want to reach all the others."

Inside, Johan's ark will have real geese, cows, and other animals, as well as life-size polyester "wold" animals, including some dinosaurs and even a "teenage" T. rex. There will be two partly covered amphitheatres available for choir performances and lectures. The tour which visitors can follow will be signed via elephant "footprints" on the floor. As they tour the interior of the ark, visitors will pass by hydraulically powered moving models and robots of Noah's family and other biblical characters, aimed at bringing the Bible's history to life.



Johan wants to promote the message even to those people who will merely observe only the outside of this not-to-miss-ark in its full stature. “Many people will not visit a church, or even enter the ark,” he says. “But when they see it, it preaches to them already . . . the flood really happened.” He believes that it is an overt display of God’s love and His willingness to save those who will turn to Him.

### Hurdles for a Modern-Day Noah

Unlike Noah, one would think, Huibers had to have his ark conform to a vast array of rules and regulations. For example, fire safety standards meant having to apply three coats of fire-retardant varnish. Also, a special “mooring anchor” had to be installed, so as to qualify the construction as a “building” (houseboat), rather than a vessel.<sup>2</sup>

Bureaucracy was also the reason for having to build it on floating steel barges as well as to install a heavy steel reinforcing frame. Lest critics claim that this is proof that it would have been impossible to build a wooden vessel that size, Huibers, an experienced worker with wood, says

it would actually have been much easier to make a wooden ark.<sup>3</sup>

And then there were formal complaints from some neighbors that the vessel was obstructing their view—even though, as a more sympathetic neighbor noted, overlooking a shipyard was never exactly the most beautiful view. In any case, like all vessels constructed in such shipyards, it was destined to move on in due course. Not only that—all the neighbors’ houses were due to be torn down soon for redevelopment, which has likely already happened by the time this article goes to press.

Unlike Huibers’s smaller ark, this huge ship cannot readily tour the canals and rivers of the Netherlands. So it will mostly stay moored in Dordrecht (also known as Dordt) near Rotterdam, where it was built. But Johan has bigger plans.

### Taking the Ark to the World

Johan has reportedly written to Boris Johnson, London’s mayor, for permission to have the ark sail to visit London in 2012 during the Olympic games. He has had investors from Texas urging him to take it to Galveston and has even had discussions with business associates in Israel, where his construction company also has active interests. He says, smiling: “The Israelis are curious, but they say it’s not a Christian ark, it’s a Jewish ark. They say I ‘stole’ it.” Of course, both Jews and Gentiles are descended from Noah.

When I saw it, the ark was not yet open for visitors. But scores of people were already turning up every day, through the unsought publicity about this world “first”—an ark that is not only life-sized, but actually floating at sea and able to traverse oceans, potentially to be seen in many countries.

As Johan Huibers sees it, his full-size replica ark is not only a message to unbelievers or Christians who doubt Genesis. It is a message to all Christians to do something with our faith. He says:

“It is so important that we pass on our faith and what we have learned on to others, not keep it to ourselves. Even though you are not perfect yet, yes, even when you might miss the mark in many aspects, just put hands and feet to your Christianity and put it into practice.”

For details about visiting the Huibers ark in the Netherlands, see [www.arcofnoah.org](http://www.arcofnoah.org) ([www.arkvannoach.com](http://www.arkvannoach.com) in Dutch).

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*Big meets small*

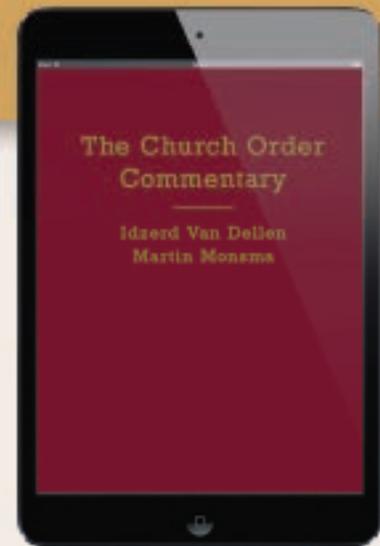
*Music Association Crescendo from Sliedrecht aboard Noah’s Ark!*

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This year marks the 450th anniversary of the first publication of the Heidelberg Catechism, a creed that arose out of the Protestant Reformation in Germany during the sixteenth century. An anniversary, it is, that ought not to pass unnoticed—especially by those heirs of the Great Reformation who still today profit from Heidelberg Catechism preaching...every Sunday.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary is pleased to sponsor this special conference on the Heidelberg Catechism, commemorating its 450th "birthday."

# A Word from the Reformed Fellowship Board President

Myron  
Rau

**F**or more than sixty years, Reformed Fellowship has dedicated itself to the propagation and defense of the Reformed faith. Christians committed to and concerned about the Reformed faith have given of their prayers, their time, their talents, and their finances to make that possible. They have read *The Outlook* and the various books and have used the Bible study materials published by Reformed Fellowship. The Lord has richly blessed Reformed Fellowship throughout these many years. But is Reformed Fellowship and *The Outlook* magazine still relevant and effective in our present age?

The Reformed Fellowship board is thankful and encouraged that in 2012, ten thousand books and more than three thousand copies of *Life in Christ* catechism books were shipped out. This was the second year that the catechism curriculum was available through Reformed Fellowship, in cooperation with First

United Reformed Church of Chino, California, which produces it. The Chino consistory has since received requests to translate the catechism material into foreign languages as well.

Also throughout 2012, the Reformed Fellowship board received various requests to translate some of our books into foreign languages. In addition, the board has entertained requests to reproduce some articles that were published in *The Outlook*, and some of those requests were from foreign countries. The board is encouraged and excited that Reformed Fellowship is being used to promote the Reformed faith not only in North America but also throughout the world.

Like most other magazines, *The Outlook* has seen a decline in subscriptions. More than fifty subscriptions go to readers in foreign countries. To keep up with the times, the board has made it possible to have online subscriptions. Our editor continues to work diligently to provide excellent articles from various writers.

In the past year, Reformed Fellowship has also been able to make available its first publication of the United Reformed Church Directory. In addition, a new and sufficient supply of the blue *Psalter Hymnal* is available for those churches and individuals who continue to use them.

Henry Gysen has commendably served the Reformed Fellowship board as its president for a number of years while also serving as general manager. Henry has served the maximum time as a board member according to the by-laws but will continue to serve as general manager. He keeps the board abreast of modern technology so that we can exercise good stewardship, resulting in financial savings for the organization in its printing and distribution costs.

By increasing our membership and our readership, and with the resulting increase in revenue, Reformed Fellowship can continue promoting the Reformed faith throughout the world and publish additional books as opportunities are presented to us.

For the propagation of the Reformed faith, you, our readers and members, can help by encouraging others to

become members and also by promoting *The Outlook*. Let's together be excited about promoting and defending the Reformed faith through Reformed Fellowship, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. To God be the glory for what He is doing through you and this small organization.

**Myron Rau**

*President, Reformed Fellowship Board*

Chadd M. Sheffield speaks with Pastor Brian Najapfour regarding what he has learned from the Puritans and Reformers about prayer through his work on *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer*, which he coedited with Dr. Joel Beeke and published with Reformation Heritage Books in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Born and reared in the Philippines, Pastor Najapfour holds a ThM in historical theology from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. From 2001 until his coming to PRTS in 2006, he served as a pastor-teacher in the Philippines. In October 2012, he became the pastor of Dutton United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan. He and his wife, Sarah, have a daughter, Anna.

## **1. How has your prayer life grown since you wrote and edited this book and fleshed out the doctrines taught by these Reformers and Puritans?**

Before answering your question, allow me to first express my heartfelt gratitude for this privilege of being interviewed by you. By God's grace, since I started this project, I have noticed a growth in my prayer life. However, I realize that the more I study the subject of prayer, the more I see my own prayerlessness. And the more I see my prayerlessness, the more I realize my great need of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

Indeed, my study of the subject has made me more aware of two basic truths: first, because of my indwelling sin, my soul acts unfriendly toward

prayer; and second, because of my indwelling sin, I need the Holy Spirit's assistance. For me to be able to pray, therefore, I have to constantly remind my soul that prayer is not a foe but a friend. Prayer is such a difficult work that it requires strong discipline. Martin Luther is not exaggerating when he declares that prayer is "the hardest work of all." I am not embarrassed to admit that sometimes I find it more enjoyable to play basketball than to pray to God. Sometimes prayer becomes boring to me. Writing in his treatise *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, John Bunyan understands what I mean here when he says:

May I but speak my own experience, and from that tell you the difficulty of praying to God as I ought; it is enough to make you poor, blind, carnal men, to entertain strange thoughts of me. For, as for my heart, when I go to pray, I find it so loath to go to God, and when it is with him, so loath to stay with him, that many times I am forced in my prayers; *first* to beg of God that he would take mine heart, and set it on himself in Christ, and when it is there, that he would keep it there (Ps. 86:11). Nay, many times I know not what to pray for, I am so blind, nor how to pray, I am so ignorant; only (blessed be grace) the *Spirit helps our infirmities* (Rom. 8:26).

Commenting on this quote, Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin notes, "From personal experience, Bunyan well knew the allergic reaction of the old nature to the presence of God. So were it not for the Spirit, none

would be able to persevere in prayer." Since my indwelling sin makes me unfriendly and even ignorant toward the necessity of prayer, I need the assistance of the Spirit. Why? Because in the words of Bunyan, a "man without the help of the Spirit cannot so much as pray once; much less, continue . . . in a sweet praying frame." O my blessed Holy Spirit, give me more grace to pray!

## **2. What caused you to choose the religious leaders you did instead of ancient writers like Augustine or modern ones like Donald S. Whitney?**

It was not until I came to Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in 2006 that I *really* noticed my own prayerlessness. When I came to this seminary, the first thing I observed was its godly atmosphere. I was particularly impressed by the prayerful life of its staff. I remember one day after hearing Dr. Joel R. Beeke pray, I felt I had not prayed before, and I also became curious about his prayer life. I, of course, found out that the Reformers and the Puritans had greatly influenced this man's prayer life. I then began to investigate the teachings of these Reformers and Puritans on prayer with a desire to learn more how to pray. In fact, most of the papers I wrote for my ThM program were about prayer. The chapters I contributed to the coedited book were originally papers written for this program. My thesis itself was about prayer—"The Very Heart of Prayer": Reclaiming John Bunyan's Spirituality."

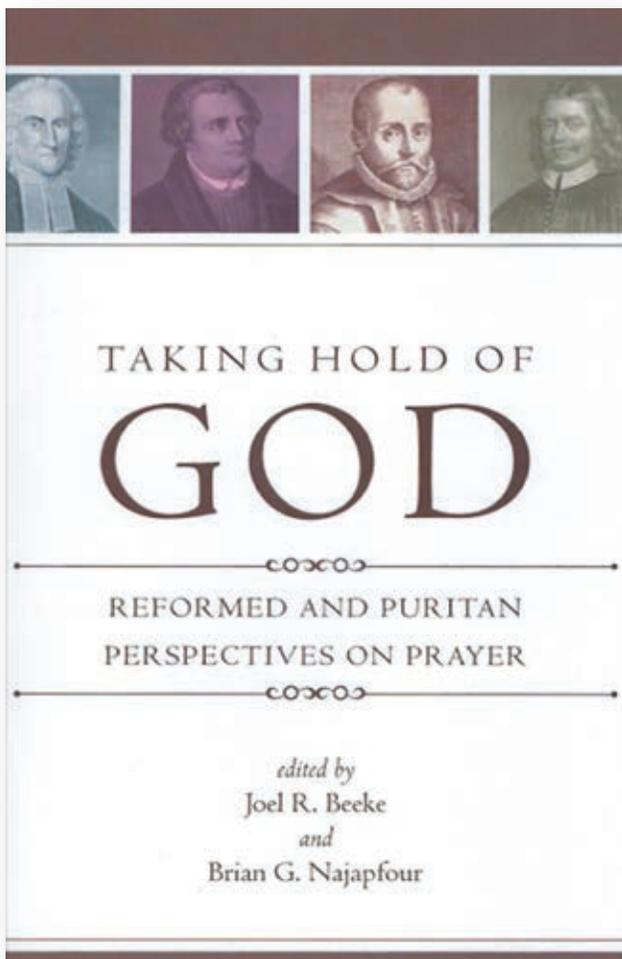
Nevertheless, my interest in Reformed and Puritan perspectives on prayer does not mean that we cannot learn from other writers such as the church fathers, medieval theologians, evangelicals, and modern authors like Donald S. Whitney. We can also learn from these godly men.

### 3. Which one of these godly men has influenced your prayers the most?

Allow me to give you two: Martin Luther (one from the Reformers) and John Bunyan (one from the Puritans). These two men have profoundly shaped my spirituality, particularly my prayer life. For example, they taught me to maintain the priority of prayer. Luther once said, “I have so much scheduled for tomorrow I must pray for that I must arise an hour earlier to have an extra hour alone with God.” Similarly, Bunyan wrote, “You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” How often we do the opposite and only set apart a little time to pray because we are too busy in our work. May we capture the prayer life of Luther who, “even in the busiest periods of the Reformation,” says Andrew W. Kosten, “averaged two hours of prayer daily.” And how true that we accomplish little because we do not pray to God for help. This is basically the point of James: “You do not have, because you do not ask” (4:2). I am more and more convinced that behind the effectiveness of these men in the ministry was their powerful prayer life.

### 4. When you pray, do you always pray “to the Father” in the “name of the Son”?

While I normally offer my prayer to the Father, in the name of Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit, sometimes I address my prayer to the Spirit and sometimes to the Son. Luther said when we pray to Jesus, we “need not worry that the Father and the Holy



Spirit will be angry on this account. They know that no matter which Person [we] call upon, [we] call upon all three Persons and upon the One God at the same time. For [we] cannot call upon one Person without calling upon the others, because the one, undivided divine Essence exists in all and in each Person.” In his treatise *Communion with God*, John Owen encouraged us to fellowship with each person of the triune God. Our prayer should be trinitarian. In

our prayer, we can say with Samuel Rutherford, “I don’t know which Person of the Trinity I love the most, but this I know, I love each of them, and I need them all.”

### 5. I noticed that the overwhelming theme throughout the book was argumentations on how to pray and the immense blessings prayer brings without focusing on the spiritual consequences of a weak prayer life. Was this intentional, and if so why?

You bring up a very good observation here. Dr. Joel Beeke and I, along with other contributors, probably gave little attention to what the sin of prayerlessness can do to our Christian life. Dr. Beeke was, of course, aware of this. Hence, he included one chapter called “Prayerful Praying Today,” in which he tackled the issue of prayerlessness and the damage that this sin can do to a believer. In that chapter Dr. Beeke writes, “When our prayer life is boarded up, everything else begins to shut down. . . . Prayerless praying freezes before reaching heaven, while prayerful praying pierces heaven and warms the soul.” We should take the sin of prayerlessness seriously! Dr.

Beeke even dares to say, “If you are prayerless in your prayer, you are still dead in your sins. You must cry out to God in repentance, begging Him to make you alive in Christ.”

## **6. When you began the book, did you immediately know which Reformers and Puritans you would write about?**

Yes, when I contributed two chapters to the book, I did know which Reformers I would focus on. As I said earlier, my contributed chapters were originally written as part of my requirements for the ThM program.

## **7. Throughout the book the different writers often mention that Christians would get up early in order to pray. Could you elaborate on the schedule Christians should keep concerning going to bed early in order to get up early?**

I feel unqualified to answer this question. I confess that I am not, for example, like Joseph Alleine, who would wake up very early in the morning to pray. Let me quote here what his wife said of him:

At the time of his health, he did rise constantly at or before four of the clock, and on the Sabbath sooner, if he did wake. He would be much troubled if he heard smiths, or shoemakers, or such tradesmen, at work at their trades before he was in his duties with God; saying to me often, "O how this noise shames me! Doth not my Master deserve more than theirs?" From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms, which he much delighted in, and did daily practice alone, as well as in his family.

I do not rise up that early to do my devotions, nor do I spend four hours straight in prayer a day. I admit that this is one area in my life that I need to improve. I need to discipline myself to be able to spend more time with

God and sing with William Walford: "Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!" I know it will take grace and self-control for me to break the pattern that I have been used to. O may the Lord help me grow more in my prayer life!

However, going to bed late and waking up late does not mean that we cannot have quality time to pray. Each of us knows which time works best for us. For Alleine, four o'clock in the morning worked best for him, but this time may be too early for others. So I would say that we should know when we can best have quality time with God. Also, we need to remember that to be prayerful does not necessarily mean spending four hours straight in prayer a day or spending seven hours a day, as in the case of John Welsh, pious son-in-law of John Knox. If we try to imitate these men, we will be disappointed. Why? Because we are simply not like them. But, I am not suggesting that we should be content with where we are right now, so far as our prayer life is concerned. We must always strive to grow more and more in our prayers. Actually, we coedited this book to encourage and at the same time to challenge us to take our own prayer life to a higher level.

## **Was there any event in your life, in particular, that goaded you into writing this book or that gave you a sense that a book like this is needed in our day?**

Like I mentioned earlier, after hearing Dr. Joel Beeke pray, I felt I had never prayed before. This led me to become curious about his prayer life. I found out that the Reformers and the Puritans had tremendously impacted his prayer life. So I started studying the teachings of these Reformers and Puritans on prayer with a desire to go deeper into my own communion with God. Actually, my original plan was to publish a book on prayer in the Philippines. What I was planning to do was publish all the papers I wrote

on prayer for the ThM program. In addition to these papers, I was going to ask permission from Dr. Beeke to include his article on Calvin on prayer. When Dr. Beeke learned about my plan, he asked me if I was going to publish them in my language. I told him that I didn't and that I intended to publish them in English. Dr. Beeke then said, "Why not publish them here in the U.S.? I obviously did not hesitate to take Dr. Beeke's suggestion. The book grew with the contributions of Dr. J. Stephen Yuille, Dr. Haykin, Rev. Johnny C. Serafini (who did his MDiv thesis on prayer), and Dr. Peter Beck (who wrote his dissertation on Jonathan Edwards's theology of prayer). Again, it was my personal desire to learn to pray more that motivated me to coedit a book like this.

## **What modern men have influenced your prayer life?**

Without a shadow of a doubt, Dr. Joel Beeke has been one. My dear friend Kushal Rai, whom I first met at PRTS in 2008, has also had an impact on my prayer life. Rai, who hailed from India, came to PRTS for his ThM. He is now back in his native land faithfully serving the Lord. Rai is one of the few godly young men that I have ever known. I am often jealous of the piety of this man. When he prays, his personal holiness vibrates in his prayer. Indeed, he has modeled to me a godly prayer life. O may the Lord raise more godly men and women like Beeke and Rai!

Soli Deo Gloria!

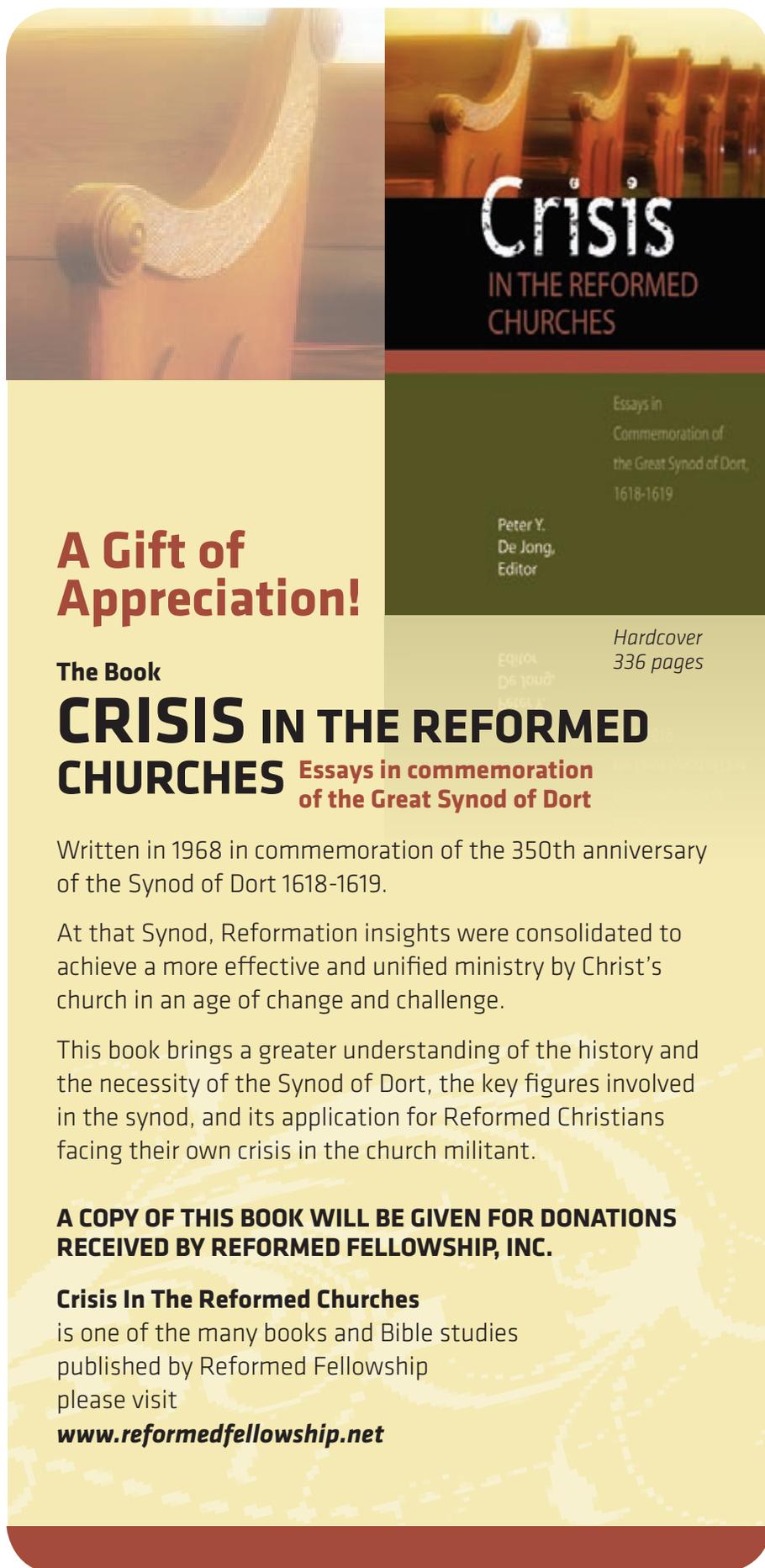
### **Chadd M. Sheffield**

is an MDiv student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

## Teach Me to Pray

I fully know  
that I must pray,  
Not just at times,  
but every day.  
But the sin  
that dwells in me,  
Makes praying  
a difficult activity.  
I enjoy more  
doing other things,  
Than kneeling down  
before my King.  
I pray out of duty  
and with hypocrisy,  
Not with delight,  
and for God's glory.  
Truly to prayer  
I'm naturally allergic,  
Left to myself,  
my life will be tragic!  
O my Lord,  
with Thy disciples I say,  
"Jesus Christ,  
please teach me to pray."

**Brian G.  
Najapfour**



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*Hardcover 336 pages*

**T**he Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) has the privilege of representing the United Reformed Churches in North America outside of North America. The fact that the URCNA has a committee for this purpose is an indication that it considers ecumenical contact to be of utmost importance for the ongoing church-gathering work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we confess that the communion of saints means, "First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members." Because the URCNA has appointed a Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad, it believes that what we confess here about the communion of saints in local congregations also applies to the communion of saints between Reformed church federations throughout the world. We hope that this report will give you an opportunity to pray for our work in a focused manner.

### **The Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)**

At Synod Nyack 2012, CECCA received a request for advice from the fraternal delegate of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. This request pertained to changes that were being proposed to their Form for the Baptism of Infants, which is the same as the URCNA's. These changes were prompted by the belief of some that the Form for the Baptism of Infants has overtones of presumptive regeneration. On behalf of CECCA, two of its members sent documents in support of the Form for the Baptism of Infants in its present form.

### **The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv)**

The developments in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands continue to be a cause of concern for CECCA. In our evaluation of these concerns, CECCA plans to focus on primary sources as much as possible. Formal parallels with the Christian Reformed Churches in North America (CRCNA) are a reason for us to be careful that we do not judge the GKv prematurely as being the same as the CRCNA. To that end, CECCA has committed itself to carry on its own correspondence with the

BBK (the CECCA of the GKv) and to evaluate the issues independent of that done by other federations that are expressing concerns about the direction of the GKv. We covet your prayers as we undertake that task for and on behalf of the URCNA.

### **The Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT)**

Since the Canadian Reformed Churches have had correspondence with the GGRC-NTT for quite some time and have not yet entered into full ecclesiastical fellowship with this federation, CECCA decided it would be wise to delegate one of its members to join their Canadian Reformed brothers on their next visit to Indonesia. This will enable us not only to pool our resources but also allow our relationship with the GGRC-NTT to mature in a responsible manner. Rev. Ray Sikkema will be joining Rev. Andrew Pol for a visit to Indonesia in the first two weeks of August of 2013.

### **The Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC)**

Rev. Jason Tuinstra had the privilege of being the fraternal delegate of the URCNA at the General Assembly (GA) of the Free Church of Scotland

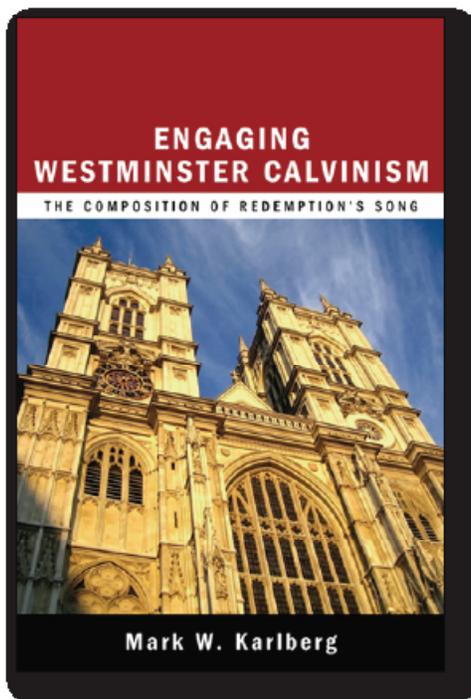
Continuing in May of this year. The FCC is made up of six presbyteries, representing thirty-eight congregations. The FCC was formed in 2000 but sees itself as a continuation of the Free Church of Scotland. Given this, they trace their history back to the “Disruption of 1843,” when, under the leadership of Thomas Chalmers, 450 ministers left the Church of Scotland. Through the Church of Scotland, the FCC dates back to 1560 and the Reformation under John Knox. The GA ended as it began, with thanks and praise to God. While the URCNA and the FCC have different confessional backgrounds (the FCC holds to the Westminster Standards), it is clear that we share the singular, like precious faith. Our practices may differ at points (the FCC holds to no instruments in worship and exclusive metrical psalm singing), but our similarities are clear. May the Lord greatly bless this new relationship, for His glory and the building up of His church.

### The United Reformed Churches in Congo (URCC)

The relationship between the URCNA and the URCC is in the very earliest stages of development. Although we are in the Ecumenical Contact (phase one) relationship with the URCC, it has proved to be difficult to move beyond that point to date. Because of unforeseen difficulties, a planned first meeting with the URCC at its first synod (scheduled for July 23–28, 2012, in Kananga) had to be cancelled. A planned meeting

## ENGAGING WESTMINSTER CALVINISM

THE COMPOSITION OF REDEMPTION'S SONG



978-1-62032-798-2 / \$22 / 188 pp. / paper

### Mark W. Karlberg

This collection of writings contains articles and book reviews that are not readily accessible to most readers. Many of them are written for a wider audience of informed lay students of Scripture, as well as seminarians. They have been brought together here in a fresh way with other new writings. As a result, this study is somewhat unique, drawing upon the author's career in theology and church music. Over the course of four decades of scholarly research and writing the author has also been engaged in the music ministry of the church, serving as organist and choir director. Chief influences in his study and practice of music in the church have been Robert Elmore and Gene Hancock, leading organists, choral masters, and composers of our generation. In the course of their stellar careers Elmore and Hancock have served in different ecclesiastical settings—Monastic, Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, and Anglican. What they both share in common is their exceptional skill in the art of improvisation. Part of their accompaniment was “off the written musical score,” resulting in service-playing that was creative and engaging. In the spirit of their artistic expression we offer this collection of writings bearing as its theme the great Song of Redemption, composed by “the singing Christ” (Heb 2:12).

Mark W. Karlberg obtained three theological degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, including a doctorate in Reformation/Post-Reformation studies. He is the author of the trilogy: *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (2000); *Gospel Grace: The Modern-day Controversy* (2003); and *Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the Crossroads* (2006), all published by Wipf and Stock.

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in late summer of this year was also cancelled after it became clear that it would be very difficult to meet with the pastors and elders of the churches when no synod would be in session. Additionally, the URCC is looking forward to have the visiting delegates of the URCNA participate in the teaching ministry of its fledgling seminary. However, the seminary is in recess until October—well after the date a visit

had been planned. It is our prayer that the Lord will bless our efforts to meet with this very needy federation of churches that longs so much for our support in the very difficult and trying circumstances wherein they find themselves every day.

**Rev. Dick Moes** is the pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church (URC) in Surrey, British Columbia. He is a member of the URCNA CECCA Committee.

Herman Bavinck's treatment of the doctrine of sin in the third volume of his *Reformed Dogmatics* consists of four parts: (1) the origin of sin; (2) the spread of sin; (3) the nature of sin; and (4) the punishment of sin. In my previous articles, we considered the origin, spread, and nature of sin. In this article, we will consider the punishment of sin. These four main features of the biblical doctrine of sin form the backdrop to Bavinck's exposition of the biblical doctrine of salvation through the person and work of Christ, the mediator of the covenant of grace.

Identifying the main consequences of the fall into sin through Adam and the sinfulness of the human race in him serves as preparation for a treatment of the doctrine of redemption in Christ. Christ's work as mediator redresses all of the adverse consequences of sin, and it is, in this respect, a multifaceted and unfathomably deep, extensive work. The triumph of God's grace in Christ leaves none of the features of the punishment of sin unconquered. For this reason, giving careful attention to the specific ways in which sin is punished within the sovereign and gracious purposes of God not only prepares the way for a treatment of Christ's work of redemption but also anticipates his gracious work. The darkness of sin, especially in the way God's punishment of sin comes to expression in history, stands in stark contrast to the light of God's glorious grace that shines in the face of Jesus

Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). For believers, all these punishments of sin are vanquished in and through Christ.

## Mercy and Justice

Bavinck begins his treatment of the punishment of sin with a brief reflection on the relation between God's mercy and justice. When God deals with the creature, whether in the pre-fall or post-fall state, he always acts in accordance with his own essential nature. All of God's attributes are identical with God himself, and therefore God acts in conformity with his nature whenever he deals with the creature's transgression of his holy law and will.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the biblical record of Adam's fall—and the fall of his entire posterity by virtue of his appointment as covenant head of the human race—recounts a story in which God's justice is tempered by mercy. Even though God had threatened Adam with death upon his transgression of the commandment of life, he did not immediately execute the sanction of the covenant of works when Adam sinned. Rather than immediately punishing Adam with death in its totality and fullness, which Adam's sin justly deserved, God graciously “moderated and delayed this punishment” (RD 3:160). Adam and Eve were permitted to live many years, and Eve became the mother of all living. A human race sprang forth from them that was sustained and nourished upon the earth; in this way grace “went into effect immediately after the fall” and

was given a “presiding role in history, not at the expense of, but in union with, the justice of God” (RD 3:160). This moderation of God's justice in the course of the subsequent history of his dealings with the fallen human race could not have been, in the nature of the case, revealed to Adam before the fall. While the moderation of God's justice in dealing with the fallen human race reflects his undeserved grace and mercy, it does not mean that human disobedience and sin will escape the consequences of his justice. For God to be true to his own nature, he must repay human disobedience in a manner that accords with his own justice and holiness.

The ultimate purpose of the punishment of sin is “to redress the justice of God that has been violated by sin” (RD 3:160). In the history of God's dealings with Israel, the so-called *lex talionis*, or law of retribution (“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”), was administered as an expression of God's justice, even as it was in use also among the surrounding nations. The law of retribution in its proper meaning and application was ultimately rooted in God's own justice, which requires that sin and disobedience be punished in a manner commensurate with the severity of the misdeed. When the Lord Jesus Christ comments on this law of retribution (cf. Matt. 5:38–42), he does not repudiate it but offers a true interpretation of its meaning in opposition to the false interpretation that prevailed among the Jewish

schools. The law of retribution may not be enlisted as “a tool of self-interest, personal vengeance, and hatred” at the expense of the obligations of love and patience toward a neighbor (RD 3:162). Rather, this law underscores the principle of equity that follows from God’s own justice: when an offender disobeys the holy law of God, he or she must be punished in a way that answers to the severity of the offense. In the final analysis, God, in his justice, will require a proper recompense for whatever offenses the creature commits and, in doing so, will take appropriate vengeance in redressing the wrong and making it right.

### **Crime and Punishment**

Only within the framework of a proper understanding of God’s own justice and the administration of the life of the creature that accords with it can we properly address the important issue of crime and punishment. Consequently, Bavinck follows up his brief opening comments on God’s mercy and justice with a fairly extensive treatment of the important, albeit controversial issue of retribution as the principle and standard of punishment throughout Scripture. Bavinck also offers a number of insightful comments at this point regarding the controversial subject of the state’s administration of justice in punishing offenders who have committed crimes against public order and justice.

In the scriptural doctrine of punishment, especially in the legislation of the Old Testament economy, there are three emphases regarding the demands of justice that are grounded in God’s own justice and righteousness: (1) guilty persons may not be regarded as innocent or exonerated of the consequences of their unlawful actions; (2) those who are righteous may not be condemned unjustly; and (3) “the rights of the poor, the oppressed, the day laborer,

the widow, and the orphan especially may not be perverted” (RD 3:1162). These provisions of God’s law reveal that the punishment of the unrighteous is always grounded in and has no other ultimate explanation than in God’s own justice. “All punishment presupposes that the person who pronounces and imposes punishment is clothed with authority over those who have violated the law. This authority cannot have its origin in humanity itself, for what human being can claim any right as such vis-à-vis others who are of the same nature?” (RD 3:163). Whenever the ultimate ground of the exercise of judicial authority in God’s justice is denied, no warrant remains for the punishment of offenders who violate the standards of God’s holy law. The administration of justice, including the meting out of punishments upon those who transgress the law, can only be explained in terms of the way human agents fulfill a sacred office under God of maintaining his holy law. If the ultimate ground of the holy law of God for the administration of retributive justice by legitimate human authorities (parents, civil magistrates, etc.) is denied, no explanation other than expediency remains to account for the imposition of punishment upon human sin and disobedience.

In Bavinck’s defense of the claim that crime and punishment have no other ultimate basis than the holy and righteous character of God, he offers an extensive, penetrating analysis of the way modern thought has undermined the warrant and application of punishment in human society and jurisprudence. In place of the Christian worldview, which affirms the rule of law and the administration of punishment as an application of God’s own justice, the modern worldview embraces “historicism” and “relativism.” Accordingly, in modern societies,

the “concepts of good and evil, responsibility and accountability, guilt and punishment” can no longer be sustained (RD 3:163). Atheism in all of its forms militates against the idea of God and the rule of his divine justice in human behavior. But when there is no God, there can be no justice. All that remains is a variety of explanations for human misconduct that tend to diminish human responsibility and accountability and reduce the administration of justice to utilitarian and remedial ends that fall short of true punishment for crimes of which the perpetrator is genuinely guilty.

In one school of thought, the “anthropological or biological,” human misconduct is the fruit of a defect in evolutionary development, or hereditary, so that the individual can scarcely be regarded as culpable. In another school of thought, the sociological, all human misbehavior is ascribed to the unhappy influences of the person’s social environment and upbringing. People who act irresponsibly do so as a “symptom of social disease, a necessary product of circumstances, a consequence of ignorance, poverty, poor upbringing, and heredity” (RD 3:164). From this standpoint, criminals cannot be regarded as responsible for their misdeeds, and society has no just basis to punish them. Furthermore, two inconsistencies rear their ugly heads. On the one hand, society is treated as morally culpable for the sins of the individual, even though societies are no more responsible for their character from a sociological perspective than are individuals. Why blame society for its wrongs when society is no more capable than individuals of being other than it is? And, on the other hand, no legitimate basis remains for punishing the criminal when he is personally innocent and incapable

# A Site to Behold

Mr. James Oord

If the URCNA were Superman, Mrs. Glenda Mathes would be its Lois Lane. She's always in the thick of the URCNA's action, always eager to report its latest exploits, and always providing clear updates on its latest news. Most importantly, Mrs. Mathes has shown time and again that she is brimming with love and loyalty to the Church (I capitalize the first letter of *Church* intentionally) because Mrs. Mathes's extends beyond the little URCNA federation. Her passion for God's people, the body of Christ, is shown repeatedly in her work.

I'm sure many of our readers are familiar with Mrs. Mathes's body of work. Her reports on church news are frequently published in *Christian Renewal*, the *Mid-America Messenger*, and *The Outlook*. She diligently reports on classes (plural of *classis*), synods, graduations, ordinations, anniversaries, and other events of note in the Reformed world. More recently, she has written an excellent book, *Little One Lost: Living with Early Infant Loss*, a poignant and much-needed look at the sorrow and pain so many couples experience with miscarriage, stillbirth, and newborn loss. In this book, Mrs. Mathes demonstrated that she not only has a "nose for news" but also a heart for God's people. She also recently released *A Month of Sundays: 31 Meditations on Resting in God*, in which she encourages readers to be true Sabbath keepers, understanding

of acting otherwise. Criminals who disobey the (arbitrary) standards of human society deserve to be pitied rather than punished since they are the product of social factors and influences outside of their control.

Within the framework of modern, non-Christian worldviews, alternatives to the older idea of retribution or punishment of offenders have surfaced. Rather than viewing the state's responsibility toward criminals in terms of punishment, the improvement or remediation of criminals has become a primary goal of the justice system. However, when the improvement of the offender becomes the goal of the civil magistrate, a number of insoluble problems arise. How can the judge in a civil court truly ascertain all the factors that may have occasioned the commission of a crime? And how can the criminal justice system determine an appropriate penalty without having an accurate assessment of how an individual's social circumstances, hereditary makeup, and limited personal responsibility may have contributed to his or her offense? Furthermore, when moral improvement or remediation becomes the state's primary goal, it is difficult to see how the state has the competence or wherewithal to ensure that this goal is met. As Bavinck observes, "Modern criminology, by calling the notions of retribution and punishment antiquated and adopting as its goal the moral improvement of the criminal, takes from the government's arm the power of justice and assigns to it a task for which it is utterly unqualified and unfit" (RD 3:167). One of the consequences of denying the civil magistrate's administration of retributive punishment is the degeneration of the state's use of its power of the sword into mere coercion and exercise of superior power. If the state metes out punishment solely for its utilitarian benefit, it is difficult to constrain the

state's power to punish by the dictates of justice.

In the final analysis, only the Christian worldview can provide a satisfactory warrant for the legitimate power of the state in the punishment of offenders. Because punishment always involves a kind of suffering and deprivation of such goods as property, freedom of movement, and the like, it requires a sanction that goes beyond mere coercion or caprice on the part of the civil magistrate. But where does such a sanction find its source? In Bavinck's estimation, the only satisfactory answer to this question lies in God himself. "Behind that judicial order stands the living, true, and holy God, who will by no means clear the guilty, and for him punishment rests not on 'an absolute dominion' in the sense of Duns Scotus but on the demands of his justice. If he did not punish sin, he would give to evil the same rights he accords to the good and so deny himself. The punishment of sin is necessary so that God may remain God" (RD 3:168).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, Duns Scotus, a medieval theologian, is associated with a distinction drawn between God's "absolute power" (*potential absoluta*) and his "ordained power" (*potential ordinate*). In simple terms, this distinction implies that God "could have chosen" to accomplish his purposes, especially in redemption, by some means other than the one he arbitrarily "ordained." Bavinck's point is that this distinction fails to affirm that the punishment of sin is a necessary expression of God's own nature or character; God would deny himself if he did not justly punish sin.

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**ASCRIBELOG**

Taking Thoughts Captive

Feeds:



# ASCRIBELOG

## Taking Thoughts Captive

that God has called his people to develop daily the attitudes of worship and rest we enjoy on Sunday.

Mrs. Mathes has a blog titled *Ascribelog* ([ascribelog.wordpress.com](http://ascribelog.wordpress.com)), which is noteworthy for not only its content but also for having a very clever name. Of the decision to begin blogging and the title *Ascribelog*, Mrs. Mathes told me:

I hesitated to begin blogging because I was intimidated by the intelligent and articulate writing of many other bloggers. I felt that blogging was a presumptuous activity that assumed someone, somewhere, would be interested enough in what you have to say to bother to visit and actually read your blog. I was afraid that my musings would degenerate into self-pitying litanies. But I kept feeling like God was nudging me in the blogging direction.

One morning about eight years ago, I was complaining in prayer that I was an incompetent and uncreative writer, that I couldn't even come up with a good name for a blog. Immediately, the name *Ascribelog* popped into my head. As a writer, I am a scribe, and my goal in everything is to ascribe glory to God.

No longer having the "I can't even think of a name" excuse, I bit the blogging bullet and gingerly entered cyberspace.

*Ascribelog* regularly features meditations, news items, and helpful links, all provided by Mrs. Mathes. I generally use *Ascribelog* as a "one-stop shop" for the latest news and uplifting thoughts from Scripture. It's a good site to check out every two or three days. Mrs. Mathes described the site this way: "*Ascribelog* is a bit different from a lot of blogs because it's more than personal reflections. Since my work involves different types of writing, my blog presents various kinds of posts . . . But they're all united under a common focus: ascribing glory to God."

Popular posts include her reports from synod, her previously published articles (she usually posts them a month or so after they appear in *Christian Renewal*), and her meditations on the Psalms.

Her purpose in blogging is simple. Mrs. Mathes writes,

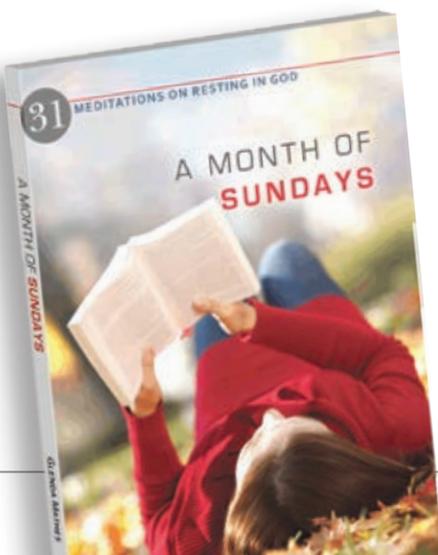
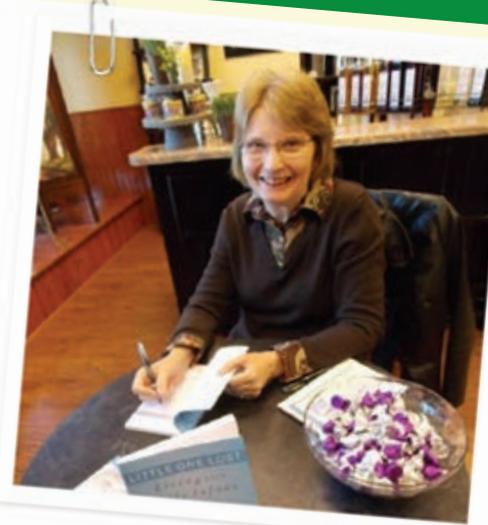
The primary purpose of *Ascribelog* is to glorify God. I hope and pray it always does that. I'd like to see it help people study their Bibles more closely to become more genuine believers who love God and others with all their hearts. I'd like to see it help unify Christ's church in North America and around the world. I'd like to see it help people think about literature from a distinctively biblical perspective. These sound like lofty goals, but I know that God can do whatever he wants with my blog, despite its inept author.

Of the future of *Ascribelog* Mrs. Mathes writes, "I'd love to see my blog go wherever God leads it. If he led it to draw more people closer to him and draw believers together in Christ, I'd be thrilled. If he led it to help people appreciate quality literature and read and write from more biblically informed worldviews, I'd be ecstatic."

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Writer and editor



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