

THE Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense
of the Reformed Faith

February 1999



*Tomorrow's
Kings &
Queens*



Tomorrow's Kings and Queens

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O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise
Because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars which you have set in place,
What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings,
And crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
You put everything under his feet:
All flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
All that swim the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8

The whole image of "royalty" has become tarnished and diminished in today's world. Modern princes and princesses have rebelled against their royal parents, throwing out the "glue" of traditional values which has held dynasties together for centuries, at least formally. The political climates around the world have produced democratic mindsets that have replaced royal families with prime ministers and presidents who are elected by the people and must be sensitive to the people. In Great

Britain the "royal family" has become a mere figurehead, and "not so royal" at that. The real authority and direction-setting resides in the prime minister and the Parliament. In the United States it resides in the president ("not so royal" at that) and the Congress.

But in God's Old Testament theocracy, the king was the ruler, coached and chastised by God's prophets, and directly accountable to God Himself. This ruler was to oversee the spiritual lives of God's people, calling them to repentance and amendment of life. He was also to direct their political and economic affairs so that maximum productivity for the kingdom of God was achieved.

It is in this sense that the psalmist, in Psalm 8, praises God for conferring on man the high office of ruler over all creation (vs. 6). But man does not come to the exercise of that rule without preparation. "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise," says the psalmist. Little children are tomorrow's kings and queens.

In our roles as parents, educators, pastors, catechism and Sunday School teachers, and youth leaders, it is crucial that we see these children as we ought to see them. Emerging generations in our postmodern times are being dubbed as Boomers, Busters, Millennials and Tweeners. But these words are only descriptions (and rather dismal ones at that) of existing dominant mindsets in our culture. They do not generate the goals, curriculum and tasks for which today's children, tomorrow's rulers, are be-

ing born and should be raised. It is Psalm 8 which provides that vision. As shapers of these young lives, it is imperative that we catch that vision and make it a reality for them.

THE GOALS

Through the psalmist, God directs us to unleash the power and potential of each child to do two things: (1) ordain praise to God (positive) and (2) silence the foe and the avenger (negative). How do we do this?

Praise does not happen in a vacuum. It is a response to something or someone. Response presupposes a prior transmission of knowledge. It is our job as child-builders to introduce the children in our care to that knowledge - the great Word of God, the great works of God, and the great world of God, day in and day out. And in that long process, we must exhibit our own personal praise (joy, excitement, thankfulness, awe - worship) for them to see and emulate.

"Silencing the foe" also presupposes knowledge - knowledge of the enemy; and it requires action in fighting him. As child-builders we need to instruct children about Satan's strategies in their own lives and in the world around them. But we also need to administer firm love (discipline) to them when they violate the will of God. If we fail to

do this, we are destroying the children, cooperating with the enemy and setting a negative example. Above all, we may not set one standard of obedience for ourselves and a different one for our children. Consistency in precept and practice are imperative. The old adage has a lot of truth in it: "Children will do what you *do* rather than what you *say*."

THE CURRICULUM

The Lord Himself provides a curriculum for the training of tomorrow's kings and queens. He announces at the beginning and the end of Psalm 8: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" The curriculum is the *name* of God. This includes *everything* by which God is known: His *Word*, His *works* and His *world*. Is there anything that is not enfolded in these three entities? For all who impact the lives of children, the *content* of your training is clear. Introduce your children, *with a passion*, to the *Word* of God *incarnate*, Jesus Christ Himself, by demonstrating daily the mission He came to fulfill and the power He has in your life. Lead them carefully and thoroughly through the *Word* of God *inscripturated*: "Impress them [these commands] on your children. Talk about them when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). *Saturate!!*



Children also need to be lead to stand in awe (holy fear - something hard to come by these days) of the *works* of God — works in *nature* (the grandeur of the mountains, the design of a sparkling snowflake, the protection and care afforded to God's animals who wear colors that blend with their environments, the mystery of birth, and myriads more), and works in *grace* (the covenant love of God displayed in His redemption promise, and His patient and gracious arrangement of the details of history to accomplish that redemption and apply it until Christ comes again).

And then there is God's *world*: "O Lord... how majestic is your name *in all the earth!*" (Psalm 8:1,9). "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the *world* and *all who live in it*" (Psalm 24:1) — worlds of science, geography, history, mathematics, technology, communications, medicine and so much more! Can you feel the excitement of opening these vistas from God's perspective for tomorrow's rulers?

THE TASK

When tomorrow's rulers become today's journalists, businessmen/women, politicians, agriculturalists, professors, engineers, educators, health providers and service personnel, what is their *task*? To paraphrase Psalm 8:6, "Everything is put at their feet." They are to "rule for God," that is, they are to manage the air waves so that the audio and visual communications conform to the will of God and benefit, not destroy, His people; they are to refine medical procedures and medicinal drugs for the preservation and promotion of life, not death; they



are to fight "principalities and powers" of evil which invade classrooms, courtrooms, media and legislatures; they are to harness the natural resources which God has placed in this earth - steel, coal, iron, water - in a way which glorifies God and is of benefit to His people; they are to channel the huge and rapid growth of technology to God-glorifying uses; they are to stem

the tidal waves to "play God" in genetic engineering — and so the list goes on, and on, and on.

The *goals* of "ordaining praise" and "silencing the foe" are achieved through a *curriculum* of uncovering the glorious *name of God* in His *incarnate Word*, Jesus Christ, in His *inscripturated Word*, the Bible, in His *works in nature* and in *grace*, and in His *world*. For tomorrow's rulers, all of these converge on the stupendous task of *ruling God's world for Him and not for themselves*.

When you tuck your little ones in bed at night, or discuss issues around the table with your teens, or when you stand before your class of pre-schoolers or preach to your young people - how do you see them? Your *vision of them and for them today* is crucial for them and the world *tomorrow*.

PS - Parents, when you choose a school to help lead your children through this developmental process, what are your criteria? You only have one time around.

"Your vision of them and for them today is crucial for them and the world tomorrow."



A Discussion on Justification

W. ROBERT GODFREY

On November 20, 1998 the Evangelical Theological Society, meeting in Orlando, Florida, held a panel discussion of the documents "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and "The Gift of Salvation." These two statements were prepared by a group of evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders who reached agreement on certain theological issues and concluded that the areas of agreement were sufficient to allow them not only to cooperate on various social and cultural issues, but also to do evangelism together. The doctrine of justification was a special focus of "The Gift of Salvation" and it appeared to many that a surprising measure of agreement had been reached on that basic doctrine.

The purpose of the panel discussion was to present for evangelical scholars a discussion of these documents. About 800 scholars attended the session, mainly from Christian colleges and seminaries. Father Francis Martin represented Roman Catholics who supported the documents and Dr. James I. Packer represented evangelicals who did the same. I was asked to represent evangelicals with "serious concerns" about the statements. Each of the three panelists was given ten minutes to present an opening statement. After the statements were made, the panel discussed among itself some of the issues for about 45 minutes and then answered questions from the floor for about 45 minutes.

In my opening remarks I tried to make clear the importance of the

doctrine of justification and the inadequacies of the documents in stating the doctrine clearly and fully. My conclusion was that the inadequacies on justification made cooperation in evangelism with Rome impossible.

Father Martin and Dr. Packer defended the doctrinal agreement as an adequate basis for cooperation. Dr. Packer made clear that he still held the historic Protestant view on justification and believed that enough of it was in the document to justify its use as a foundation for cooperation with Rome.

Although the discussion format gave us a fair amount of time for discussion, much of what was said did not seem to connect on our differences. My concern - that since Roman Catholics believed that these documents could be reconciled with the Council of Trent, they therefore were not an adequate statement of the Protestant view of justification - was not really addressed by Packer in my judgment.

The following is my opening statement at the discussion. In spite of its brevity I hope that it will help readers of *The Outlook* to see some of the issues involved in this important debate. I do not believe that my concerns as expressed in this statement were really addressed or answered in the discussion that followed.

OPENING REMARKS

Let me begin by clarifying what issues are not before us this evening. First, we are not discussing whether it is good for Protestants and Roman Catholics to have dia-

logues. I believe that such dialogues are a good idea. Second, we are not discussing whether there are true Christians in the Roman Catholic Church. I believe, as historic Protestants have always believed, that there are. Third, we are not here to debate the legitimacy of Evangelical and Roman Catholic cooperation in the culture wars that we face. Such cooperation on cultural issues is valuable. Fourth, we are not here to further anti-Catholic prejudice. I always tell my classes that Roman Catholicism is closer to the gospel than many

A r m i n i a n evangelicals and that Rome historically has stressed the importance of sin and grace in a way that is more Biblical than evangelicals who want to replace the courtroom with the family room. Fifth, we are not here to discuss whether a Christian must be able to give an accurate theological definition of justification in order to be saved. Rather we are asking whether theologians and Christian leaders involved in a theological dialogue are obligated to do so.

The issue before us this evening is this: Do the documents, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and "The Gift of Salvation" clearly state and uphold the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and do they advance the cause of the gospel? My position on both matters is that the documents *do not*, and

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therefore I am not just seriously concerned about the statements, but rather I *am appalled* by them and *utterly opposed* to them.

Many evangelicals seem to believe that these documents represent progress and movement of Roman Catholics toward evangelical Christianity. I do not. These documents express positions that would have been acceptable to the delegates at the Council of Trent as "The Gift of Salvation" itself implicitly recognizes.¹ Some Roman Catholic signers of these documents have clearly stated that the positions in them do not conflict with the decrees of Trent on justification. That being true, the only movement could have been on the part of the Protestants who have betrayed their historic confession either by failing to speak clearly on the gospel and thereby compromising the cause of Christ, or by concluding that the issues that divided Rome and the Reformers in the sixteenth century were not really fundamental after all.

I. What is the gospel and how is it compromised in these statements?

The confessional Protestant doctrine of justification stands at the heart of the gospel and all Christian truth. This truth has been accurately and eloquently stated by J. I. Packer.

(Let me say that I cite Dr. Packer in this discussion, not to be mean-spirited or as a debating trick, but first, because I, like so many who stand with me, believe that I am upholding the truth that Dr. Packer has taught me, and second because try as I might, I still do not see how he can affirm what he has written in the past and what he now says about "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and "The Gift of Salvation.")

Dr. Packer wrote:

For the doctrine of justification by faith is like Atlas: it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace. The doctrines of election, of effectual calling, regeneration, and repentance, of adoption, of prayer, of the church, the ministry, and the sacraments have all to be interpreted and understood in the light of justification by faith.²

He also wrote:

"...the good news of the Gospel is that we do not have to wait for righteousness to be accomplished in us before God counts us justified in his sight."

A right view of these things is not possible without a right understanding of justification; so that, when justification falls, all true knowledge of the grace of God in human life falls with it, and then, as Luther said, the church itself falls. A society like the Church of Rome, which is committed by its official creed to

pervert the doctrine of justification, has sentenced itself to a distorted understanding of salvation at every point. Nor can these distortions ever be corrected till the Roman doctrine of justification is put right.³

If justification is the heart of the gospel, then the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness is the heart of the doctrine of justification.

Again Dr. Packer:

Salvation in the Bible is by substitution and exchange: the imputing of men's sins to Christ, and the imputing of Christ's righteousness to sinners. By this means, the law, and the God whose law it is, are satisfied and the guilty are justly declared immune from punishment. Justice is done, and mercy is made triumphant in the doing of it.⁴

And again:

Behind Calvin's phrase, "the imputation of the righteousness of Christ," lies the characteristic "Christ-and-his-people" Christology which was the center of reference—the hub of the wheel, we might say – of the Reformers' entire doctrine of grace.⁵

The essence of the gospel - justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness - is totally and tragically marginalized in "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and in "The Gift of Salvation." Theologians cannot claim agreement on the gospel where the issues of imputation and merit have not been explored and agreement reached. For that reason the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals prepared an analysis of "The Gift of Salvation" entitled "Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals." (Copies are available.) As our time is short, let me read a few paragraphs from that statement as a brief expression of my conviction as to how the gospel is compromised in "The Gift of Salvation."

"What is striking about this document is the joint affirmation by the signatories that 'we understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).' This statement would seem to indicate that the co-signers agree in affirming the biblical and Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*. If such is the case, we rejoice. However, although it is said that certain affirmations are 'in agreement with' *sola fide*, *sola fide* itself is not stated.

"The Gift of Salvation' says that:

1. Justification is received through faith,
2. Justification is not earned by good works or merits of our own,
3. Justification is entirely God's gift,
4. In justification God declares us to be his friends on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, and

5. Faith is not mere intellectual assent but an act of the whole person, issuing in a changed life.

Each of these points agrees with *sola fide*. Yet separately and together they fall short of both the biblical and Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, which is our concern.

"Why do they fall short? Central and essential to the biblical doctrine of justification and to the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide* is the concept of the 'imputation' of the righteousness of Christ to the believer. Historically Rome has always contended that the basis of justification is the righteousness of Christ, but it is a righteousness that is 'infused' into the believer rather than being 'imputed' to him. This means that the believer must cooperate with and assent to that gracious work of God, and only to the extent that Christ's righteousness 'inheres' in the believer will God declare the person justified.

"Protestants disagree, pointing to the critical difference between 'infused' righteousness and 'imputed' righteousness. *Sola fide* affirms that we are justified on the basis of Christ's righteousness *for* us, which is accomplished by Christ's own perfect active obedience *apart* from us, not on the basis of Christ's righteousness *in* us. Thus, the good news of the Gospel is that we do not have to wait for righteousness to be accomplished in us before God counts us justified in his sight. He declares us to be just on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness."

II. Now, how does this compromise between evangelicals and Roman Catholics damage the cause of Christ?

Let me mention four areas very briefly:

First and most importantly, this compromise defames the honor and work of Christ by failing to state clearly that justification is found only in the imputation of his perfect righteousness to us.

Second, this compromise undermines the peace of Christian consciences: only the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness can give us in this life that peace of conscience taught in Scripture.

Again as Dr. Packer wrote: "...justification is a *life-giving mystery*, the source of all true peace of conscience, hope, love, joy, holiness and assurance."⁶

Third, this compromise damages the missionary work of the church:

Should we say without clear qualification as "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" does: "Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ."? Should we agree that "it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community."? Does that mean that evangelicals should not approach the pious Roman Catholic on her knees crawling to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe and try to rescue her from her idolatry?

Fourth, this compromise misrepresents the character of the Roman church:

Rome is allowed without challenge to preserve its myth of infallible and irreformable councils - which means that Rome has both anathematized those of us who believe in justification by faith alone at Trent, and then called us "separated brethren" at Vatican II and in "The Gift of Salvation" says we are fellow Christians with whom she can do evangelism. Such self-contradictions cannot go unexamined by those interested in Biblical truth. To leave those contradictions unchallenged contributes to evangelical conversions to the Roman church. Listen again to the *Canons of the Council of Trent* on justification:

Can. 9. If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is re-

quired to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.

"Rome is allowed...to preserve its myth of infallible and irreformable councils..."

Can. 11. If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the *charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost*, and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.

These are the reasons that I have been utterly opposed to the content and effect of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and "The Gift of Salvation." I will listen carefully in the coming discussion to see if I have failed to give the documents a "fair reading." I will do so without fear or favor. My one goal will be faithfulness to Christ and His Word.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Its final paragraph declares "...we affirm our unity in the gospel that we have here professed." This affirmation concludes a sentence in which the evangelicals reiterated their adherence to the classic Reformation confessions and the Roman Catholics declared their commitment to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 2 J.I. Packer, "Introductory Essay," to James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Edinburgh (The Banner of Truth Trust), 1961, p. viii.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. ix.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
- 5 J.I. Packer, "Justification in Protestant Theology," in *Here We Stand, Justification by Faith Today*, London (Hodder and Stoughton), 1986, p. 91.
- 6 J.I. Packer, "The Doctrine of Justification in Development and Decline Among the Puritans," in *The Papers of the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference*, 1969, p. 19.

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The Means of Grace

D. G. HART and JOHN R. MUETHER

Question: *What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?*

Answer: *The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments and prayer, all of which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.* (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 88)

In a previous article, "Reformed Liturgy," we discussed the vertical dimension or the "dialogical principle" of worship. Worship, we noted then, is for God, and not for us. God is the audience of our worship, not unchurched "seekers" or even fellow believers. He alone is the one whom we are to please in our worship. Worship is not evangelistic outreach, nor a concert, nor a lecture, nor a counseling session. These might be important things for Christians to attend at certain times, but they do not constitute public worship.

Our focus now turns to *what worship does for us, and how it nurtures and edifies us through the means of grace.* We need to confront ourselves first with the question, are we involved in a contradiction here? If our sole criterion is whether God is pleased, isn't it impious to ask whether and how we as worshipers are blessed? Yet the Bible makes clear what happens to us in worship. When we praise and glorify God we will be blessed. The way that He glorifies us, the way that He causes us to grow in grace, is to worship Him as He desires.

This principle finds expression, for example, in Psalm 1. "Blessed is the man," we read, whose "delight is in the law of the LORD." Growth in grace will come to the believer as he obeys God:

And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season,

And its leaf does not wither;

And in whatever he does, he prospers (v.3).

Scripture always connects growth in grace with pleasing God. The vertical character of worship, then, contains a blessing for us. We need not add to worship any "horizontal" elements for our benefit. The Westminster Shorter Catechism question quoted above spells this out. God promises to bless His people through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and prayer.

These elements of worship, moreover, are "outward and ordinary." They work slowly and quietly in reorienting our hearts heavenward. This is what God has designed for the souls of His people, but these ordinances are not a quick fix, nor are they a spiritual high. Too often, in pursuit of a spirituality of instant gratification, we might dismiss these means in search of what might appear to be a richer diet. But to do so is to resist the ordinances of God and to claim that we are wiser than He. The diet He has prescribed may not satisfy the taste buds that have been

conditioned by worldliness or spiritual junk food. But this diet is guaranteed to be nourishing for us, because God Himself is oath-bound to bless it toward our growth in grace.

Consider the experience of the early church on the Day of Pentecost. In response to Peter's sermon, 3,000 souls come to faith. What follows for these new Christians? Filled with the Spirit, do they pursue exotic experiences of spiritual ecstasy? On the contrary, they attend faithfully the outward and ordinary means of grace: "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

MEANS AND SECONDARY CAUSES

To speak of "means" is to refer to God's providence, whereby, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism He preserves and governs all His creatures and all their actions. God does not carry out His plan in history only through miracles or the regeneration of the human soul. Rather He controls all of history through the use of secondary causes.

Conservative believers may be leery of employing the language of secondary causes. This suspicion is often in response to the naturalism of liberalism that reduces all of History to empirically verifiable causes and limits God's existence to His immanence in creation. We have battled so hard, especially in this century, to defend the *transcendence of God* and the truth of

miracles, that we may overlook the value of secondary causes. But to affirm with the Catechism the legitimacy of means is not to deny supernaturalism but simply to acknowledge that God uses creation to perform His bidding. God sovereignly works in the lives of all of His saints through circumstances that He ordains.

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So the doctrine of miracles should not prevent us from upholding the doctrine of ordinary providence. We should not be afraid to talk about means. The *Westminster Confession* refers to means in its chapter on providence: "God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure" (V.III). Providence is the way in which God accomplishes His purposes. He uses means to bring us to Himself, and to cause us to grow in grace.

MEANS OF GRACE: MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS

Worship is our work and it is also God's work. He is at work saving His people. But, one might object, are we not already the recipients of God's saving grace? The Bible teaches us that God's people are saved, they are being saved, and they will be saved. The means of grace remind us that we who are marching toward Zion are weak and frail and sinful, and we are prone to wander. So we are in constant need of God's grace, and this is what we receive especially in worship.

Perhaps no metaphor is more central to the Bible's description of the Christian life than the idea of *pilgrimage*. The church is like the Israelites in the wilderness (Heb. 3-4). We are aliens and strangers in this present life (1 Pet. 2:11), and we seek a heavenly city (Heb. 11:16). As we struggle between our new identity of a life that is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3) and our present surroundings, we experience suffering because we are not home yet. This metaphor helps us to appreciate the means of grace.

The means of grace that God provides in worship become our sustenance; they are what keep us going throughout the wilderness of our pilgrimage. If we avoid them, we are foolishly ignoring God's provision. If we trivialize them by preferring means of our own devising, then we

do not understand how dire our circumstances are and how generous is God's provision for us.

Absenting ourselves from worship is not only an insult to our creator and redeemer, who has ordained praise from His people. It is also a terribly presumptuous attitude regarding the state of our souls. The psalmist despairs when he is absent from worship: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). These words are too often sentimentalized in contemporary praise choruses. But the psalmist is panicking, and his words are laced with desperation, especially as he contrasts his circumstances with the privilege of worship in his past: "These things I remember, and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival" (v. 4). Ultimately, the psalmist locates his assurance in the conviction that he will return to worship: "Hope in God, for I shall again praise him" (v. 5, 11).

Similarly, the letter to the Hebrews links the pilgrimage metaphor with the importance of worship: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near" (Heb. 10:23-25).

As the *Catechism* notes, the means of grace are ordinary, and too often worshipers equate ordinary with boring. This should not surprise us. We should expect that God's wilderness people will complain about

His provision of manna, just as they did in ancient days. To be sure, God can work extraordinarily. The *Confession* acknowledges this in order to protect the freedom of God. But to acknowledge the extraordinary work of God is not to expand our options, allowing us to find God or to tap His grace by the means of our own devising. To presume upon that right is to disdain the gracious way in which He does promise to meet us and enable us to grow in grace.

MEANS OF GRACE AS CORPORATE GRACE

"...the means of grace are ordinary, and too often worshipers equate ordinary with boring."

In his recent book, *The Church*, Edmund P. Clowney notes that the doctrine of the means of grace points us to the truth that the Christian pilgrimage is a *corporate journey*. "Growth in true holiness," Clowney writes, "is always growth together. It takes place through nurture, through

the work and worship of the church." The wilderness experience is a *corporate march* toward the promised land.

For this reason, the outward and ordinary means of grace are ecclesiastical ordinances. They belong to the church, which alone possesses the keys of the kingdom. The Reformers rightly insisted that outside of the visible church "there was no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF 25.3).

Calvin employed the metaphor of the motherhood of the church in order to stress its vital necessity. "Let us learn, even from the simple title 'mother' how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know [the church]. For there is no other way to enter life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, until she keep us under her care and guidance, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until

we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation." For Calvin, so essential was the church and the means that it provided that he was willing to conclude, "He who refuses to be a son of the Church desires in vain to have God as his Father."

American Christians generally overlook the *communal character* of their faith. We practice what some have dubbed "churchless Christianity," where church membership and worship attendance is incidental to the Christian life. Religious polling data have shown that large majorities of American Christians believe that they should arrive at their religious convictions independent of any church. With Calvin and the *Confession* we must reject the individualism of contemporary American spirituality, and the designer spirituality that invites us to pick and choose what works best for us. We do not come to church as consumers, looking for the best-equipped nursery or the most dynamic youth program.

Finally, adequate attention to the means of grace should provoke us to rethink the habit of absenting ourselves from evening worship. While the Bible may not specifically prescribe when and how often churches are to gather for worship on the Lord's Day, reflection on worship as a means of grace will challenge the prevailing notion among American Christians that attendance at one service is sufficient. When we absent ourselves from the worship that is called by the elders of our church, are we not denying ourselves the fullest portion of the blessing that God intends for us? And when our churches are dark and empty on Sunday evenings, are the elders of the church nourishing their flock as adequately as God would have them do?

THE BENEFITS OF REDEMPTION

Precisely what do the means of grace accomplish? How do they work grace in us? The *Catechism* explains to us that the Word, sacraments, and prayer are the "means by which Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption."

What are those benefits? The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* identifies these benefits in Q&A 32 as justification, adoption, and sanctification. As strange as this sounds, the *Shorter Catechism* suggests that there is a sense in which we can say that we are justified, adopted and sanctified *through worship*.

There are other benefits which "do either accompany or flow from" our justification, adoption, and sanctification. Q&A 36 describes these as "assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase in grace, and perseverance therein to the end." What more could we need in the barren wilderness that we find ourselves in, as we suffer and are persecuted and groan for our Lord? What could be more comforting than to enjoy these benefits? And how else are we to obtain them, than by the diligent use of the means of grace?

The instrumentality of worship in communicating these benefits is explained in Q&A 89: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation." This is a bold claim, but as Paul writes, faith comes from hearing the preached word of God (Rom. 10:13-15). This also seems like an archaic claim. In our hyper-stimulated, video-oriented, MTV culture, self-styled communication experts are saying the sermon is an ineffective and outmoded means of com-

munication. After all, people cannot devote sustained attention to anything, much less a "talking head," for more than 5 or 10 minutes. Yet here the church must be counter-cultural, and trust in the promises of God, even if it appears foolish according to the wisdom of our age: "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

What is said here of preaching applies to the other means of grace: they too convince and convert us, and they build us up and sustain us in the faith. Baptism, the *Shorter Catechism* tells us, is a partaking "of the benefits of the covenant of grace" (WSC 94). In the Lord's Supper, believers "are made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace" (WSC 96). Notice the language of benefits: we receive these benefits through the sacraments.

In these words the Westminster Divines are echoing Calvin. Calvin wrote that "the sacraments bring the clearest promises; and . . . they represent [the Word] for us as painted in a picture from life." The sacraments, Calvin is suggesting, are sermon illustrations from God. They are the images He uses to show the gospel to us. Moreover they

confirm us in the gospel. According to Calvin baptism and the Lord's Supper "have been instituted by the Lord to the end that they may serve to establish and increase faith."

Finally, prayer as a means of grace is accompanied with the promise of God's blessing. When we offer up our requests to God for things agreeable to His will, then our prayers will be a blessing to us and cause us to grow in grace. This can happen, of course, in private prayer. But corporate prayer is a knitting of our hearts together. The Lord's

"We do not come to church as consumers, looking for the best-equipped nursery or the most dynamic youth program."

Prayer is a "we" prayer, a model for praying together, with and for others.

Specifically, these means convey grace through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit accompanies the preaching of the Word. The Spirit enables the spiritual presence of Christ in the sacraments. And the Spirit prays with us, translating our groanings into words pleasing to God and edifying to us. The Reformers stressed the work of the Spirit in order to avoid the Catholic error of sacerdotalism. Grace is not dispensed by any virtue in the means themselves or in those who administer them, as if by some automatic or magical way. Rather, grace comes "only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them" (WSC 91).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEANS OF GRACE

We are not saying here that God will not provide us with assurance of His love or an increase in grace through other means. Christians may find assurance and grace through listening to Christian radio or participating in small group Bible studies. God can always work wherever and whenever He pleases. But the Bible teaches that God has promised to bless the means of grace that He provides in worship in a way that He has not promised to bless anything else. We have no need to expect God to work through anything else if we attend diligently to the means He has promised to bless. If we want God's blessing, if we want genuine comfort for the difficulties of our pilgrimage, then we have no further to look than the outward and ordinary means. The means, communicated through the church, "are made effectual to the saints for their salvation." And so we avoid or trivialize worship only at our own peril.

Dieters know how dubious are the promises of many heavily-advertised weight-loss programs. God's

diet is a sure thing. The Spirit promises to make these outward means effectual for our salvation. He honors His own promises and uses the word, sacraments, and prayer to sanctify us. We must avoid the many counterfeit diets that are flooding the Christian marketplace. Instead let us see how great God's provision is for us in worship, and how important it is to the life and the health of the believer. The means of grace are part and parcel of Christian worship. We worship to praise God and to give Him the glory that He alone deserves. And in worship God is also at work, extending His blessing to His people, and transforming us into His image.

If you believe that . . .

- ◆ *preaching is to be central . . .*
- ◆ *the Reformed confessions and creeds are reliable and useful . . .*
- ◆ *the gospel ministry is the practical application of the whole counsel of God . . . in the life of the church,*

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Adultery — from never to “normal”?

CAL THOMAS



Following the “normalization” of premarital sex, divorce and homosexuality, I have been wondering when and which of the few remaining dominoes dealing with personal morals would fall. It appears the next to go will be adultery.

Several press reports indicate the adultery domino is already teetering. The Air Force brought several charges, including adultery, against B-52 pilot Lt. Kelly Flinn. Flinn admits to an affair with a married man. The *New York Times* characterized it as “violations of the heart.” Wrong organ. CBS’s Morley Safer rolled his eyes during a “60 Minutes” interview with Flinn, communicating his view that the idea of punishing adulterous behavior is a relic from the era of witch trials in Salem.

Another press report tells of Army men visiting a brothel in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. A 33-year-old married soldier, who paid \$40 for five minutes of sex with a prostitute, explains, “Everyone is human, it’s going to happen,” as if “humanity” and its lower inclinations are the new standard. Would his wife agree? Would he feel the same about humanity if she was the cheating spouse?

Then there is the story of broadcaster Frank Gifford, who was caught on videotape by a supermarket tabloid, embracing a woman who is not Kathie Lee Gifford. Initial reaction was about entrapment and “press ethics,” not the damage

adultery causes to the wife and kids.

Rushing to keep pace with the cultural decline are at least 40 member churches of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which last week signed a “covenant of dissent” signaling their noncooperation with the denomination’s “fidelity and chastity” law. That law, to be adopted this spring, requires church leaders not to engage in sex outside of a male/female marriage bond. If some churches start going wobbly on a central Biblical teaching, what are the rest of us to think?

Psychiatrist and family therapist Frank Pittman has written about adultery, calling it the “primary disrupter of families, the most dreaded and devastating experience in marriage. It is the most universally accepted justification for divorce. It is even a legally accepted justification for murder in some states and many societies.”

Indeed, the author of the Mosaic code deduced from the Seventh Commandment prohibiting adultery that people who committed it were to be stoned. Jesus said of the woman taken in adultery (which looked like a setup to entrap Him) that she should “go and sin no more.”

Adultery is about breaking an agreement — to forsake all others until death parts the agreeers. That some high-profile people, such as Donald Trump, Lt. Flinn and, apparently, Frank Gifford, engage in adul-

tery, does not repeal the law given for our individual and corporate benefit.

Why do we treat this most sacred of human contracts in such a cavalier manner? Today, adultery is largely regarded as less offensive than a politician’s broken promise. The breaking of a business contract is more universally condemned than the violation of a marriage contract. Yet, the consequences to a society which lowers its standards for such things is broken homes, broken children and, ultimately, broken society.

Infidelity is primarily about lying. That is why it is incorrect to assert that a politician, or anyone else, can be one person in his or her “public life” and another person in private. If one lies about a marital promise, on what basis do we judge his standard for truth-telling elsewhere? Some politicians who promote themselves as favoring “women’s rights” see no inconsistency in violating their marriage contract through extramarital affairs, divorce or “annulments.” What about the rights of the woman who has been victimized by her predator husband, whose first responsibility is to preserve and protect his family?

Most states continue to treat adultery as a misdemeanor and everywhere it is grounds for divorce. But seeing the dominoes that have already fallen and the deaf ear we have turned to the Seventh Commandment (and all the others), adultery is taught in our public schools as “normal,” “human” and even beneficial.

Los Angeles Times Syndicate

**“Today,
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Bible Studies on
Genesis 1-11

LESSON 13: SAVED THROUGH THE WATER (PART ONE)

READ GENESIS 5:28 – 6:22

In an earlier lesson (#1) we noted what appears to be a very deliberate structure to the book of Genesis, in that the text was divided by the phrase "These are the generations of ..." or "This is the account of ..." This phrase has already appeared in Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. We find it again in Genesis 6:9, "This is the account of Noah." At the end of the first "generation/account" section we came across what I called an "epilogue of shame." Genesis 4 traced the genealogy of the cold murderer Cain, a line that ends with boastful Lamech. Yet the Bible adds a small glimmer of light in the text when it tells us that Seth is born to Adam and Eve as a replacement for the murdered son Abel. "At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26).

Two hearts . . . two purposes

The generation/account section that runs from Genesis 5:1 through 6:8 also ends with a brief epilogue of shame in Genesis 6:1-7. Spiritually the human race had degenerated until we read this evaluation of the human race by the LORD in Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." The King of creation was genuinely grieved about this state of affairs throughout His creation-kingdom, and He resolved to destroy all living things from the face of the earth. Yet once again we encounter another glimmer of light in the text just before we move on to the next generation/account section. "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:8).

Man's heart is described as completely corrupted. Man's heart was headed in the wrong direction, always and in every way. This is an absolute depravity that must have made daily existence for people a great struggle. What was man's chief purpose in this sinful state? To glorify himself and enjoy himself as long as he could. Genesis 5 with its somber echo, "and he died," caused people to live with this purpose: eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow (or at least some day) we die.

But Genesis 6:6 describes God's heart. God's grief was generated by His holiness and zealous hatred of sin, but it also arose out of the fact that He saw the creature made in His image, living in cross-purposes with His own will. His heart was "filled with pain." This is important to note because when we read of God's intention to destroy humanity in the flood, such awe-

some action was not done out of sadistic pleasure. God would have His justice satisfied, but He does not delight in the death of the wicked. "His heart was filled with pain." Even today, our sins of bitterness, rage and anger continue to give the Holy Spirit grief (cf. Eph. 4:30).

Will Noah bring us comfort?

Often in the Biblical story we meet characters whose names are significant, either because of the circumstances of their birth, or because of their changed roles in redemptive history (e.g., Abram becomes Abraham), or because the name is prophetic of something future. When Noah was born, his father Lamech spoke of his hope and faith that Noah would bring comfort (the name *Noah* sounds like a Hebrew word that means "comfort"). God had cursed the ground so that it would produce thorns and thistles. Work would go forward, but such labor would now be toil: difficult, painful, frustrating and tiring. In the end mankind would still die and return to the dirt from which we are all made (cf. Gen. 3:17).

Living under God's solemn curse can never be easy. Rather, it is crushing. Man's pride may seek many devices to hide the reality of cursed living, and humanity may try to live in denial ("God would not punish us, in any case"). But to the godly (and apparently Noah's father Lamech still had some knowledge of a godly state of affairs), living under God's common judgment in everyday life is felt daily and in many situations. The godly know that only in reconciliation with this just King can there ever be comfort and rest from sin and its consequent painful toil. Just as Eve had exalted with hope in the birth of a man (her firstborn, Cain) with the help of the LORD, so Lamech finds a name for his son that speaks of humanity's hopes.

Despite the overwhelming predominance of sinfulness in the human race, one man stood out. Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. Like Enoch before him, Noah walked with God. That is to say, his daily patterns of life arose out of a desire to serve God and honor His will for life. His attitudes and behavior were in sharp contrast to the violence and moral degradation of his time. To be sure, Noah was also conceived and born in sin, as were his ancestors and the people of his day. He was not sinless in an absolute sense. But his heart knew the true and only God, and he brought his lifestyle into conformity with the heart of God, to the extent that God had made His will known. This was the result of

God's grace, unmerited mercy. God's sovereign condescension in love to Noah created a man whose life was righteous, a life that was like a star shining in the darkness (cf. Phil. 2:14-16).

Revealing the divine will

It was in this context of grace which created a godly person, that Noah found favor (grace) in God's sight. Thus God came to Noah to reveal His intention and will regarding the earth. Later on the LORD would come to Abraham and would share with him His intentions of destroying wicked Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 18:17 we read, "Then the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'" God had already prophetically revealed that Abraham would receive the promised land and that he would become the father of a great nation. But Abraham also was made privy to the fate of the wicked, thereby prompting Abraham to begin a sustained intercession for the wicked city of Sodom. So too in Genesis 6 God showed Himself as friend and covenant partner to Noah (the word *covenant* comes up in verse 18).

In these two examples of Noah and Abraham we see a pattern, on a small scale, of something that is true on a larger scale. God gives the righteous greater insight and knowledge into the reality of things, including the things that are to come. During the period of the monarchy, God would do the same by speaking to His servants, the prophets. By providing us with divine counsel, God enables His chosen people to regain the prophetic role, a role that was lost in the sinful rebellion by Adam and Eve, but a role that is truly regained in union with Jesus Christ, our "chief Prophet and Teacher" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 12).

This fact helps us to understand more clearly the events of Genesis 6 (indeed, to understand all of the Bible!). For the Bible is not a morality tale of "good guys" versus "bad guys." It is a grand story of what God has done in Jesus Christ throughout redemptive history for the salvation of His elect and the redemption of His creation. Genesis 6 happens because of Jesus Christ, the descendant of righteous Noah. For the sake of the Christ who was to come, God came to Noah to give him a revelation about the world-destroying flood, and instructions concerning the ark in which Noah and his family would be saved from death.

Noah, heir of righteousness

Because Noah had received insight into God's intentions, he in turn began to build the ark. Hebrews 11:7 reads, "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." I have heard this expression: "It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark." Faith is not a leap into the dark as such. It is rather

a trusting in things that are not seen, **because of the trustworthiness of the One who speaks. Thus, if God says, "Leap into the dark, and I will be there to catch you,"** then we can leap because we trust our heavenly Father.

Presumably it would be another 120 years from the time of God's announced decision to **destroy the wicked human race, and the beginning of the flood itself. Yet Noah believed God's Word, responding in "holy fear" by building the ark. His efforts were probably scorned and ridiculed by the society around him. Yet when God's people live in fear of God, they need not fear man, either his ridicule or his scorn. Such faith in Noah's heart strengthened him with resolve to do what God had commanded.**

Noah, preacher of righteousness

Not only did Noah demonstrate his faith by building the ark in holy fear, he also began a campaign of *preaching* to the people of his generation. II Peter 2:5 says that **God destroyed the world of ungodly people, but He "protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others."** Genesis itself does not tell us in what capacity or to what extent Noah "heralded" the message of God's impending judgment. Obviously his life was a testimony to God's righteous ways, and the building of the ark spoke great volumes to his generation concerning what lived in Noah's heart. But Peter suggests that Noah also *spoke* of these things. Yet we must sadly conclude that only his immediate family was persuaded. No one else followed Noah's message and manner of faith: they remained eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the flood came and swept them all away. Only divine grace opens our hearts and the eyes of faith to believe what on the surface must seem incredible.

The ark: designed to preserve life

How often we may have picked up ideas of what Bible characters and physical objects are like from the Bible storybooks we read (or heard read as children), or from pictures in Sunday School material. If you have ever seen an artist's conception of Noah's ark, you have noticed that it is often (not always) portrayed as a huge boat with a prow. It is more likely that the ark was built like a huge barge or a floating chest of enormous proportions. It was not a ship that was going sailing on the ocean, nor was it a boat that needed to be launched from a dock.

Another place in the Bible where the same word is used for a similar ark is the little floating chest in which the infant Moses was placed in Exodus 2. This little box was made of reeds lined with pitch in order to be watertight. It is interesting that two great figures in redemptive history, Noah and Moses, find themselves in floating barges (one enormous, the other quite small) to escape death.

The ark was a three-decked structure, a kind of layered floating platform, filled with rooms to house the human residents and the various male-female pairs from the animate non-human realms of God's creation-kingdom. Again, we could let our imagination run rampant about all the logistics of this (e.g., How much food had to be stored? How did these wild animals react to each other?). But the Biblical text fails to satisfy our curiosity on these matters. The very fact that the animals and birds came in pairs demonstrates extraordinary providence from God. Did God also quiet or temporarily tame them for the duration of the flood? We are not told. It is likely that very young (and thus smallest?) representatives of each species came into the ark so that they might be the healthiest and longest to live as "first parents" of their species after the flood. But even I should not let my speculations get too far from the text!

What is clear is that a male-female pair from all the animate species, beginning with believing Noah and his family, was to enter the ark to escape the great cataclysm of universal flooding. Just as the world of wicked humanity and the old creation with it were to die, so too, in the ark a believer and his household with the (post-flood) "first parents" of the other animate species were to enter the ark to live. Genesis 6:20,21 put it this way: the creatures will come to Noah "to be kept alive." He was the key figure in building the ark and storing up the right kinds and sufficient amounts of food for them. While God was in sovereign control of all things in the world, yet in a real and practical way, everything hinged on the obedience of righteous Noah. What a responsibility!

Noah, a type of Christ?

The above discussion suggests that in several ways Noah typifies Christ. When we speak of Biblical *types*, we are referring to those persons, events and institutions of the Old Testament historical era that anticipate, or look forward to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. One might say that Christ left an impression or an imprint of Himself in earlier moments of history. It is through the obedience of one Man, Christ, that we are saved (cf. Rom. 5:15ff; I Cor. 15:20-22). So it was with Noah and his obedience: his household (a congregation of only eight people!) and the rest of creation were saved from death in the flood. All creatures had to come to Noah, enter the ark and stay with Noah, and be fed by Noah.

Does this not picture the relationship of the Christian church – and every Christian personally, along with the creation itself – to Christ? "Without Me you can do nothing," says the Lord. "Apart from Me, you cannot live." In John 15:1ff., Christ reminds us that our life is drawn from the nourishment of the Vine which is Christ Himself. The world of Noah's day had become corrupt

and rotten. Violence was prevalent in many places. Death reigned in men's hearts (cf. Eph. 2:1). But in Noah's time, that one righteous man became the narrow doorway through which the rest of history could flow and be rescued. In our day Christ Jesus is that narrow door, the only way back to the Father.

Covenant established

The Bible uses the actual word *covenant* for the first time in Genesis 6:18. But we should notice that the force of the phrase used in verse 18 ("But I will establish My covenant with you") is not such that covenant appears as something brand new, coming to Noah out of nowhere. A covenant is a relationship of life between God and His people, sovereignly initiated by Him but carried out in history with real human beings of His choice. Thus covenant (and that of grace!) is already presupposed and anticipated in the "mother promise" of Genesis 3:15: a Seed from the woman will arise in history to triumph in victory over the seed of the serpent. But to get from Eve to Christ, God creates a line of people with whom He lives "in covenant," this relationship of merciful friendship and life. Along the way of this history, God introduces various formalities of the covenant. But the point is this: even before the formalities of covenant are enacted along the road of redemptive history, God is seen again and again acting according to a covenant. So He speaks before the flood of securing ("establishing") the covenant in 6:18, but it is not until after the flood that God spells out what His covenant with Noah, with Noah's seed, and with all creation will mean (we will look at this in a later lesson on Gen. 9:1-17).

POINTS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. Psalm 2 describes the LORD's reaction to all attempts at sinful rebellion against His anointed one. First He laughs, and then He gets angry. Where else in the Bible do we read of God's "emotional state"? What does this reveal about God and His interaction with us in history? Does God laugh today at human sinfulness, or is He angry? How does Psalm 2 conclude as to what is a wise response to the LORD and His Son?
2. Genesis 6:9 says that Noah was a "righteous man, blameless among the people of his time." Something similar is said of Job (Job 1:1). Read Psalm 18:20-24 and Psalm 26. In these two Psalms we note that the psalmist appeals to his "blameless life," and he claims that God rewarded him according to his righteousness. How do we understand such expressions, if all of us (even the Psalm writers) are sinners?
3. Eschatology is the teaching of the Bible on the *last things*. What are the "signs of the times," those things that will occur in history which signal the end of this age? Are some (or all) of these "signs of the times" occurring today? What things must happen before Christ comes back again? See Matthew 24; II Thessalonians 2:1-12; *Belgic Confession*, Article 37.
4. Will the human race become **more and more** corrupt before the end of history, **or will it become** gradually better as the Gospel **message continues** to go forward throughout the world? **Support** your answer with Scripture.
5. Psalm 147:19-20 say that the LORD has "revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws. Praise the LORD!" God befriends the righteous and tells them things the world does not know on its own. God's people know about the good news of Jesus Christ, His Person and work; and they know about the coming judgment before God's holy throne. What must believers *do* with this knowledge? What does the Bible say about those who fail to make this known?

Mark D. Vander Hart

Bible Studies on
Genesis 1-11

LESSON 14: SAVED THROUGH THE WATER (PART TWO)

READ GENESIS 7

Genesis 7 really cannot be separated from the material in Genesis 6 and what follows through Genesis 9:17. Therefore, in this lesson we continue to examine several aspects that emerge in the flood story. We are again impressed with the seriousness in attitude and action which God demonstrates with regard to sin; but we are also humbled by the fact that He was still determined to bring to completion His grand plan of saving the world through the Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Symbols of kinds and times

In Genesis 6:19-20 we read that all the animals and birds were to come to the ark in pairs, with the obvious reason being an anticipation of filling the world again after the flood. Genesis 7:2-3,8 mention an additional detail. Seven of every kind of clean animal and bird were also to come into the ark. The word *clean* in Scripture has reference to what is properly fit and prepared to appear before the Lord in worship. Only clean animals could be sacrificed to the Lord, and after the flood Noah was to sacrifice to the Lord in worship. It would be completely improper for him to offer a sacrifice of an unclean thing after the great flood! Furthermore, in Genesis 9 man is given permission to eat meat, but he may only eat the meat of clean animals, the blood properly drained. Again, it would be necessary that there be extra clean animals available for such a food supply. In Leviticus there would be elaborate prescriptions given to God's people about what is clean and unclean before a holy, covenant God.

We also take note of several numbers that are significant, at least significant beyond this present story. After Noah and his family enter the ark, there are seven days before the flood begins. *Seven* takes us back to the weekly, sabbatical pattern of time, and it represents completion. In addition the rain lasts for 40 days and nights. In later redemptive history, Israel is in the wilderness for 40 years, thus out of the bondage of Egypt, but not yet in the promised land of Canaan. Our Lord Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and nights at the outset of His ministry (an historical echo of Israel's probation in the wilderness). While we should be cautious not to press the significance of numbers whenever they might appear in the Biblical text, perhaps 40 comes to have the significance of representing a period of testing, of not yet being in the place of rest, the goal of our journey. An interesting fact: about

40 years after Jerusalem crucified our Lord, the city of Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans (A.D. 70). Having received a period of probation, Jerusalem failed to accept her Messiah, so then God's judgment fell upon her.

The obedience of faith

Genesis 6 ended in verse 22 with a statement that is significant for us to understand what is happening in the flood narrative. Genesis 6:22 says, "Noah did everything just as God commanded him." Notice two things in this statement. First, it is the LORD God who initiates everything in terms of announcing the destruction that is to come. Building the ark to escape the flood is not Noah's idea. The rescue is divine in its conception. Secondly, the Biblical text tells us here that Noah did what God commanded him. Genesis 7:5,9,16 point this out as well.

The importance of this can be sensed if one were to read the flood stories that arose among ancient Mesopotamian peoples. In Mesopotamian myths there are many gods, usually arguing and fighting among themselves. The Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* tells us that the gods destroyed mankind because there was too much noise in the human race. If only we had been quieter! Furthermore, the "hero" in the pagan flood stories has his emotions and feelings described in vivid ways during his ordeal.

But the Biblical text is more sober in its telling. The flood story is not a romance; it is not a tale of high adventure. We do not know what Noah was thinking or feeling. He is silent in the narrative. Again, what Noah's wife and family may have been wondering during the many years of the ark's construction, we do not know. We may well speculate, but it remains just that: interesting speculation.

The repeated refrain concerning God's command and Noah's obedience must not be lost on us as well. When Hebrews 11 lists Noah as among those who "by faith" did tremendous things in redemptive history, we learn that faith is not merely knowledge of important Biblical teachings. Faith is not simply a lovely warmth in one's heart. It is not only an attitude toward God and His Word. *A mature faith results in works of obedience.* Faith takes hold of God's Word, but that faith then, in turn, begins to work in love (Gal. 5:6). Faith without works is dead (James 2:14ff). Had Noah only thought that God's Word was true, but then never acted upon that kind of faith, it would have been a dead faith. And Noah and

all his family would have been dead as well. Faith alone makes one right with God, but a true faith is never alone in the life of a true child of God.

One plus seven: eight souls saved

One characteristic of Biblical storytelling is that of *repetition*: certain details are told twice, even three times. One can still read scholarly literature that points to such instances of repetition in the Bible and concludes that this "proves" that the Biblical account is something of a "cut and paste" job of putting together elements from different stories and traditions. But such a theory cannot be proved, and it hardly is the case.

The repetitions are done in the Biblical story to press significant points upon the readers. We have already noted the fact that the Bible stresses God's commands being fulfilled through Noah's obedience. Furthermore, we read several times statements about God's intention to wipe out all living things because of wickedness. We also encounter mention of Noah's family in several places (see Gen. 5:32; 6:10, 18; 7:13; cf. 7:23). Here is demonstrated an important principle of how God deals with us in the practical matters of our redemption. He is pleased to deal with believers and their households. Noah is the righteous figure in the narrative. But God, in His infinite wisdom, is pleased to save his household with him. His three sons and their wives are sinners (consider what Ham does later in Genesis 9!). Yet all eight enter the ark to escape physical death in the flood.

Later in Genesis 17 God will apply this principle with Abraham. He is the great (Gentile!) believer, justified apart from the law (cf. Gen. 15:6). Yet he is to apply the binding sign of circumcision to himself and all his household. Genesis 17 notes three times how the covenant sign is administered even to the servants in his household who had been purchased with money. Thus the covenant of grace in the Old Testament was never merely a biological, national matter. From the beginning, the covenant of grace was open to all kinds of people, although it was administered through believers and their households. How important it is throughout Biblical history to attach oneself to the righteous ones of God, to their households, to their cities, to their nation. For example, when Lot began to move away from Abram, he put himself on the road to Sodom, a doomed city.

"Water, water everywhere"

The description of how the flood is brought upon the earth is clearly an echo from Genesis 1, but here in Genesis 7 we witness a reversal of the creation's structuring. Genesis 1 tells us that God created a firmament that is "inserted," one might say, into the cosmic waters in order to separate the waters above from the waters below. With the creation's firmament in place, life on earth could go forward upon ground that was dry.

The water that flooded the whole world in **Genesis 7** came from two directions: rain coming down through the floodgates of heaven (7:4,11,12) but also from the springs of the great deep (7:11). The rain lasted **40 days** and nights, and enough water was present to flood the earth for many more days and weeks to come. **With** water coming from above and from below, **we have in effect an undoing of the creation.** The sinfulness of mankind brings judgment, and that means not only death for the sinner, but the undoing of the creation as well. **What is more, creation always does the bidding of the LORD, and it serves as the ready instrument to bring the waters of death upon the whole earth.**

There are those who advocate the idea that the flood described in **Genesis 7-8** was only a local flood, that it was not a **universal flood**. They point to geological evidence. **Careful study of geological material is valuable and necessary. How its findings always "fit" with Biblical revelation, is a challenge, it is agreed.** Christians must be ready to face the hard questions, even those raised in **careful study of this creation.**

Yet it is **very hard to deny the fact that the Biblical material in Genesis 7 points out that the flood was universal and not merely a local flood.** Consider the following things in the text: **water coming from above and from below for 40 days and nights is an incredible amount of water (verse 18, the "waters rose and increased greatly on the earth").** Verse 19 says that **"all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered."** While we do not know the precise elevations of pre-flood mountain ranges, yet it is clear that if the highest mountain was covered enough to allow the ark to float above it at the height of the flood, then **all the mountains were covered with water. That is a universal flood!** Furthermore, Genesis 7 points out that **all life perished in the flood.** "Every living thing ... perished ... Everything on dry land that had the breath of life ... died. Every living thing ... was wiped out" (verses 21-23). The concluding statement of verse 23 is **very sobering:** "Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark." Imagine floating for weeks on a shoreless ocean, you and seven others being the only human beings in the world!

We learn here that God was just as serious and earnest in His dealings with sin and sinners as He was when Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden. "The soul that sins shall die," says the LORD. God gave the human race a probationary period of 120 years (6:3). The sinful race could see Noah's preparations, and they could hear his warnings. But in the end even the patience of God can wear thin, and then judgment of a most severe kind becomes inevitable.

There is one more point to be made here. **Genesis 7:16b,c reads, "as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in."** **The two most important Old Testament names of our God are used here, but the usage**

brings out two important aspects of who He is. As the Deity (God), He has full authority and power to command our obedience. But when it comes time to enter the ark before the flood begins, it is as the faithful, covenant-keeping LORD that He is identified. He is both Almighty God and heavenly Father, *able* to do what is good for His believing children but also fully *willing* to do it for us (see *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 9). The rest of Genesis 7 now proceeds with no more mention of God's names as the flood proceeds to destroy the world of sin.

Baptism now saves you

We have mentioned *typology* in an earlier discussion. To repeat what we have said: typology is a study of those people, events and institutions of the Old Testament era that anticipate and point forward to the realities of the new covenant era in which the Christian church now lives. Peter makes explicit notice of this in I Peter 3:20-21. In the context Peter is speaking of Christ's suffering death for our sins, but then he makes some remarks that are slightly off the main thrust of his discussion. Admittedly, there is dispute about the meaning of the words, "but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah ..." (verses 18-20). What is clear is that God was patient with mankind until the point when divine patience had run out.

But Peter continues in his tangential remarks. In the ark there were "only a few people, eight in all," saved through water. If the ark were the instrument of salvation for Noah and his family, then the water was the agent of destruction and deadly judgment. But Peter adds (v.21), "and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"

How often do we consider the fact that baptismal water is symbolic of both grace and judgment? Or is that the case? Consider the following: in the flood at the time of Noah, the water caused the death of the human race that was rotten and continually violent. It wiped the surface of the earth clean. The cataclysmic flood, one might say, flushed the creation of all that was filthy and unclean in the eyes of the LORD. But this now opened the way for the righteous to emerge from the ark in due time to live for the glory of God and to enjoy Him forever.

But note also this: the flood itself did not change the hearts of the eight people saved in the ark. So too baptismal water itself cannot regenerate the heart, nor can it effect the conversion of one's life. Baptism is a sacrament. As such, it is a holy sign and seal; it is not the thing itself (see *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 25). It points to the saving work of Jesus Christ, which is why

Peter has mentioned Christ's suffering for sins (3:18) and joins to it a reference to His resurrection (3:22). Good Friday and Easter morning's events are the moments when our second Adam, the true Comforter (Noah's name suggests *comfort*), accomplishes our salvation. Baptism points to these realities. But, remarkably, Peter tells us that the historical event of the flood points ahead to the symbol of baptism, the sacrament of our Christian identity and union with Christ.

The flood thus has two powerful realities: destruction and salvation. The work of Christ has two powerful realities: the destruction of sin and the sinner, but also the salvation of His elect by grace through faith. And thus baptism has two powerful indications lying in its background: the destruction of sin by the blood of Christ, and our salvation through that blood. If we who have been baptized should repudiate, despise or neglect what baptism symbolizes, namely, Christ and His work, we can never rest our hope upon the ceremony of baptism. It is then as if we had left the ark and thrown ourselves into the floodwaters. Outside of the ark was death. Outside of Christ is death.

The symbolism of the ark also must not be overlooked. It was with deliberate design that many Christian churches were built to suggest the ark. But again, just as we may not place our hope in the sacramental water as such, there is no salvation in "brick and mortar." Yet the people who gather around the Word of God as Christians, are constituted the community of faith by God's grace. Therefore, the Christian church confesses that outside of the church there is no salvation (cf. *Belgic Confession*, Art. 28). Seven people joined Noah in the ark and were saved "through water." Today people from every tongue, language, culture and background join Christ and His church, receive Christian baptism, and they are saved by God's grace. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

POINTS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. Read Matthew 24:36-51. It says that in Noah's time people were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" up until the day Noah entered the ark and the flood began. Such activities are not wrong in themselves (see I Cor. 10:31). What is the Lord Jesus warning us about in this passage? How well do Christians heed this warning? How much warning do we give to our society, our communities, our neighbors?
2. Noah believed what God said about the judgment through a devastating flood, and then he acted upon that faith. He built the ark when it was not raining. How is it possible for some Christians to profess faith but then never act upon it? Are we saved by good works? Are we saved apart from good works? What is the relationship of faith and good works in the Christian life? (See Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:14; *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Days 24, 32, and 33; *Belgic Confession*, Art. 24.)
3. What was God's purpose in the older covenant to make the elaborate distinctions of clean and unclean things, animals and birds? When were these distinctions removed? Why? What, if anything, does this distinction teach us today?
4. What does our society believe about the judgment of God upon human sin and rebellion? If you think that the common views about God's judgment are less than Biblical, what has led society to think this way? How is the Christian church affected (if it is) by such thinking?
5. Christ's second coming will be at a moment that no one knows. Then the whole human race will be judged. But before the end of history, could (or would) God bring a sudden and very widespread judgment of catastrophe upon the human race? If so, why might He do so? How could He do so?
6. Baptism is a sign and seal of God's covenant of grace. It marks the recipient of the baptismal water with the Name of the Triune God (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). What does Christian baptism mean? How well do Christian people understand the meaning of baptism? How seriously do Christians take their own baptism? What is more important, baptism or making a profession of faith? Why? (See Romans 6:1-4; I Corinthians 10:1ff; *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Days 26-27; *Belgic Confession*, Art. 34; *Westminster Confession*, Chap. 28; *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q/A 94-95; *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q/A 165-167.)

Mark D. Vander Hart

John Murray — Two Selections from his Collected Writings

JOHN MURRAY

The Origin of Man

[Published in *The Law and the Prophets*, edited by John H. Skilton, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1973.]

Vol. 2, p. 3

For our knowledge of man's origin we are mainly dependent upon the first two chapters of Genesis (cf. also Matt. 19:4, 5; Mark 10:6, 7; Luke 3:38; 1 Cor. 11:8, 9; 1 Tim. 2:13). In these chapters in Genesis there are three leading emphases:

First, the universe had a beginning; it is not eternal (Gen. 1:1, 31; 2:1; cf. John 1:1, 3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 11:3). Only of God can eternity be predicated, and all that is distinct from God came to be by his will and word (cf. Psalm 33:6, 9). The data mentioned in Genesis 1:1, for example, are basic to all Christian thought of God, of reality distinct from God, and of God's relation to this reality.

Second, in the production of the heavens and the earth there is sequence and progression. They did not come to be by a single all-embracing fiat. There is ordered process moving to the climax of man's formation, to man as the crown of God's handiwork. The platform of life for man is prepared by successive steps and life itself appears to an appreciable extent in an ascending scale until it reaches its apex in man.

Third, at each stage in this progression God speaks and gives his command. We read repeatedly, 'And God said' (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29). No *single* grand fiat endowed created reality with potencies which spontaneously by energies intrinsic to them produced the various forms of life. We are advised of the significance of God's word and of the efficacy belonging to it (cf. especially Gen. 1: 3, 11, 12; Psalm 33:9).

The Significance of the Doctrine of Creation

Vol. 1, pp. 325-329

Nothing is more basic and determinative in shaping our thought than is our conception of God. The thought that does not begin with God and move towards him is essentially godless and therefore ungodly.

CREATION AND OUR IDEA OF GOD

It might seem that the doctrine of creation is only remotely or, at least, secondarily involved in our conception of God. It is true that God is self-existent and self-sufficient. He is not dependent upon creation, and the act of creation did not change his being and internal necessary relations. Creation did not add anything to his eternal and inherent perfections. It might therefore be plausibly argued that our conception of God is not determined by that which God has created, and that our conception of God is independent of the view of creation we entertain. Let us not prejudice our view of God, it might be said, by introducing concepts of creation, since creation is really extraneous to the being, perfections and internal relations of the eternally blessed, self-subsistent and self-sufficient Godhead.

The fallacy of this line of argument is that we are speaking now of *our* conception of God. We are not self-existent and self-sufficient beings, existing in abstraction from creation, and viewing God in his eternal being and independence by some kind of superintuition and perception. We are dependent beings, and it is only by creation and in the context of creation that we think and entertain a conception of God. When *we* think, and particularly when we think of God, we think as beings conditioned by creation. In other words, when *we* think of God we cannot think of God aright without thinking of our relation to him. Even if the thought of our relation to him is not in the forefront of consciousness at a particular time, it must always be in the immediate background conditioning our whole attitude in thinking of him. To be quite specific, any thought of God by us must be conditioned by a profound apprehension of his transcendent majesty and glory; in a word, that he is God and that there is none else beside him. Our thought must always be determined by the fear of God. Reverence is the very soul of true thought, and worship is its invariable result. But why reverence and worship? Simply because he is God and we are his creatures. So far then as we are concerned, we can never think of God without thinking of God as God and of ourselves as his creatures. In other words, the thought of creation, the thought of our dependence upon God, is implicated in any true thought we entertain with respect to God. Without the concept of creation, then, we cannot think even one right thought of God. Hence the significance of creation for our conception of God, and therefore for the Christian position.

CREATION AND THE WORLD

There are, however, other respects in which the doctrine of creation basically affects our conception of God. Not only does our relation to God affect our thought of God, and must always condition our thought of him; it also affects our thought of the relation to God of the world in which we live. We live in space and time, and it is foolish to try to abstract ourselves from the conditions of space and time. They condition our thought as well as ourselves. Whence are they? Do they condition God? Our very relation to them compels us to ask: What is their relation to God? Obviously if they are aspects of his being they immediately determine our conception of God. And if they are not, whence came they, or whence are they?

We can readily see how germane is the first word of the Scripture, that God created the heavens and the earth, and the commentary of the Psalmist, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." All that which exists distinct from God himself owes its origin to the sovereign will and fiat of God. The whole of reality distinct from God himself is dependent upon God and dependent upon him because he caused it to be. The doctrine of creation affects the sole eternity and universal sovereignty of God. If anything that exists, exists apart from the creative will of God, then we must posit something alongside of God and independent of him, and then we have adopted a dualism that cuts athwart the sole eternity, sole self-existence and universal sovereignty of God. And this means that he is not God.

CREATION AND OUR FAITH - SIN AND REDEMPTION

Our topic is the *significance of creation for our Christian position*, and more is involved in the Christian position than our conception of God. We may now ask: How does the doctrine of creation affect our faith? It needs no proof to affirm

that the Christian position is one of faith in God. The Christian position is one of Christian faith. The Christian redemption contemplates communion with God and without faith it is impossible to please him.

The faith of the Christian religion is the faith of God's redemptive grace, and redemption has no meaning apart from sin. Sin and redemption therefore set the points for the describing of the orbit within which, or in relation to which, Christian faith has meaning. How does creation affect these two points?

Creation means that all things owe their origin and existence to the will and fiat of God. Since God is just in all his ways and holy in all his works, this implies the inherent goodness of creation. It is not without profound meaning that it is written, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." In no form did evil inhere in creation. Evil in all its forms, and particularly in the specific form that we call sin, originated subsequent to creation, that is, after God had finished all his works which he created and made. Two negatives follow from this: first, that evil and sin are not eternal; second, that sin and evil were not resident in God's created handiwork. Sin had an origin, and it originated subsequent to creation. Man, in particular, was created in the image of God and therefore replete with that which is the opposite of sin, namely, knowledge, righteousness and holiness. For sin as sin, for sin as guilt, man is responsible, and man alone is responsible. When viewed either seminally or actually it cannot be referred to divine authorship. On any other position it is impossible to maintain a doctrine of sin as the contradiction of the divine will and perfection.

For if we suppose that sin is something necessarily emanating from an entity that existed independently of God and outside of man, then at least man is not responsible. With the implications of such a supposition for God we have already dealt. If we suppose that sin is something necessarily arising from the constitution of man, then it is something belonging to the constitution of man, either because

God in forming man was compelled to form man that way or because God freely made man that way. On the first alternative we may shield God's responsibility at the expense of his sovereign power. On the second alternative God is directly responsible for making man with an evil constitution. But, on either alternative, man is not responsible: he is the helpless victim of the nature with which he is endowed. Human responsibility is removed, and with responsibility goes guilt, and with guilt goes sin!

We can see, then, how indispensable to the doctrine of human sin is the doctrine of creation. Creation was in its whole extent very good, and sin was not a necessity arising from that creation nor a necessity arising from the nature with which man was endowed. It originated as a free movement of defection and apostasy within man's own bosom.

How does creation affect the other focal point in Christian faith, namely, redemption? Redemption saves from and annuls sin, and sin is the contradiction of the divine will and perfection. Ultimately sin is the one and only thing in God's universe that is recalcitrant with reference to God. It is the one thing that is opposite to him. Other evils may in a sense be said to be opposite to him also. But all other evils are derivative from sin and they are the result of the reaction of the divine holiness to sin. So we may say that sin is the one and only thing in which contradiction to God inheres. Yet it is sin that redemption overcomes and destroys. Redemption cannot be defined as anything less than the making an end of sin and its evil consequences.

Now if God is to overcome sin it must be within the realm of God's government, that is to say, within the realm in which he exercises such absolute sway that he can deal effectively with it. If we do not hold a pure doctrine of creation, then we have opened the door for the positing of the existence of something that exists independently of God, and therefore of something outside the realm of his government. In that moment we have posited the existence of a realm that is unamenable to his absolute sway, and therefore

a realm within which sin may be impervious to his redeeming power. We can see therefore the stake that redemption has in the fact of creation. Sin is not something that exists outside the universe that has come to be by God's omnipotent fiat and sovereign will.

It should not surprise us therefore that the Epistle to the Hebrews, conceiving of faith as projection into an unseen and hoped-for realm, should coordinate

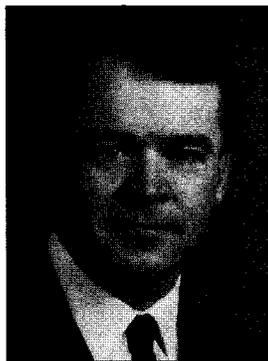
the faith, indeed identify the faith, by which believers in all ages were accepted by God, by which they lived the life of righteousness and by which they attained to the promise of an eternal inheritance, with the very faith by which we believe that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

CREATION AND THE END OF ALL THINGS

Finally, the doctrine of creation affects our teleology, our philosophy of the end of all things. Nothing is more essential to, and determinative of the Christian position than that the end of all things is the glory of God. "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). All things have their beginning and their end in God. The relevancy of creation to this truth is apparent. In the words of Revelation 4: 11, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created."

Note: Headings were inserted by the editors.

Dr. John Murray was a beloved professor at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia for many years. These two selections from his Collected Writings were printed by Greenville Presbyterian Seminary in honor of the 100th year of Dr. Murray's birth.



Accountability: the key to good pastoral care

JOHN R. SITTEMA

Over the years, I've written literally dozens of columns for elders and deacons. In them, I've stressed a common theme: these offices aren't designed by Christ to fulfill merely administrative tasks within the church (go to meetings, structure budgets, oversee building and grounds), but are established with *pastoral purposes* in mind. They are given to the church to defend the flock from evil, to nurture the flock in the Word, to guide and coordinate the stewardship of the flock, and all of this with a view to equipping the membership to give itself in its own service to Christ. If I've said it once, I've said it a hundred times: elders (especially) are pastors, and ought to be involved in pastoral care.

Recently, however, someone who reads this column visited our church in Dallas on a particular Sunday. He sought me out after church to ask me how we "did things differently" here. I guess he was looking to see whether I practiced what I preached in this monthly column. I had to admit to him that we struggle just as mightily here to implement this vision as anyone does anywhere in the Reformed and Presbyterian church world. I suspect this is so for a couple of reasons. First, we're all busy, and the demands of pastoral care are heavy. (We have no retired elders here; all are engaged in demanding careers.) Second, tradition is weighty. In most churches, the

view that "the pastor" should pastor the flock, the elders should "rule" (read: "administer"), and the deacons should take care of the money is a dominant viewpoint. Though we may agree that Acts 20 and I Peter 5 describe a different model, it's hard to implement. We've always done it the other way.

So, how do we improve our pastoral care? How do we actually get elders and deacons beyond mere agreement with a concept, all the way to hearty involvement in the pastoral care of individuals and families? In a word, *accountability*.

"A rose by any other name..."

I recently read an article in a theological journal that was discussing the validity of the third of Calvin's "three marks of the true church." The first (pure preaching of the Word), and the second (right administration of the sacraments) are indisputable for Reformed Christians.

"Unless the church...takes the Word seriously, and insists that it be honored and obeyed, the church is not and will not be alive in Christ!"



tians. But the third (faithful application of church discipline) is not as popular these days, and many are beginning to question whether it really belongs in the list.

I believe it is absolutely essential. That means, I believe that without it, the church will lose her spiritual vitality, and ultimately shrivel up and die. Let me explain (but first, let's change the name and call it "accountability"). By "accountability" I mean holding people accountable to agreed-upon standards of behavior and doctrine. In the business world, that is assumed. You either have accountability, or your business fails. In the educational arena, academic achievement is measured in terms of accountability. You do your homework, you fulfill the requirements of your degree, or you fail. It's as simple as that.

So too in the church. When a believer hears the Word of God (purely preached!) or reads the Word of God, he or she is called to a *response* of life and heart. That is a nonnegotiable component of a covenant relationship with God. (Jesus demanded *doers*, not only hearers!) When a believer commits herself to membership in the local body, she promises to honor the care of the eldership as they shepherd her according to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Why then should we balk at the notion of "church discipline," properly understood? It's not merely punitive, but is intentionally *pastoral*. It doesn't aim merely to scold, but to hold God's people accountable to the Word of Christ, to the body of doctrinal truth that the church embraces, and to the lifestyle of holiness that the Scriptures demand of the converted.

I once said, in an elders conference, that "all church members are at all times under the discipline of the Word." Discipline isn't just applied when pastoral care fails. Pastoral care is discipline! Or,

for the purposes of this column, pastoral care demands accountability. Elders dare not merely make suggestions without following up. Imagine confronting an adulterer with "advice" to leave his lover, but without ever following up to discover whether obedience to the Word of the Lord brought about the conversion of life? Imagine "suggesting" that a member who neglects worship repeatedly might consider attending services periodically, but doing nothing if she doesn't? Such behavior would be pastoral neglect.

That's what I think Calvin meant when he called "discipline" a mark of a True Church. That's certainly what I mean when I call accountability evidence that a church has vitality. Unless the church (and that means the preacher, the pastoral elders, the deacons and everyone else) takes the Word seriously and insists that it be honored and obeyed, the church is not and will not be alive in Christ!

Now, back to my point. All this applies to elders and deacons too. I can write column after column arguing for and articulating what the Bible says about pastoral care by the elders of the church. I can write and preach until I'm blue in the face about the fact that the preacher cannot and should not pastor the flock by himself. I can holler and scream and dance about all I want but unless there is accountability to the Word in this church in Dallas, and in the congregations you serve wherever you read these words, we'll be disobedient to our Lord, and thus will jeopardize the vitality of His Church.

Elders and deacons can agree with me that Acts 20 demands that elders become intimately involved with the flock, defending against the

wolves of false doctrine and unholiness. They can agree that I Peter 5 demands a pastoral heart and style of relating with the flock. They can endorse my insistence that Acts 6 demands deacons who do more than collect money, but who actively seek to cultivate,

assess, receive, and manage all kinds of resources, including both spiritual gifts and finances.

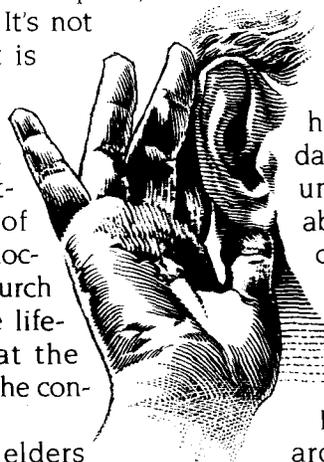
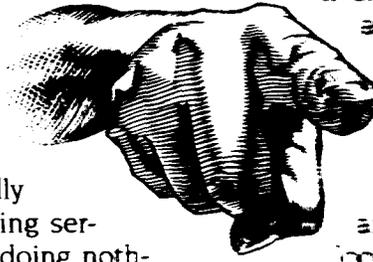
But if your elders and deacons don't look each other in the eye regularly and ask, *are you doing your thing?* you won't make the necessary changes to improve your pastoral care. You must hold yourself accountable. You must hold your brethren accountable. You must insist on obedience to the Scripture within your own body of officebearers. You must encourage the hesitant, and rebuke if obedience isn't forthcoming, even going so far as to bring witnesses to bear on stubborn and uncompliant brothers.

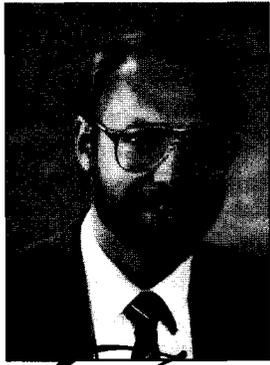
Why? Because the spiritual vitality of the church of Jesus is at stake!

And that, after all, is the goal, isn't it? Our goal as Reformed churches is not merely to prove that we're maintaining traditions, staying conservative, avoiding liberalism. The goal is to be alive in Christ, displaying the vitality of a church throbbing with His Word and Spirit, pulsating with personal and dynamic relationships with Christ, His Word and each other, flexing servant-hearts and performing effective ministry. That's what the reformation is all about. Nothing more, nothing less.

So, dear brother, hold yourself accountable to the Word of Christ. And start holding your fellow servants accountable to their Master's expectations. His Church's health is at stake!

Dr. Sittema is pastor of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Dallas, TX.





Abraham Kuyper - His Life and Legacy

PART THREE: ABRAHAM KUYPER – ANSWERING CRITICISMS OF HIS WORLDVIEW (II)

CORNELIS P. VENEMA

In my previous article, I noted that Kuyper has been a controversial figure within the Reformed community. During his own lifetime and afterward, Kuyper's articulation of a Calvinistic worldview has provoked considerable debate. Evaluations of Kuyper's position have ranged from enthusiastic approval to vigorous dissent, with any number of positions between these extremes. The number and variety of Kuyper's critics attest to the importance of the issues he raised for the service of Christian believers in his day and ours.

Having considered some of the more common criticisms of Kuyper's doctrine of the church and his principle of sphere sovereignty, we have yet to consider those criticisms that relate to Kuyper's understanding of the antithesis and of common grace. Here too Kuyper's viewpoint has evoked rather different responses. Indeed, something of the complexity of Kuyper's thought is evident in his emphasis upon both the antithesis and common grace. Among those influenced by Kuyper, quite different approaches and viewpoints have been adopted, depending upon the role and prominence of one or another of these principles.¹ Some have enthusiastically embraced Kuyper's insistence upon the antithesis between faith and unbelief as it affects every area of life. As a result, their policy has been to vigorously separate from all illegitimate entanglements with the world in the area of worldly amusements, organizations and institutions and so on. Others

have more affinity to Kuyper's view of common grace and have adopted, accordingly, a more affirmative policy toward the world. Each of these policies can easily find support in Kuyper's writings.

CRITICISMS OF KUYPER'S VIEW OF THE ANTITHESIS

One of the keynotes of Kuyper's life was that of the *antithesis* between faith and unbelief. This antithesis between the truth and the lie, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world, cuts through all of life and profoundly influences human life at every level and in all of its expressions. There is no neutral place so far as the recognition and service of Christ as King is concerned. Whether it be in marriage, the home and family, the business enterprise, the school or academic institution, the political party, the labor union – in all the areas and spheres of life one either works "for the King" (*pro Rege*) or *against* Him.

For this reason, one of the distinctive fruits of Kuyper's reforming activity in the Netherlands was the promotion of distinctively Christian institutions whose formative principles were based upon the Christian worldview. Not only in the Netherlands, but also in North America, those who have followed Kuyper have sought to establish *separate Christian organizations* in various life spheres.

Kuyper's influence was far-reaching in the promotion of, for example, Christian schools at every level (from primary school to university), Christian labor unions, and Christian political associations. The consequence of this emphasis is known today in the Netherlands as a process of *verzuiling* ("pillarization") in which the whole of society is structured along ideological lines with different groups (Reformed, Catholic, secularist) developing separate institutions to express their particular principles.² Similarly, the conflicts within many Reformed communities regarding the subject of "worldly amusements" and the dangers of world-conformity were the product, at least in part, of a Kuyperian emphasis upon separation from all illegitimate entanglements with the principles and practices of the world.

Kuyper's stress upon the antithesis and its implications for the separate development of Christian institutions has been criticized in several ways. One criticism often voiced is that Kuyper's emphasis encourages a kind of *isolationism* in which the Christian community develops a radically separate form of existence in each sphere of

life. By insisting upon the separate development of Christian institutions in every area of life, Kuyper's worldview encourages *pluralism* within human society that unnecessarily and dangerously isolates differing communities from each

"...something of the complexity of Kuyper's thought is evident in his emphasis upon both the antithesis and common grace."

other. As a consequence, there is little place for any bonds of community or society that bridge the differences between ideological or religious communities. This can lead, say Kuyper's critics, to a kind of isolation from the world on the part of the Christian community that will be counter-productive to any leavening influence within society. Furthermore, within the academic sphere, Kuyper's stress upon *two kinds of science* can lead to an obscurantism within the community of Christian scholars, one which rejects any accountability to or interaction with the broader world of scholarship.

A different, though related, criticism of Kuyper's insistence upon the antithetical development of distinctively Christian institutions is the charge that it often produces an unrealistic, even triumphalistic, social policy. Advocates of Kuyper's vision have often maintained that – no matter how impractical it might prove to be – the Christian community must establish its own organizations in order to be faithful in the service of Christ. Nothing less than a Christian political party or a Christian labor union, for instance, will answer to the need to honor Christ's lordship, respectively, in politics and labor relations. Critics of Kuyper's vision frequently argue that this approach is naïve at best, grandiose at worse. It assumes that Christian believers not only can form such organizations, but also can expect them to make a real difference in society. But it is hardly possible in a country like the United States that a Christian political party could be formed that would have any meaningful impact upon the formation and implementation of public policy. Nor is it likely that – in spite of the brave talk about the *transformation* of this or that dimension of modern life – these efforts

will make any appreciable difference in the patterns of western secular society. Often, it is alleged, these efforts result more in *being conformed* to than *transforming* the world.

It is difficult to respond to these criticisms of Kuyper's emphasis upon the antithesis and its implications for Christian practice. Some of them do not so much address Kuyper's position as distortions or one-sided approaches on the part of those who claim to be working "in his line." Others represent a lack of appreciation for the biblical teaching that the believer and the believing community are to be *separated from* the world in order to be *consecrated to* the Lord's service. Still others reflect the conviction that the transformation of individual believers is a more appropriate policy than the formation of Christian organizations which often become an obstacle to real transformation.³

However, in some cases Kuyper's emphasis may produce the kinds of ill fruit described.

Ironically, the separation from the world which Kuyper advocated on the basis of his doctrine of the antithesis can become the occasion for a kind of isolationism which cuts the Christian community off from any meaningful (including evangelistic)⁴ engagement with the world. This is ironic in view of Kuyper's emphasis upon separation from the world *for the sake of a distinctively Christian practice in the world*. Kuyper did not intend the formation of Christian institutions to be the means of escape from engagement in legitimate worldly vocations. Rather, he intended these institutions to be the means of expressing and exhibiting Christ's lordship over all of life in the various life spheres. The kind of isolationist practice that characterizes some advocates of Kuyper's principle of the antithesis repre-

sents a distorted and one-sided appropriation of Kuyper's insights. This practice often reflects an appreciation for Kuyper's emphasis upon the antithesis, but a rejection of his emphasis upon common grace.

One legitimate aspect of these criticisms of Kuyper's understanding of the antithesis relates to the different situation Kuyper faced in the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. What Kuyper advocated and encouraged in terms of the separate development of Christian institutions in the Netherlands in this period is often impractical in North America at the end of the twentieth century. This is not a concession to a kind of pragmatism that measures what is proper by what is practical. But it is a recognition that there were unique circumstances and developments in the Netherlands during Kuyper's lifetime that cannot be replicated in North America in our day. Though the principles Kuyper advocated are of continuing significance, the policies that these principles recommend may be somewhat different. Though the formation of separate Christian organizations, where this is feasible and possible, may be a preferred means to express the lordship of Jesus Christ in different areas of life, alternative means in some cases have to be found by the Christian community today.⁵

COMMON GRACE AND "POSITIVE" CALVINISM

It is fitting that I should return to the last the doctrine of common grace as Kuyper developed it. No feature of Kuyper's thought has been the subject of more sustained reflection or severe criticism than his understanding of common grace. No feature of Kuyper's thought has provoked greater dissension among his critics. On the one hand, there are those who receive Kuyper's doctrine of common grace as an important "corrective"

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or antidote to his at times extremist development of the principle of the antithesis. According to these critics, the doctrine of common grace blunts the sharp edges of Kuyper's view of the antithesis, preventing the kind of isolationism and obscurantism of which I spoke in the preceding section. On the other hand, there are those who regard Kuyper's development of this theme as a kind of "Trojan horse" within the camp of a Christian worldview. By developing and expanding the doctrine of common grace beyond anything known previously in the Reformed tradition, Kuyper opened the door to the very thing his emphasis upon the antithesis ought to have nailed shut - a policy of *conformity* to the world.

One of the remarkable features of the discussion of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace is the prominent role this doctrine has played within the (Dutch) Reformed community in North America. Students of the history of the Reformed churches in North America are familiar with the debates regarding common grace, for example, that troubled the Christian Reformed Church in the early decades of the twentieth century and led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed churches.⁶ Though I will not enter into the history and course of these debates, these ecclesiastical developments reflect the intense and ongoing debate that Kuyper's doctrine of common grace has evoked.

Among those who appreciate Kuyper's doctrine of common grace, it is generally acknowledged that this doctrine allowed Kuyper to account for the possibility and propriety of engagement with the world at every level. Because common grace expressed God's continued goodness toward the creation in upholding, maintaining and directing its life and development, Christians were obligated to continue to serve God within the full range of human life and culture. Because God by His common grace hindered and prevented the full expression of sinful

rebellion in human life and culture, much that was good and praiseworthy could be found and appreciated by the Christian community in its use of the products of human culture. Common grace, according to Kuyper, accounted for the presence of institutions (the state), the progress of science and scholarship, the arts, and the like, which Christian believers are obligated to receive with gratitude and use in the service of Christ. However corrupted or distorted through human perversity and sinfulness, these fruits of God's common grace in the preservation and development of the creation are not to be despised or wholly rejected. Common grace, therefore, provided Kuyper with a basis for encouraging Christian activity in the world rather than *flight* from the world. This doctrine provided the kind of balance Kuyper needed to prevent his understanding of the antithesis from spinning off in the direction of the kind of isolationism described in the preceding section.

Those who have little appreciation for Kuyper's doctrine of common grace view this doctrine in an entirely different light. According to these critics, Kuyper not only failed to show any meaningful *connection* between his understanding of "particular" and "common" grace, but he also provided a basis by means of this doctrine for emasculating the antithesis of its power. By expanding the doctrine of common grace, Kuyper laid the foundation for the kind of *positive* Calvinism that has little eye for the antithesis between faith and unbelief, but a keen eye for all the ways the kingdom of Christ and of the world converge. This positive Calvinism finds much of the culture and scholarship of the world to be congenial to the Chris-

tian faith. It looks eagerly for common ground with the world and risks thereby accommodation to the allurements of worldly success and approval. Though it still speaks of the need to "transform" all of life, its practical policy is one of "conformity" to the dictates of contemporary culture and scholarship. Rather than seeking to distance the Christian community from the world's patterns of thought and life, the mind of common grace looks upon the world and its products as benign and non-threatening.

That Kuyper's doctrine of common grace could give rise to such widely divergent responses ought to caution against too simplistic an evaluation of his position. However, it is striking to notice how Kuyper is criticized by some for emphasizing too much the antithesis. This criticism maintains that Kuyper's doctrine of the antithesis can only lead to isolationism and radical separation from all worldly engagements. Others also criticize him for emphasizing too much the doctrine of

common grace. This criticism then maintains that Kuyper's doctrine of common grace can only lead to world conformity and accommodation to sinful human culture and scholarship. Two more conflicting sorts of criticism could hardly be imagined!

At the risk of being regarded as too much a "Kuyperian," I would argue that these criticisms of Kuyper represent a kind of one-sided caricature of Kuyper's worldview. Neither of them answers to the complexity and breadth of Kuyper's full position, a position that resists playing off the antithesis against common grace as though these were inherently at odds. No doubt many of Kuyper's followers have

"One of the remarkable features of the discussion of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace is the prominent role this doctrine has played within the (Dutch) Reformed community in North America."

embraced one or another aspect of his thought - some emphasizing the Kuyper of the antithesis, others emphasizing the Kuyper of common grace. Kuyper's legacy includes not only those who are sometimes termed "antitheticals," but also those who are sometimes termed "positive" Calvinists. Each of these approaches can appeal to Kuyper against the other. But in so doing they confirm that Kuyper's worldview was more complicated and rich than their own, one-sided worldview which offers, dare I use the term, a more "simplistic" handling of the issues Kuyper was addressing.

Now this does not mean that Kuyper's doctrine of common grace is wholly satisfactory. There is some real ambiguity in Kuyper's doctrine on the question of the relation between particular and common grace. In some of his formulations, Kuyper so emphasizes the working of God's common grace that it seems to have a completely independent significance, unrelated to the purpose and working of God's special grace in the salvation of His people.⁷ As a result, Kuyper does not always carefully articulate the significance of common grace as it provides a *context* for the accomplishment of God's redemptive purposes. Nor does he provide an adequate account of the kind of interrelation that exists between the principle of the antithesis and the doctrine of common grace. It is not surprising, therefore, that students of Kuyper have been able to take hold of one or another of these emphases while rejecting or depreciating the other.

CONCLUSION

When I first consented to the request of the editors of *The Outlook* to write an article or two on Abraham Kuyper, I had no idea that this

project would grow into a series of articles. However, now that I have come to the conclusion of this survey of Kuyper's life and legacy, I am struck by how much more could be written! Much of what I have written has been rather general and abbreviated. Many things demand further discussion and reflection. But I will have to resist the temptation to do so here.

It has not been my purpose in this series to provide a complete account of Kuyper's life. Nor have I provided anything like an adequate evaluation and critique of his articulation of a Christian worldview. Rather, I have written this series in

"...Kuyper's legacy lies in his insistence that we bring every thought and work captive to the obedience of Christ."

commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Kuyper's famous *Stone Lectures* at Princeton Theological Seminary, with the hope that it will contribute in a small way to a renewal of interest in Kuyper's life and legacy.

As the Christian community in North America, especially the Reformed community, confronts the challenges of the present day, Kuyper's writings and ideas represent a rich resource of biblical and Reformed insight. They deserve to be read and pondered, as the challenge of presenting the Christian worldview confronts the forces and currents of contemporary culture. If withdrawal from the world and retreat from the challenge of modern scholarship are not viable options for us - as I believe they are not - then we have a great deal of hard work to do in carefully studying the resources of our tradition and articulating the catholic claims of the biblical worldview in our time.

For this reason, Kuyper's legacy is not so much the ideas or principles he articulated, important and useful as they may continue to be. Nor is Kuyper's legacy the extraordinariness of his life and labors. We do not pay homage to any person.

Rather, Kuyper's legacy lies in his insistence that we bring every thought and work captive to the obedience of Christ. There can be no rest for the Christian or the Christian community in relentlessly seeking to love the true and living God with all of our soul, mind and strength. This means not only that every thought be brought captive to Christ but that every deed be tested by the standard of God's kingdom and its righteousness. The Triune Redeemer who is the Creator of all things demands (and deserves) nothing less than that from us.

Kuyper's legacy remains best expressed in his well known work, spoken on the occasion of the founding of the Free University: "[N]o single piece of our mortal world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The Protestant Reformed churches, for example, have historically insisted upon the wholeheartedly his doctrine of common grace.
- 2 See Peter S. Heslam, *Common Grace and the Christian Worldview*, pp. 2-8, for a detailed discussion of this process in Dutch society and its relation with Kuyper's influence.
- 3 This last objection to Kuyper's proposal that Christian institutions does not seem particularly significant. The failure of a particular institution to fill its promise (e.g. a Christian university) simply call for renewed effort to improve the institution or form another similar institution. Though no one should place their faith in such institutions, they are often a legitimate means of acknowledging the lordship of Jesus Christ.
- 4 In this connection, it is interesting to note that Kuyper does not have much to offer in terms of the evangelistic and missionary calling of the church. Kuyper lived in a world very different from the one many of us face in North America at the end of the twentieth century. The terms often used to describe the contemporary situation, "post-modern" and "post-Christian," would not describe the situation in which Kuyper worked. Whereas the Christian community today in the West faces a new missionary situation, Kuyper simply assumes the presence of a Reformed community of churches. He does not directly address the question of how the gospel should be communicated to a culture that has turned away from the Christian faith.

- 5 For example, in some circumstances "home schooling" may be preferable to the Christian school as a means of providing Christian education for the children of Christian parents. These circumstances could include: the absence of a good existing Christian school; inadequate financial resources for tuition; the strength and aptitude of the child's parents for teaching at various levels; the unique circumstances of the child; political, cultural or legal obstacles to the establishment of a separate Christian school and others. It should also be noted that there might be circumstances where the preferred policy for the Christian community is one of *withdrawal* from involvement in some areas of modern life.
- 6 See James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 37-54, 93-122; and Henry Zwaanstra, *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1973), pp. 68-131. Bratt and Zwaanstra describe in considerable detail the debates within the Reformed churches (the Christian Reformed especially) in North America regarding Kuyper's views and the doctrine of common grace. Both of these authors argue that different sectors of the Reformed community tended to emphasize one or another of Kuyper's principles. Those who emphasized the antithesis are termed "anti-theological" Calvinists by Bratt and "separatist" Calvinists by Zwaanstra. Those who emphasized the doctrine of common grace are termed "positive" Calvinists by Bratt and "American" Calvinists by Zwaanstra. Though these labels and party designations tend to oversimplify matters, they do help to sort out some of the debates and differences of emphasis that characterized conflicting groups within the Dutch Reformed community of churches.
- 7 See S. U. Zuidema, "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper," (in his *Communication and Confrontation* [Toronto: Wedge, 1971]), pp. 52-105, for a thorough evaluation and criticism of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. Students of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace generally acknowledge that it remains an unfinished item on the agenda of Reformed theology. Cf. Edward Heerema, *Letter to My Mother* (Freeman, S.D.: Pine Hill Press, 1990), pp. 5-22. Heerema describes the doctrine of common grace as "unfinished business" so far as the history of the Christian Reformed Church is concerned.

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SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

GARY COX

This past October two adult delinquents brutally murdered a homosexual student in Laramie, Wyoming. Shortly thereafter, Katie Couric of the "Today" show interviewed the governor of Wyoming and asked this question: "Governor, some gay rights activists have said that some conservative political organizations are contributing to this anti-homosexual atmosphere by having an ad campaign saying, 'If you are a homosexual, you can change your orientation'... Do you believe that such groups are contributing to this climate?"

The next morning, Couric asked Elizabeth Birch of the Human Rights Campaign: "Do you believe this ad campaign launched by some conservative groups really contributed somehow to Matthew Shepard's death?" The reply was affirmative. The clear implication in all of this is that Christians who understand the Bible to be God's infallible, inerrant Word and therefore authoritative for what we believe and how we live are fanatics who condemn anyone who disagrees with "their version" of Scripture. And we must never publicly repeat what the politically incorrect Bible teaches or we will be labeled as bigots and purveyors of hate who grossly misrepresent the meek and mild Jesus who never harmed a fly and would embrace all mankind regardless of their creed or sexual orientation.

But is that true? Is that the kind of God we celebrated at Christmas? Not if you believe the record!

The Babe of Bethlehem grew up. His first recorded sermon was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). In the next chapter Jesus says that He did not come to "abolish the Law or the Prophets (another way of saying the entire Old Testament) but to fulfill" them. In the same chapter, meek and mild Jesus condemns divorce except for adultery (5:32). The entire purpose of His coming had to do with the fact that God condemns sin, and you really can't separate the sinner from the sin any more than you can separate the dog from his bark.

The very death of Christ was a cosmic statement that God takes our sin very seriously whether its "a little white lie" or a deviant lifestyle. If all the Father wanted to do was show us how to live a life of love then He could have beamed Jesus down, had Him exemplify the perfect life, and then snatch Him back into the heavens. But we have no power to live perfectly and none of us meets God's standard, for we have all sinned "and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Christ-child came to die for the sins of His people precisely *because* God condemns whatever is contrary to His divine nature.

So, to speak the truth in love is not an exercise in hate-mongering, but just the opposite. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is tell a person what they need to hear but may not want to hear. Jesus Himself said, "Am I your enemy because I tell you the truth?"

You see, what we should celebrate every day of every year is God's incredible grace to incredibly damaged people. I celebrate that because I'm some very "damaged goods" - wounded by my own sin, self-centeredness and attempts at autonomy. But what a marvelous truth that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

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Pastors against homosexuality - and hate, too

TIM BAYLY

When Rome burned in 64 AD, Nero denounced the followers of Christ, and during the first few centuries of the apostolic church it was common practice to blame Christians for whatever evil befell the Roman Empire. Why?

At a time when even the most exotic religions were embraced under the Pax Romana, Christians broke the rules by preaching an exclusive faith which held that the pantheon of Roman gods were only idols, and that the Christian God alone made the heavens and the earth. Upsetting the foundation of diversity and tolerance from which Rome's emperors ruled, Christians were considered anarchists and suffered death for the crime of high treason. Rome had little tolerance for religious and moral absolutism.

Today we find ourselves mirroring the decadence of the Roman Empire, eagerly welcoming the latest spiritual fad as one more pattern in the grand tapestry of man's search for transcendence. In such a climate of tolerance, the radical exclusivism of Christian doctrine and morals has again become abhorrent.

So, commenting on Matthew Shepard's tragic murder, the Rev. Philip Amerson expressed grief over this death, and rightly so. Amerson went on to use this tragedy as a means of attacking Christian leaders who have faithfully preached the Bible. Taking aim specifically at pastors who have warned our nation against homosexual practice, Amerson accused them of fomenting hatred against homosexuals and, therefore, bearing a part of the guilt for Shepard's murder. A senseless murder has then, by twisted rhetoric, been turned into an ideological

weapon wielded by those seeking to normalize homosexual practice.

We have a problem here, reminiscent of the days of the Roman Empire. Christian pastors have taken ordination vows to teach God's truth without ignoring or downplaying those aspects which our generation dislikes. We are to "preach God's Word, in season and out of season, with great patience" knowing "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:1-3 NIV).

Scripture's moral law is not rooted in the latest Gallup poll but in God's divine character. Thus God commands, "Be ye holy for I the Lord your God am holy." As men called by God to serve as His undershepherds, we must warn those tempted by sin to flee the wrath to come. What member of a Christian congregation who loves his own soul would ask us to forsake this calling in the interest of better vibes between the Church and her surrounding culture?

We the writers both hold membership in the Evangelical Theological Society which is composed of pastors and professors in higher academic institutions who affirm the complete truthfulness of the Bible. The society met for its 50th annual meeting Nov. 19-21 and 1,225 strong, passed a resolution pertinent to this discussion. Here are excerpts:

"Whereas advocates for the social normalization of homosexual behavior have laid the blame for hate

crimes on the moral witness of the Church and ...

"Whereas some in the national media covering reaction to the heinous death of Matthew Shepard have accepted and perpetuated homosexual attacks on the moral witness of the Church without any factual basis and have thereby failed in the fundamental journalistic responsibility to report truth and not false accusations and ...

"Be it therefore resolved that we abhor the terrible sin of doing intentional harm to another human being (from the cause of) hate ...

"Be it ... resolved that we ... abhor using the rhetoric of hate to prejudice the power of civil government against the open and complete proclamation of moral standards revealed in God's Holy Word ...

"Be it further resolved that we affirm that Scripture clearly teaches that homosexual conduct is always an abomination in the sight of God for all human beings, both men and women, in all circumstances, without exception, (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9) ...

"Be it finally resolved that we call on the national media to refrain from and repudiate insubstantial, untruthful, and hateful accusations against evangelical Christians and to report truthfully concerning the Church's true message of the good news that God offers forgiveness for sins through faith in Jesus Christ."

There is a battle today over standards of morality in our society. On one side are those who believe the moral standards of God's Word are outdated. On the other side are those who believe those moral standards are anchored in God's character, and therefore forever binding on the conscience of man.

Is it hard to understand this second group upholding God's standards by calling sinners to repent of their sin and to believe in the mercy of God which is the Cross of Jesus Christ?

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H. Westerink, *A Sign of Faithfulness*. Translated by J. Mark Beach. Neerlandia, Alberta/ Pella, Iowa: Inheritance Publications, 1997. 128 pp. \$ 9.95 (Can.). Reviewed by C. Bosch.

"This book on baptism is a jewel. One seldom comes across a book that simultaneously matches such simplicity to profundity." Those are the words of J. Mark Beach, the translator of Westerink's work. I heartily concur! In his earlier work, *Call Upon Me*, the author dealt with personal prayer in a lucid and thoroughly Scriptural manner. In his new book, he follows the same pattern and simply lets Scripture speak in thirteen concise and interesting chapters.

Westerink is a retired teacher of a Christian school in the Netherlands. His teaching skills did not retire with him however. He receives high marks in explaining the continuity as well as discontinuity between the *old* and *new* covenant. He never loses sight of his primary purpose (expressed in the Author's Preface), "that we understand our baptism well, especially since many oppose the necessity of infant baptism." The author realizes that it is not uncommon for reformed people to question the validity of their own baptism. They are tempted to look for certainty of comfort in their hearts and lives rather than in the concrete promises of God's rich grace.

Westerink draws our attention to the trustworthiness of our covenant God, "from age to age the same." He excels in explaining the "language" of the sign and seal of God's covenant. He shows how God set the children of believers apart for Himself in both the *new* as well as the *old* covenant dispensations. Says Westerink: "It is striking how again and again the Lord thinks specifically about the children of his people" (p. 45). God's people are a blessed people. "And the children of that people are blessed people."

Westerink gives considerable attention not only to God's covenant promise but also to our obligations. In explaining the importance of faith within the covenant, he draws on his pedagogical skills and asks some pointed questions, "Does the seal on a letter make the reception of that letter unnecessary so that the recipient need not pay attention to the content of the letter?" (p. 106). On the one hand, no one may withhold the water of baptism from such children as Christ took in His arms that He might bless them. On the other hand, "the unbeliever will be condemned even if he has been baptized in rivers of water, whether as a child or as an adult" (p. 107). Westerink shows that fulfilling our covenant obligations must not be a burden however. It is to be a joyful, thankful response to the wonder of God's covenant love for us in Jesus Christ. Our faith is nothing else but that we acknowledge the faithfulness of our God, "...nothing other than that we drink in the blessing of His grace, nothing other than that we are illuminated by the light of His countenance" (Num. 6:25) (p.114).

This book should be found in every one of our homes. It would also serve as a wonderful study guide for use in study societies as well as catechism classes. It will be a welcome addition to a minister's library; yet it may easily be read by a thirteen-year-old student. J. Mark Beach, who is from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, did excellent translation work. The Scripture quotations, with few exceptions, are from *The New King James Version*. The reader is served with a handy "Scripture Index" which will be appreciated by all students of God's Word. The book has already made its way to Australia. I hope it will be gratefully received and eagerly read in many places. Don't leave your local Christian bookstore without it!

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