

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Solely by Grace
Solo Christo Solely by Christ
Sola Fide Solely by Faith

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THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL

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Present Truth

Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Editor: Robert D. Brinsmead

Publishing Editor: Norman Jarnes

Publishers: A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia*. God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole *ground* of our salvation.
2. *Solo Christo*. Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole *basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.
3. *Sola fide*. The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole *means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.
4. *Sola Scriptura*. The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

Present Truth is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

Present Truth is committed to the time-honored verities of the Christian faith—such as the Trinity, deity of Christ, virgin birth, blood atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, second coming, final judgment, justification by faith alone, sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and glorification at Christ's soon return. The *Present Truth* ministry receives no denominational support. It is made possible through contributions from those who are dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith. Your contributions are appreciated. All gifts are tax deductible in the U.S.A.

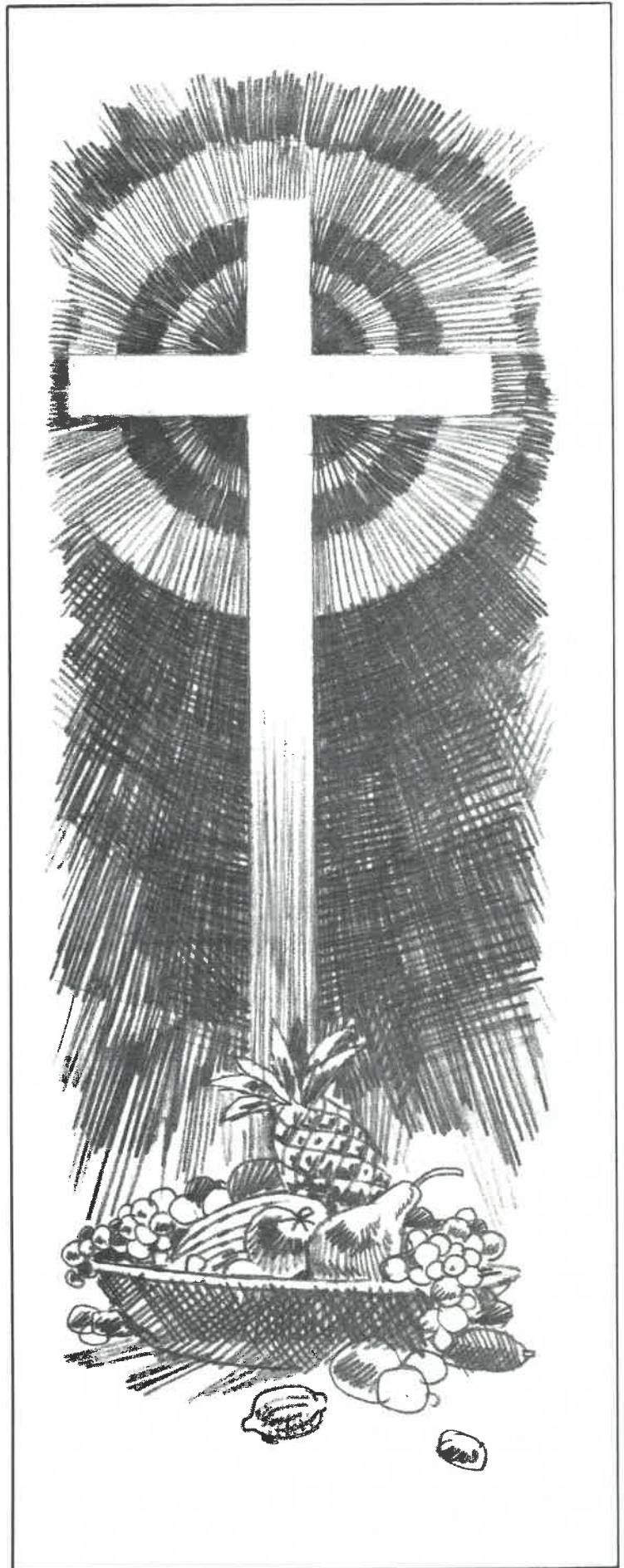
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Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
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Terrifying

Sir / How I appreciate a publication such as yours! South Africa is being inundated by neo-Pentecostalism, and we are in constant contact with people who seem to prefer committing spiritual suicide rather than to base their experiences on the objective truth of the objective gospel of the grace of Christ.

I was recently handed a book by a zealous member of a local neo-Pentecostal church as part of that church's "outreach" program. You may be aware of the publication, but I wish to quote one excerpt which sums up the whole movement and which to me is terrifying in the light of the fact that vast numbers are being swept along by this movement, not only in other countries, but also increasingly here in South Africa. The writer states:

"Pentecostal preachers have little difficulty in communicating spiritual truth in meaningful terms, well-suited to the particular level of understanding of their people. Their sermons may seem to a casual observer to be rather thin, but if so the standard of judgment might not reflect the preacher's own purpose. Pentecostal preaching is not intellectual, but emotional; it is not rational, but experiential; it is not exegetical, but allegorical; it is not doctrinal, but practical; it is not directed as much to the head as to the heart. The result of hearing Pentecostal preaching is not that you learn more, but rather that you feel better."—C. P. Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* (London: Coverdale, 1973).

The author of this book states that he himself is not a member of a Pentecostal church, but the contents of his book show him to be decidedly sympathetic or downright in favor.

May you be strengthened and encouraged in the work you are doing. Your publications indeed fulfill to a large measure a great need.

F. Schafer
South Africa

Believe It or Not

Sir / If you never have experienced the "tongues," then you cannot understand it. If you really knew the value of the experience, then you would desire it. I pray that God will soften your heart and that you will yield yourself and seek for this marvelous experience yourself.

I feel that this is what Joel spoke of when he said, "In the last days I will pour out of My Spirit upon *all* flesh." Why don't you praise God for the souls that have been saved through this move of God instead of "ripping" it apart?

What does God see in us? is the real question. There's a song in the charismatic movement, which originated in the Catholic Church, believe it or not: "They'll know we are Christians—by our love!" I never knew or felt this Bible *love* and warmth until I mingled with people who had experienced the Pentecostal experience. At first I resisted it because I felt I had the Holy Spirit dwelling in me. (I did have Him in a measure, but I soon realized that I hadn't been filled to *overflowing* with His Spirit and power, as the Scripture says in John 7:38, 39: "Out of your innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." There had been no rivers in my life up to this time.

The next day after receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit, I was just so full of the Lord and rejoicing in His presence I could hardly contain myself for the joy (bubbling-over joy) that I was experiencing! I had no desire for physical food whatever and ate nothing until that evening. It was just so wonderful! No one could ever explain this away from me; it was too real and glorious. It really made a good change in my life. It was the "gift" of the Holy Spirit which the Lord handed down to me because I was ready and yielded to receive it—to receive Him!

Mrs. Kathryn C. Landis
Pennsylvania

Clear Reminder

Sir / Here in Brazil, where the mentality is profoundly Catholic and where the Pentecostal church grows the most rapidly of any of the churches, one can see daily in real life what you write about—that is, the similarity of the subjectivism of Catholicism (Romanism) and that of Pentecostalism. *Present Truth* is a clear and constant reminder of the pristine New Testament truths of which I find myself always in need.

William H. Jennings
Presbyterian Missionary
Brazil

Clutter and Confusion

Sir / Since my recent introduction to *Present Truth* I have felt a glorious gust of fresh air sweeping through the clutter and confusion of modern religious thought. In South Africa the search for the "charisms" has become highly respectable. Sadly, popular thought goes after the spectacular.

I sincerely believe and constantly preach that the Holy Spirit's highest activity is not found in the abnormal or the exceptional but in the presence of a Christian grace or temper in the ordinary life and in the performance of our commonplace moral duties. This is a charism to be sought after with diligence.

J. Wesley Mitchell
Methodist Minister
South Africa

Likes Drawings, But . . .

Sir / If your knowledge and exegesis of the Scripture throughout your publications is as faulty as your scholarship and logic, you are in bad shape indeed. For your conclusions can be no better than your logic—which is terrible!

It is almost pathetic to see you, in issue after issue, attacking Pentecostals who have led millions of souls to the Lord when there are so many devils and, if you must attack religious groups, liberals to be castigated.

But never let it be said that all is a

loss. I can find one thing about your publications to commend. The beautiful line drawings are outstanding. Please express my compliments to your artist.

Carl G. Conner
Assembly of God Minister
North Carolina

Grotesque

Sir / I commend you for your efforts to keep "justification by grace through faith" at the heart and center of evangelical Christianity. I find many of your articles very helpful in the delicate but extremely important task of the theologian in distinguishing law and gospel.

Having said that, may I be so bold as to make a suggestion that would (in my estimation) make your publications even more beneficial? I am referring to the art work. I have found that much of the art work—which I can only describe as "grotesque medieval"—nullifies the excellent message that is being conveyed. It would seem to me that you would greatly improve your publications either by omitting the art work entirely or else putting it into some kind of contemporary idiom.

K. L. Frerking
Lutheran Minister
Missouri

Disappointed

Sir / While I am grateful for your making available the views of the great Reformers, I have been disappointed in issue after issue. Your vehement opposition to moderate dispensational views and to all who do not espouse covenant theology is uncharitable. And your treatment of the Keswick teaching is likewise regrettable. In spite of all this, I am grateful for that which stimulates thinking and enhances such truths as justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the sole authority of the Scriptures.

Bill Springstead
Baptist Minister
Wyoming

Anchor

Sir / Reading *Present Truth* is fascinating, enlightening and challenging. Your emphasis is a real anchor in the present context of theological issues.

Roger S. Dorsett
Baptist Minister
Alabama

Great Disservice

Sir / In my opinion any attempt to reduce Jesus' good news to a set of

formulas concerning salvation is to do a great disservice to Him. Christ didn't come to earth to provide us with "fire insurance" but freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed (Luke 4:18, 19). For me Christianity is a lifestyle, not holding to doctrines.

Mark Shelly
Illinois

Man-centered Religion

Sir / I have greatly appreciated the ministry of your magazine in presenting such a truthful and God-centered gospel, especially in these days when so many are falling into the trap of an anemic, man-centered religion. Your ministry has helped me in seeing the importance of solid doctrine to my Christian life.

Brad J. Jones
Illinois

Freed to Serve

Sir / It's wonderful to know that the only type of forgiveness God offers is total forgiveness and that there is "now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." I never realized that I was trusting in my works. God has freed me to serve Him in love because of the great love with which He has loved us and the all-sufficiency of Christ Jesus. Now I have been freed from self-condemnation and inward looking. I look outward to Christ. The Holy Spirit brings conviction, yes, but never condemnation. My righteousness is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Peter Kusk
Michigan

False Revival

Sir / I've really appreciated your magazine and your primary emphasis on justification by faith in Christ.

I got involved in a "revival" which brought nothing but frustration and despair. The main thrust of this "revival" was Charles Finney's autobiography. It was, in short, a type of teaching which said that as soon as you're cleaned up from your sins (and you should have seen the list after list of sins that were gone over), then God will use you, and then there'll be a "revival" like they had in Finney's day. I cannot begin to describe the guilt and despair I went through in trying to cleanse myself from my sin. The more I tried, the more I couldn't help but see how sinful I am.

Things had pretty much come to a

climax, and I had decided that this just couldn't be the way to God. I had your special issue on "Sanctification" (Feb., 1975) which a friend had given me, and I had been going through it. The last article, "Sanctification—Its Mainspring," helped me finally to see what had been happening. I was not looking to Christ for my justification. I was looking inward. I was up all night that night and couldn't sleep for sheer joy.

I still have trouble at times when I start looking inward again, but your articles always help me put my eyes back on my Lord.

Patrick Osborne
Nebraska

Encouraged

Sir / I've been able to read a few of your pamphlets and was greatly encouraged by them. It was the first time that I've read a Christian publication which searched behind the popular false doctrines of the time and exposed what the subtle meaning behind them is.

Pam Piazza
Virginia

Vain Babbling

Sir / You are making something hard out of something simple. In New Testament times they didn't sit around discussing this and that about the gospel. They just proclaimed the truth. I've had a good laugh over all this "silly talk" and vain babbling and discussion.

Mrs. Trudy Clements
Mississippi

Former Victim

Sir / Of all the religious literature that I have read, I know of none in our day that more clearly and faithfully proclaims the gospel of Christ than does *Present Truth*. It is a joy to read your publication. Thank you for being used of the Lord to lead this former victim of man-centered "religion" out of the shadows and into the clear light of the gospel.

Gordon W. Knight
Florida

Perceptive Knowledge

Sir / Your magazine presents with clarity Christian doctrine, and its tone shows a perceptive knowledge as to where the battle is in fighting for and defending "the faith."

John Lacey
Arizona



Editorial Introduction

In this issue of *Present Truth* we present three articles on the centrality of the gospel from three points of view:

The first article, "The Gospel As the Power of God," is by Reformed theologian Geoffrey J. Paxton. His main point is that genuine gospel preaching correctly handles the Bible and will do justice to its authority.

The second article, on "The Meaning of Grace," is by Lutheran theologian John T. Mueller. Naturally, he disagrees with Reformed theology in one area. We decided not to delete his criticism of Calvinism. If our Reformed readers are confident that they are right, they will not be afraid to look the Lutheran argument in the eye; and if they still have to reject Mueller's argument

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

on one point, they will yet find much in the article to rejoice in. After all, it does fairly well represent the thinking of Luther and one great stream of Reformation thought. So we say, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

The third article, "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation" (Part 2), is by the editor, who has the dubious nondistinction of being an eclectic Reformationist (not Lutheran, but a Lutherite; not Calvinist, but a Calvinite).

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.



The Gospel As the Power of God

Geoffrey J. Paxton

If asked whether or not they believe Paul's statement that the gospel is the power of God (Rom. 1:16), evangelicals will unhesitatingly answer in the affirmative. In fact, they will often be indignant that they should even be asked such a question! But is the affirmation merely *formal*, or can we see the *material* evidence of it in our evangelical churches? Are our churches noted for solid, sound and sane expositions on the gospel? We believe that there is plenty of evidence to bring a verdict on the side of *mere formal adherence!*

Tragically, contemporary society is being starved

Contemporary society is being starved for the exposition of the gospel.

“It is not sermons we need, but a Gospel, which sermons are killing.” —Peter Forsyth.

Geoffrey J. Paxton is an Anglican clergyman and well-known Australian educator and lecturer.

for the exposition of the gospel. Notice, we did not say starved for *sermons*; we said starved for the exposition of the *gospel*. Peter Forsyth said, "It is not sermons we need, but a Gospel, which sermons are killing."—Peter Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 20.

The great majority of sermons heard today are characterized by the following:

1. "Thus saith the Lord" is replaced by "In my opinion," "The great majority of scholars concur," or some similar overthrow of the authoritative declaration of the prophet of God. The good news of God is replaced by the (more or less) good views of men. Perhaps the predominance of critical material over biblical studies and related subjects in our colleges and seminaries is the villain of the piece here. Ministers are being more educated but less trained for their God-given specific task of bringing, through the Scriptures, the mind of God to needy hearts and minds.

2. The solid and sane exposition of the gospel has been replaced by "devotional" or "inspirational" bursts. This type of preaching tends to be theatrical and pseudo-dramatic. The preacher is seen struggling to maintain the favorable impression of the congregation (viz., "He's a great speaker") rather than struggling under the burden of his life and death message.

A trait of such "emotional devotionals" is the centering upon uplifting personal experiences, not least those of the speaker. Schleiermacher's advice has been followed: ". . . preaching must always take the form of testimony . . . to one's own experience."—*The Christian Faith*, H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart (T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 69. Instead of the doing and dying of Jesus, the experiences of the speaker are central, making the mouths of the hearers water. The puny, sin-ridden and often vainglorious experiences of men have replaced the inexpressibly pure and glorious saving experiences of the Son of the most high God. What a thieving exchange! People may be impressed by the experiences of men, but only the experience of the Substitute will save them. Unlike Paul (2 Cor. 4:5), we preach ourselves, and not Jesus, as Lord.

3. So much preaching is aimed at preserving the party line rather than breaking the bread of the gospel. This building of fences takes both a positive and a negative form. Positively, the enumeration of our distinctives takes place. The people are reminded of what it is that we believe, why it is that we are different from all others. Negatively, there is a sermonic blasting of the mines of others. The depth of our contribution is often measured by the intensity of our opposition. Remember, we are speaking of the preaching of evangelicals who say they really do believe the gospel to be the power of God! Where is the material evidence of this confession in all too many evangelical pulpits?

In mentioning the preservation of the party line, we are not suggesting for one moment that our people



The puny, sin-ridden and often vainglorious experiences of men have replaced the inexpressibly pure and glorious saving experiences of the Son of the most high God.

should not be kept in what we honestly believe to be the truth. However, this should be done in the context of the gospel and not as an isolated (and ideological) program. There is a vast difference between education in the truth of the gospel through painstaking exegesis and indoctrination and the preservation of in-group loyalty. The former will constantly bring our biases under divine scrutiny, whereas the latter will confirm the biases of our people. The former will be done in terms of the thorough investigation of the *whole* Bible, whereas the latter will be done with the aid of proof texts and clichés. The former will involve telling people hard sayings (not the same as harshness), while the latter will involve telling people what they want to hear.

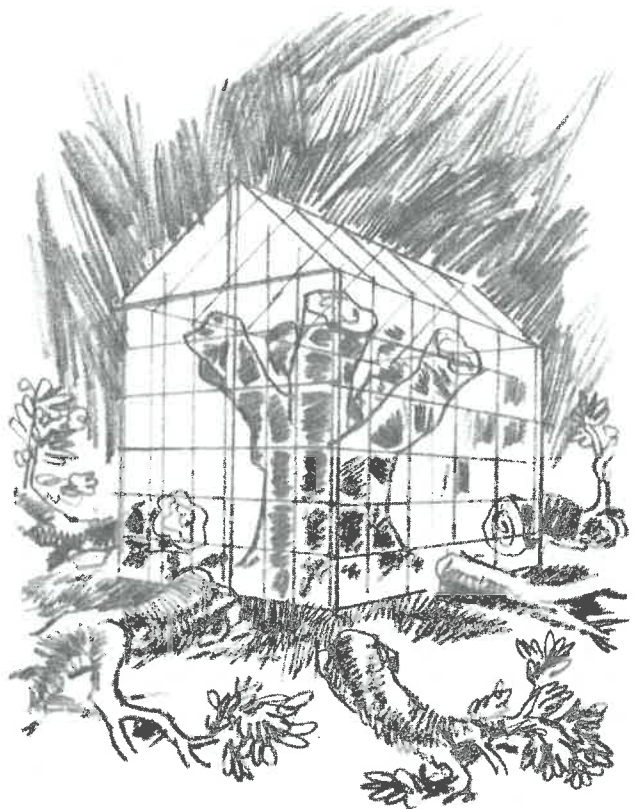
How often is a *simplistic* gospel taken to be the “simple gospel”? Some measure the worth of a sermon in terms of how little demand it makes on our brains. The rich gospel of the substitute Man is pruned and made to fit the hothouse atmosphere of the small rooms of our minds.

4. How many of our evangelistic sermons and services are geared to the manipulation of the hearers! Though we say that we believe the gospel to be the power of God, we resort to other forces to wring a “decision” or some other response from those who have come to hear the Lord. This manipulation takes many forms. There is, for example, the use of an emotion-creating device. It may be the attempt to “create an atmosphere”—soft music, dimmed lights and a tear-jerking story. It may be a particularly “moving” song by a soloist. True, there is nothing wrong with the emotions, but it should be remembered that there is a wrong use of emotions. How amazing it is to see preachers who are quick to maintain the “free will” of man and to disparage Calvinistic emphases actually do all in their power to *force* people to make a decision and, at times, even to trick them into it!

The power of the gospel is denied and dishonored by such pulpiteering machinations. The manipulating power of men becomes the substitute.

Why is evangelical preaching in such a state? Doubtless, there are many answers (or, more correctly, many parts) to this question. Fundamentally, it is because we do not believe that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Evangelical seminaries and colleges have substituted other things for the effective training of men and women in the gospel. We have become more academically respectable, but we are not good preachers of the gospel.¹

The student minister is given a perspective in seminary which means that, when he comes out into the parish, he will do anything and everything except make the Scriptures his constant and diligent study. Notice, we said that he will do *anything*. He may distinguish himself



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Evangelical seminaries and colleges have substituted other things for the effective training of men and women in the gospel.

¹We do not intend to disparage true learning, only the confusion over what we should learn and in what perspective.

around town in the local clubs. He may become a popular after-dinner speaker. He may take up additional university studies. He may do anything except become proficient in the Scriptures. Notice also that we said that he will do *everything*. Somehow his ministerial training has not taught him that, as a result of the gospel, God has distributed His gifts throughout the *whole* congregation. He will behave as though he is multi-gifted, even omnigifted.

For these and many other reasons the minister will often use the labors of others (and at the last minute) to feed his flock. We can thank God for the labors of faithful servants. Who has not been greatly helped by such? The truth is, however, that God has never intended them to become a general substitute for lazy preachers. Secondhand food is better than no food at all, but healthy congregations grow on freshly-grown food. So will the preacher who tends the garden!

In the light of our very poor preaching, can we say that we still believe in the power of the gospel to convert the heart of the sinner? Do we really believe in the drawing power of the cross of Christ? Is the gospel our greatest confidence?

The Marks of Good Gospel Preaching

Let us conclude this article on "The Gospel As the Power of God" by looking at some of the marks of good gospel preaching:

1. Dr. Harold Lindsell of *Christianity Today* has recently written a book on *The Battle for the Bible*. This indeed is the central issue in evangelicalism today. We sincerely believe that the battle for the Bible is lost or

The battle for the Bible is lost or won in the pulpit even more than in the scholar's study!

won in the pulpit even more than in the scholar's study! Biblical preaching is preaching in which the authority of the Bible is seen and heard or is not seen and not heard. In the final analysis, the preacher does more to affirm or deny the final and full authority of the Bible than does the scholar. If we hop from one opinion to another rather than using a "Thus saith the Lord" in the sermon, people cannot but get the impression that the good views of men take precedence over the good news of God. There is a place for the considered opinion of scholars, but not a predominant place. Such opinions show people how knowledgeable we are, but will not save. The gospel alone saves.

It is not merely in saying "Thus saith the Lord" that the plenary authority of the Bible will be met. It will be present or absent more in how we use the Bible than in what we say about it. Frequently, one detects the idea that the authority of the Bible can be adequately honored by pious catch phrases instead of a painstaking care in the way we preach from it. Bad exegesis does more to damage the authority of the Bible than all the loud denials of "liberals." In the end we may discover that evangelical

Bad exegesis does more to damage the authority of the Bible than all the loud denials of "liberals." We may discover that evangelical preaching has contributed more to the eclipse of the Bible than we would ever dare to imagine.

preaching has contributed more to the eclipse of the Bible than we would ever dare to imagine.

2. *Biblical preaching is always preaching of the gospel.* Listen to the salutary words of the respected Dr. H. Ridderbos in his great book on Paul's theology:

... Paul's preaching itself ... is rightly and in the full sense kerygma of the Gospel, that is, announcement, proclamation of the coming of salvation. That Paul's epistles give what is no longer the first announcement of this Gospel, but rather *the further exposition and application of it*, does not detract from the fact that *this Gospel is the sole and constant subject of his epistles also; and that therefore, if one has to characterize their general content not only as kerygma but also as doctrine and paraenesis, yet this doctrine has no other object and this admonition no other starting point and ground than the fulfilling and redeeming activity of God in the advent of Christ.*—*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, pp. 47, 48 (emphases supplied).

Biblical preaching is always preaching of the gospel. Reflect upon this offensively simple statement, and you may begin to see into the heart of so much of the sickness of evangelical preaching today.

The gospel is the dictionary which gives all the words of evangelical preaching their specific and unique meaning. A gospel-less vocabulary is a meaningless vocabulary. The gospel defines faith, the gospel defines hope, and the gospel defines love. All evangelical sermons should be the "exposition and application" of the gospel.

We dare not pass over this point without pressing it



All our sermons, in a rich and captivating manner, should know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen again.

When the gospel is the integrative center, doctrinal preaching will become a delight and the people of God will be educated systematically in the great truths of the gospel.

All evangelical sermons should be the “exposition and application” of the gospel.

again. The gospel is the heart of biblical revelation. All comes into it, and all flows from it. Would we preach on a verse from the Old Testament? Then it must be an *evangelical* sermon. Would we preach on humility? Then it must be a sermon which receives its lifeblood from the gospel. Humility must be defined and applied from within the context of the gospel. Would we preach on election and neglect the gospel and election? Can we expound the second advent isolated from the context of the gospel? And what of the many exciting narratives in the Gospels (e.g., the feeding of the multitudes, Jesus’ walking on the water, etc.)? Can we really preach upon such narratives without the gospel being their framework? Without such a framework, will we not end up with abstract notions of election, of humility, of power, of miracles, of need?

Here lies the cause of much of the sterility of most evangelical sermons. The gospel is consigned to the role of a gate. Once we have entered in by it (some do not even consign it this role!), we may wander around homiletical fields at our leisure. So much of our preaching becomes governed by socio-cultural determinants or ideological forces. We have ceased to be *evangelical* preachers.

We have advocated the *hermeneutical* role of the gospel in other issues of *Present Truth*. Now we advocate the *homiletical* role of the gospel. The gospel is the homiletical determinant for evangelical preaching. All our sermons, in a rich and captivating manner, should know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen again. The Word of God should be made fully known (Col. 1:25).

We have dealt with the *formal* and *material* principles of the Reformation in the preceding two points. These are inseparably connected. However, the latter takes precedence over the former in that we come to the former via the latter. We come to believe in the plenary authority of the Bible via the gospel of the substitute Man, Jesus Christ. Encounter with Jesus Christ in the gospel is the door through which we enter into regard for the whole Word of God. Could it be that the crisis in regard to the formal principle is more determined by the often unrecognized crisis concerning the material principle than we have realized? Might not many folk find it less difficult to believe this or that section of the Bible if they could see it integrally related to the gospel of God’s saving grace? Is not the gospel the power of God for salvation in this respect also? Think on these things!

3. *Biblical preaching is integrated preaching.* Biblical preaching declares the whole counsel of God and not just this or that part of that counsel. Many congregations live spiritually from hand to mouth. The great majority of evangelical preachers feed their congregations on fragmented offerings. Often the determinant is what happens to take the preacher's fancy. Sometimes the daily newspaper plays the role of *fons et origo* for the preacher's thoughts for the day.

Ironically enough, most congregations are poor biblical theologians. Even after a lifetime of hearing sermons, they are bad biblical theologians! Speaking along these lines at a ministers' fraternal meeting, this writer was saddened when a middle-aged minister asked desperately, "Where do I begin?" This question came after twenty-five years of preaching!

The heart of the Bible is the gospel of the saving Person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the great integrative center of biblical theology. The picture is that of a great wheel with its mighty hub and the various doctrinal spokes

radiating out from that hub. When the gospel is the integrative center, doctrinal preaching will become a delight and the people of God will be educated systematically in the great truths of the gospel.

This writer has been responsible for the training of young people from evangelical churches for the past seven years. On the whole, those students have been characterized by two things: (1) a self-confessed ignorance of the Bible and (2) an unshakeable dogmatism in what they believe!

Are evangelical churches educating or indoctrinating? Are we turning the people of God into intelligent spokesmen for the gospel or into parrots?

In summary: (1) biblical preaching is characterized by an authoritative "Thus saith the Lord," (2) it is always gospel preaching, and (3) it is preaching of the whole counsel of God—an authoritative, evangelical proclamation of the whole counsel of God! This is true biblical preaching. Let us be satisfied with nothing less.





The Meaning of Grace

John T. Mueller

The Grace of God Toward Fallen Mankind.

1. The Necessity of Divine Grace.

According to the express teaching of Holy Scripture no man after the Fall can be justified and saved by the deeds of the Law, or through good works. Rom. 3,20: "By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight." All who endeavor to acquire salvation by the works of the Law shall not be justified, but damned. Gal. 3,10: "As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse." The reason for this is that no man after the Fall can fulfil the divine Law or satisfy the claims of divine justice. Rom. 3,10: "There is none righteous, no, not one"; 3,23: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Hence, so far as the divine Law is concerned, all men after the Fall are forever lost and condemned, Matt. 19,26; Rom. 8,3.4.

According to the express teaching of Holy Scripture no man after the Fall can be justified and saved by the deeds of the Law, or through good works.

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The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith is both the basic and the distinctive article of Christianity, by which it is distinguished from all man-made religions as the only true and divine religion.

Yet, as Scripture clearly teaches, it is the gracious will of God that not a single sinner in the world be lost, 2 Pet. 3,9; 1 Tim. 2,4. For this reason God has most mercifully provided a way of salvation by which every sinner can be saved, John 3,16; Matt. 18,11, namely, the way of grace, through faith in Christ, without the works of the Law. Rom. 3,24: "Being justified freely by His grace, *dorean te autou chariti*, through the redemption, *dia tes apolutroseos*, the ransom, that is in Christ Jesus"; Eph. 2, 8,9; "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." This gracious way of salvation is revealed in the Gospel, for which reason this is called "the Gospel of the grace of God," Acts 20,24. The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith is both the basic and the distinctive article of Christianity, by which it is distinguished from all man-made religions as the only true and divine religion, Mark 16,15,16; Acts 4,12; for whereas all man-made religions teach salvation by works, Christianity proclaims as its central and fundamental message the gracious remission of sin through faith in Christ Jesus, Acts 10,43; 26,18.

Since sinful man is saved alone by grace, the Scriptural statements that sinners are saved by the Gospel, Rom. 1,16, or by Baptism, 1 Pet. 3,21, or by faith, Luke 7,50, must all be understood in relation to saving grace. In particular, they are descriptive of the means by which saving grace is conferred and appropriated without any merit, or work, on the part of the sinner. To be saved by the Gospel, by Baptism, by faith, etc., means to be saved by grace, without the deeds of the Law, through the divinely appointed means, by which alone the merits of Christ can be received.

From the viewpoint of fallen man we speak of the *necessity* of divine grace, since without grace it is impossible for the sinner to be saved. However, from the viewpoint of God divine grace must be viewed, not as necessary, but as free, because God was not moved by any necessity inherent in His essence to save guilty mankind, but alone by His mercy and compassion, John 3,16; Luke 1,78. *Deus est causa libera beatitudinis nostrae*. The view that the redemption of the world was

a necessary unfolding of the divine essence must be rejected as a pantheistic delusion.

2. Definition of Divine Grace.

Saving grace (*gratia salvifica, charis soterios*), by which God is moved to forgive sin and to bestow salvation upon fallen mankind, is His gracious disposition (*gratuitus Dei favor*), or benevolent inclination, mediated through Christ's vicarious atonement, revealed in the Gospel, and witnessed to the world in order that it may be believed by all men, Rom. 3,24,25; John 20,31. Luther: "God's love or favor, which He cherishes toward us in Himself"; "*Gottes Huld oder Gunst, die er zu uns traegt bei sich selbst.*" *Gratia Dei aliquid in Deo, sc. affectus Dei benevolus, est non qualitas animi in hominibus*. Synonyms of grace, in this sense, are love (John 3,16), mercy (Titus 3,5), kindness (Titus 3,4), etc., all of which describe more fully God's benevolent disposition by which He is moved not to condemn, but to save, fallen mankind by faith in His beloved Son.

Although the term *grace* properly denotes God's unmerited favor in Christ Jesus, Scripture uses it also to describe the spiritual gifts or excellences which God, as the gracious Lord, works in all believers and by virtue of which they begin to fulfil the Law (willing and faithful service, 1 Pet. 4,10; patience in suffering, 1 Pet. 2,19; conscientious administration of the office of the ministry, Rom. 15,15,16; etc.). In this case the effect, by way of metonymy, is named after the cause, or the gifts of grace are named after their divine Source. *Nomen gratiae per metonymiam [effectus pro causa] pro donis ex benevolentia Dei in nos collatis sumitur*.

Grace in this sense must be definitely excluded as a cause of forgiveness of sin and salvation, since Scripture teaches expressly that the sinner is justified and saved without the deeds of the Law, Rom. 3,28; Eph. 2,8,9. The believer owes his salvation not to inherent or infused grace, or the grace which is in him, but alone to the benevolent disposition in God, or the *gratuitus Dei favor*. In other words, when we say that we are saved by grace, we do not refer to divine grace as it exerts itself in us, but as it is found outside of us, in God. So also faith does not justify and save either as

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a good quality (*nova qualitas*), or as a good work (*opus per se dignum*), or as a gift of God (*donum Spiritus Sancti*), or as a source of good works in us, but alone as the receiving means (*organon leptikon*), by which man, who in himself is ungodly, appropriates to himself the grace of God and the merits of Christ through implicit trust in the promises of the Gospel.

In short, faith justifies solely by virtue of its object, which is Jesus Christ, the Crucified, Gal. 2,16; 1 Cor. 2,2. Luther: *Non per se aut virtute aliqua intrinseca fides iustificat, sed simpliciter quatenus habet se correlative ad Christum*. This truth Scripture teaches clearly by placing faith in opposition to works whenever it describes the way in which the sinner is justified. Rom. 4,5: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"; Eph. 2,8,9: "By grace are ye saved, through faith, . . . not of works."

This sharp distinction between grace as God's unmerited favor and grace as a gift of God (*donum gratiae*) in the article of justification is of the greatest importance; for all who teach that grace in the sense of infused grace (*gratia infusa*) is either the sole or a concomitant cause of justification inculcate salvation by works and have fallen from grace, Gal. 5,4. In reality, while retaining the Christian terminology, they are teaching the paganistic doctrine of work-righteousness.

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This pernicious mingling of grace and the gifts of grace is the basic error of the Roman Catholic Church, which in the *Decisions of the Council of Trent* (Sess. VI, Can. XI) has anathematized the definition of justifying grace as *gratuitus Dei favor*, from which infused grace must be rigidly excluded. But also the Reformed are obliged to rely on infused grace for justification since they deny that God's grace (*gratia universalis*) is seriously offered to all sinners in the Gospel and the Sacraments. They are therefore compelled to rely for the personal assurance of their justification on something within themselves or upon their renewal, or their good works, in short, upon infused grace. The same is true of all enthusiasts who assume a revealing and sanctifying operation of the Holy Ghost outside the divinely appointed means of grace (the Word and the Sacraments), no matter by what names they may be known. Zwingli, in *Fidei Ratio*: "*Dux autem vel vehiculum Spiritui non est necessarium*." Since in this case the believer cannot rely for justification and salvation on

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the objective promises of God, he must rely on the feeling of grace (*sensus gratiae*) within his heart, or upon divine grace as it exerts itself in him.

It is true, wherever the grace of God in Christ Jesus is accepted in true faith, there good works must needs follow, and at times there will also be the comforting feeling of divine grace. But if the believer puts his trust in his spiritual renewal or in the presence of grace in his heart, Christ's perfect work of redemption, or the objective reconciliation effected by Him, 2 Cor. 5,19, is denied. But then also the essence of justifying faith, which is trust in the objective divine promises of grace, Rom. 4,18,25, is denied. In the final analysis, then, also the certainty of salvation must be denied; for if salvation is based upon good works, such a person's hope of heaven is absolutely futile.

By reaffirming the true definition of justifying grace as *gratuitus Dei favor* and excluding from it the false conception of infused grace, correcting in this respect even St. Augustine, the Church of the Reformation re-

turned to the apostolic purity of the Christian faith. The confessional Lutheran Church of America follows in the footsteps of the great Reformer and in the article of justification sharply distinguishes between grace and the gifts of grace, or between God's unmerited favor and its benefactions in the believer's heart. For this reason it constantly bears witness not only against Catholicism, Zwinglianism, and enthusiasm, but also against synergism (Arminianism), which denies the *sola gratia* and places the cause of man's justification to some extent in him (*aliquid in homine*), thus inducing him to trust for salvation both in divine grace and in human goodness.

While the synergists include man's moral conduct, or his self-decision, or his right attitude toward grace, in justifying faith, the Arminians insist that justifying faith embraces also the good works of believers. According to their teaching the believer, seeking assurance of his salvation, must trust in the divine grace *within himself* (*gratia infusa*), or in his sanctification.

From the above it is obvious how important it is for the Christian theologian to maintain the Scriptural definition of justifying grace; for without it he can neither teach the true doctrine of justification as revealed in the Gospel nor exclude from justification the doctrine of salvation by good works, nor can he rightly comfort any sinner who seeks assurance of salvation. Hence, wherever the Scriptural doctrine of justifying grace is perverted, the entire Christian doctrine becomes corrupted and paganized. It is for this reason that Luther and all orthodox Lutheran theologians so earnestly insisted upon having this Bible doctrine taught in the Church, that justifying grace is God's unmerited favor in Christ Jesus. The *Apology* declares: "It is necessary that in the Church of Christ the Gospel be retained, *i.e.*, the promise that for Christ's sake sins are freely remitted. Those who teach nothing of this faith . . . altogether abolish the Gospel." (Art. IV (II), 120. *Tri-glossa*, p. 155.) Chemnitz says: "*Gratia in articulo iustificationis intelligenda est de sola gratuita misericordia Dei.*" With this definition of justifying grace the Christian Church stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*).

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3. Attributes of Justifying Grace.

The attributes, or adjuncts, of justifying grace are as follows:

a. *Justifying grace is grace in Christ.* Justifying grace is not absolute grace, or grace bestowed upon the sinner by a fiat of the divine sovereign will, but grace mediated through Christ, or grace in or for the sake of Christ. In other words, according to Scripture, God is gracious to sinful and condemned mankind only in view of the fact that the incarnate Son of God through

Divine grace does not exclude divine justice, but rather presupposes or implies the satisfaction of its demands through Christ's vicarious death.

His vicarious atonement (*satisfactio vicaria*) has ransomed all sinners from the curse and condemnation of the Law. Rom. 3,24: "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The price which Christ paid for the redemption of guilty mankind was that He of His own free will placed Himself both under the obligation (Gal. 4,4.5, *obedientia activa*) and the curse and punishment (Gal. 3,13, *obedientia passiva*) of the divine Law which man had violated.

Divine grace therefore does not exclude divine justice (*justitia Dei vindicativa*), but rather presupposes or implies the satisfaction of its demands through Christ's vicarious death, Rom. 8,3.4. For this reason the Gospel, which offers divine grace to all men, Titus 2,11, is not a message of grace apart from Christ's death (Modernists, rationalists, Harnack: "The Son of God does not belong into the Gospel"), but "the Word of Reconciliation," *logos tes katallages*, 2 Cor. 5,19, that is, the unique message that God "hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ," or that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

Scripture thus leaves no room for grace without the payment of the penalty of man's sin. God neither forgives sin by ignoring His justice, nor does He accept the worthless ransom-price (good works), which men offer Him to satisfy the eternal claims of His justice. Divine grace for sinners could be secured only through the unspeakable sacrifice of Christ's vicarious obedience, Heb. 7,26.27; Eph. 2,13-16; Col. 1,20-22. Hence the axiom: "Divine grace and human merit exclude each other; but divine grace includes the divine merits of Christ."

Luther very aptly writes on this subject: "I have often said before that faith in God alone is not sufficient, for also the costs must be paid. The Turks and the Jews also believe in God, but without the means and the costs. And what is the cost? That the Gospel shows. . . . Christ here teaches that we are not lost, but have eternal life, that is, that God so loved us that He was willing to pay the cost, the putting of His only, beloved Child into our misery, into hell and death, which He made Him drink to the dregs." (St. L., XI, 1085ff.) Again: "Though grace is given to us for nothing, so that it does not cost us anything, yet it cost some one else on our behalf



very much; for it has been secured through an uncountable, infinite treasure, namely, through God's Son Himself." (*Ibid.*)

Such questions as, "Could not God be gracious to men because of His sovereign power as supreme Judge, without Christ's atonement?" or, "Is it not a thought unworthy of God that His grace toward sinners had first to be purchased by the perfect obedience of His Son?" are both useless and foolish; for the fact that God is gracious to sinners only for Christ's sake is emphatically stated in His Word and must be believed by all men if they desire to obtain divine grace and eternal life, 2 Cor. 5,18-20. All who teach that God is gracious to sinners without the death of Christ (Unitarians, Modernists, Ritschl, Harnack, etc.) reject the Christian faith, champion pagan doctrine, and are outside the pale of the Christian Church; for the Christian Church is the communion of believers who trust in the gracious remission of their sins through the blood of Christ, Gal. 3,26; Eph. 1,7. So Chemnitz writes: *Extra Christum nulla gratia et misericordia Dei erga peccatores nec debet nec potest recte cogitari.* (*Harm. Ev.*, c. 28, p. 152.) Hence those



**“Though grace is given to us for nothing, so that it does not cost us anything, yet it cost someone else on our behalf very much; for it has been secured through an uncountable, infinite treasure, namely, through God’s Son Himself.”
—Luther.**

who deny Christ’s vicarious atonement likewise deny the grace of God.

However, divine grace is denied also by those who claim that Christ’s atonement was in itself not adequate as a ransom, but was declared and accepted as such for the acquittal of the sinner by God’s own mere volition (the theory of acceptilation; Scotists, Arminians). This theory, in the final analysis, ascribes the forgiveness of sins to God’s sovereign will and thus reduces the value of Christ’s vicarious suffering and death. But Scripture bases divine grace not merely in part, but *wholly* on Christ’s atoning work, so that there is no grace for sinners but that which is in Christ Jesus, Rom. 3,24; Acts 4,12. According to Scripture the expression

“the Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20,24) and “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2,2) are synonymous, so that he who preaches the one must preach also the other.

The *Augsburg Confession* emphasizes this truth when it says: “Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by His death has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight, Rom. 3 and 4.” (Art. IV. Cp. also Luther, St. L., XII, 261ff.)

b. *Justifying grace is universal (gratia universalis)*. The unmerited favor and love of God in Christ Jesus extends not merely to some (the elect), but to all men without exception. *Gratia Dei salvifica erga homines lapsos non particularis, sed universalis est*. This paramount truth Scripture teaches in all passages in which it declares a) that Christ is the Savior of the whole world, of all men, John 3,16; 1,29; 1 John 2,2; 1 Tim. 2,4; Titus 2,11; b) that God earnestly desires that each individual person be saved, 2 Pet. 3,9; Ezek. 33,11; 18,23.32; c) that salvation has been secured even for those who reject the grace of God and are thus lost on account of their unbelief, Matt. 23,37; Acts 7,51; 1 Cor. 8,11; 2 Pet. 2,1. The universality of divine grace is denied by all who limit the purpose and efficacy of divine grace to the elect (particularism, *gratia particularis*).

These errorists may be divided into three groups: a) Supralapsarians: God decreed to create some to damnation; b) Infralapsarians: God decreed to leave some in the state of damnation into which they had fallen through their own fault (*praeteritio*); c) Amyraldists: God indeed offers grace to all, but bestows faith only upon the elect.

Every form of particularism is anti-Scriptural, being based upon the fallacy that, since not all men are actually saved, God does not desire the salvation of all. Misled by their error, all particularists claim that the term *world* (John 3,16; 1,29) signifies “the elect,” and they substitute for God’s universal counsel of grace (1 Tim. 2,4) a *voluntas signi*, in opposition to which stands His *voluntas beneplaciti*. That is to say, God indeed wishes to save all men according to that will which He has revealed in Scripture (*voluntas signi*, the revealed will); but by His secret will (*voluntas beneplaciti*, the will of His purpose), which is not revealed in Scripture, He wishes to save only the elect.

According to Calvinistic doctrine, God, in the final analysis, is the cause why some are not saved, while Scripture expressly teaches that those who are not saved perish through their unbelief, or rejection of divine grace, Luke 7,30; Acts 13,46; 7,51; Matt. 23,37. Charles Hodge writes: “It cannot be supposed that God intends

what is never accomplished; that He purposes what He does not intend to effect. . . . If all men are not saved, God never purposed their salvation and never devised, and put into operation, means designed to accomplish that end. We must assume that *the result is the interpretation of the purposes of God.*" (*Systematic Theol.*, II, 323.)

In order to support the doctrine of particularism, the Synod of Dort (1618-19) declared that God can never be resisted whenever He earnestly offers His grace to men (*irresistible grace*). But also this doctrine is anti-Scriptural; for Scripture affirms that the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel can be resisted, Acts 7,51; Matt. 23,37, though the operation is itself one of divine power, Eph. 1,19.20. As in the realm of grace God can be resisted when He works through means, so also in the realm of nature; for life, which is originated and sustained alone by divine omnipotence, Acts 17,28, can nevertheless be destroyed by feeble man. God indeed cannot be resisted when He deals with man in His sovereign majesty (Luther: *in nuda maiestate*, Matt. 25,31ff.); but when He approaches man through means, resistance on his part is always possible.

If the objection is raised that God becomes the cause of a sinner's damnation at least in cases where He hardens his heart (cf. the divine judgment of obduration), we reply that according to Scripture God very earnestly offers His grace even to those who harden their hearts, Rom. 10,21; Ex. 5,1ff. The divine judgment of obduration is never absolute or arbitrary; God hardens only those who first have hardened themselves by resisting His Word and will, Rom. 11,7.20.

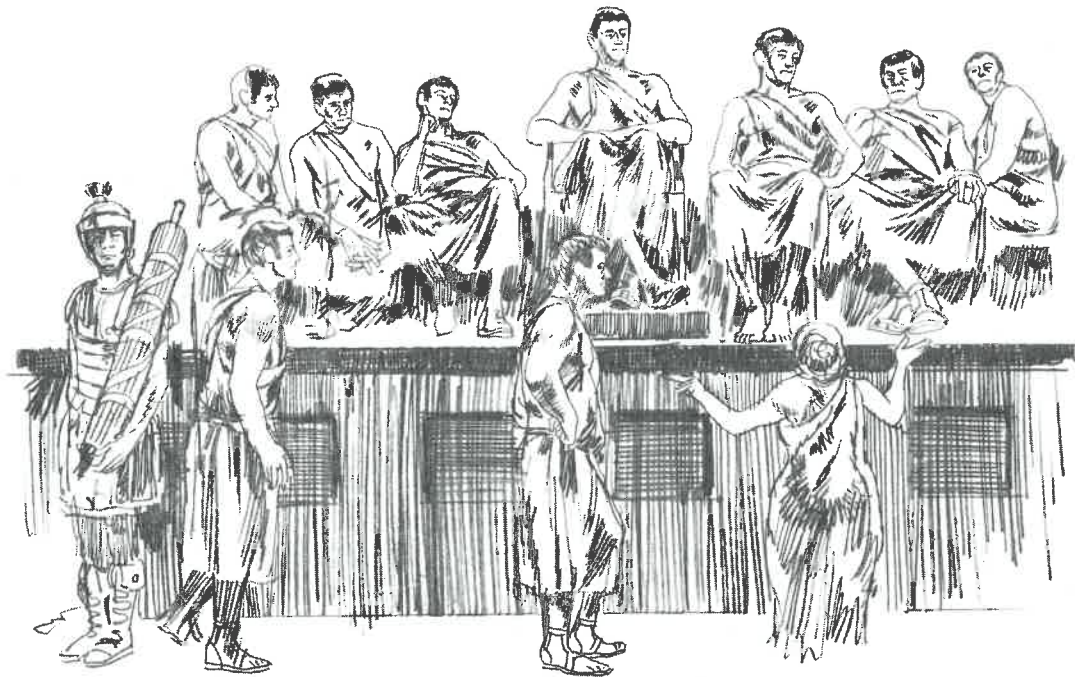
c. *Justifying grace is serious and efficacious (gratia seria et efficax)*. In spite of the fact that divine grace can be resisted (*gratia resistibilis*), we must not regard it as a "fruitless wish" or an "indifferent complacency by which God does not desire to effect or obtain the things which please Him" (*otiosa complacentia, nuda velleitas*), but as both serious and efficacious. That is to say, God seriously purposes, by sufficient and efficacious means, to effect the salvation of all men, Rom. 2,4: 1,16.

This truth is proved from a) the divine command to preach the Gospel to *every creature*, Mark 16,15.16, and make disciples of *all nations*, Matt. 28,19.20, which certainly must not be construed as mockery on the part of God; b) His divine promise to grant His Holy Spirit to all who hear His Word in order that He may work in them saving faith, Zech. 12,10; Acts 2,17.18; Ezek. 11,19.20; 36,26.27; Acts 2,38; 7,51; c) His comforting assurance that He will not only begin, but also perform, finish, the good work in all believers, Phil. 1,6; and d) His most serious endeavor to work faith in those who resist the Holy Spirit, Matt. 23,37; Acts 7,51, so that, if the wicked perish, they do so solely through their unbelief, 2 Cor. 4,3.4.

In opposition to Scripture the efficaciousness of divine grace is denied a) by all particularists (Calvinists), who limit God's efficacious desire to effect salvation in men to the elect; b) by all synergists, who teach that God works in man only the ability to believe, not faith itself, since the latter, they say, depends on man's own decision or good conduct or his omission of malicious opposition. However, according to Scripture, God bestows not only the power to believe, but also faith itself, Phil. 1,29. In opposition to Pelagianism and synergism, Scripture teaches that all who believe in Christ believe solely by virtue of divine grace and not through their own power or effort (*sola gratia*), while over against Calvinism it affirms that those who remain in unbelief do so not because divine grace is inefficacious in their case, but because they maliciously resist the Holy Spirit.

It is true, when we maintain universal and serious grace (*gratia universalis, gratia seria et efficax*), on the one hand, and the *sola gratia*, on the other, the question arises: "Why, then, are some saved and others not (*cur alii, alii non?*), though all men by nature are in the same guilt and corruption (*in eadem culpa?*)" The particularists (Calvinists) answer the question by denying the *gratia universalis*; the synergists, by denying the *sola gratia*. Both solutions are alike unscriptural, since Holy Writ most emphatically teaches both, *gratia universalis* and *sola gratia*. The true Lutheran Church does not attempt any solution of the question at all, but regards it as an unsolvable mystery, which human reason should not try to explore. The two truths regarding man's salvation which Holy Scripture clearly reveals are: a) Those who are saved are saved by grace alone, without any merit on their part; b) those who are lost are lost through their own fault. Beyond these two revealed facts no Christian theologian dare go. (Cp. *Formula of Concord*, XI, 54-59.)

Also with respect to the heathen we must maintain the *gratia universalis* because Holy Scripture includes all men in the gracious counsel of salvation. To deny the clear Scripture-teaching of universal grace because many heathen have never received the Gospel of salvation is an offense against the very divine grace which has enriched the world with the saving truth, Mark 16,15.16; Matt. 28,19. On the basis of Scripture we therefore believe that God's gracious will extends to the heathen also, though actually thousands of them perish without the Gospel. Nor are we to assume that the heathen are saved without the divinely appointed means of grace, Eph. 2,12, since Holy Scripture teaches that the means of grace (the Word and the Sacraments) are appointed for the salvation of all sinners, Mark 16,15.16; Matt. 28,19.20. The opinion that the heathen may be converted after death is anti-Scriptural, Heb. 9,27. The passage 1 Pet. 3,18ff. does not treat of salvation possible after death, but of the condemnation of those who during their life on earth refused to accept the saving Word of God.



The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation

Robert D. Brinsmead

Part 2

In Part 1 of this series we saw that there are two aspects of salvation—the legal and the moral. Sin is guilt (legal) as well as pollution (moral). The atonement was a satisfaction made to the divine law (legal) as well as a demonstration of God’s love to change our hearts (moral). Salvation consists in a change in our standing before the law, which is called justification (legal), as well as a change in our state, which is called sanctification (moral).

In the centuries which followed the apostolic age the church increasingly confused these two aspects of redemption. This meant that man’s right standing or acceptance with God was made to rest on his personal moral renewal. While it was maintained that this moral renewal

was accomplished by grace, salvation still rested on the internal righteousness of religious man.

It is no exaggeration for Koslin (*The Theology of Luther*, pp. 77, 78) to say that Luther was “the first great clear preacher of the righteousness of faith sent to the Christian Church since the days of the apostle Paul.” It is doubtful if the early church ever really understood or appreciated the real force of St. Paul’s doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness. Niebuhr¹ is probably right when he suggests that the church was unable to grasp the truth of Pauline theology until she had adequately tried the alternatives and found them bankrupt.

At any rate, the Reformers made a clear distinction between the legal and moral aspects of redemption (i.e., between justification and sanctification). They went

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 2.

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further and maintained the primacy of the legal over the moral. This was a revolution which broke through the medieval system and swept the consciousness of Western man with such tempestuous fury that it changed the history of Christendom—religiously, economically, politically and socially.

The Primacy of the Legal

1. In the Matter of Sin. Sin must be viewed as guilt (Rom. 3:19) as well as pollution (Job 14:4; Jer. 17:9). In the theology of Romanism sin is thought of primarily in terms of pollution. Consequently, salvation is thought of primarily in terms of moral renewal. That which makes a sinner acceptable to God is said to be an inner transformation (*gratia infusa*) which removes the offense of inner pollution. Original Protestantism, however, being a revival of Pauline thought, saw sin primarily as guilt—man's indebtedness to the law.

Here we see a strange paradox. The opponents of the Reformation saw sin primarily as a moral defect in man, but they had a shallow view of the utter ruin of man and how that moral defect permeates every part of his existence. The proponents of the Reformation saw sin primarily as man's guilt before the law, yet it was they who had such a profound view of man's moral condition that they held the doctrine of "total depravity."²

2. In the Matter of the Atonement. There are two major aspects of the atonement. (1) There is the aspect of Christ's bearing our judicial punishment or penal satisfaction. This is often (and rightly) referred to as the *sub-*

stitutionary death of Jesus Christ. (2) Also, there is the aspect of the revelation of God's love to the darkened mind of sinful man.

When the second aspect alone is stressed (or even overshadows the first), we have what is known in theology as "the moral influence theory of the atonement." It goes along with the idea that sin is not a legal problem (guilt) but solely a moral problem (pollution). With a good deal of plausibility it argues that it was not God but man who changed in the Fall, and therefore salvation only consists in changing man. Man's heart needs reconciling to God, and in order to effect this change God must give man such a demonstration of His love that it will work the needed change of attitude in the sinner. The cross is this revelation. In this theory salvation was not wrought out at the cross, but it is a subjective process wrought out in the heart of the sinner. When he repents and believes in God's love (which the cross enables him to do), he is declared right *because* he is now morally changed and is therefore in a right relationship with God.

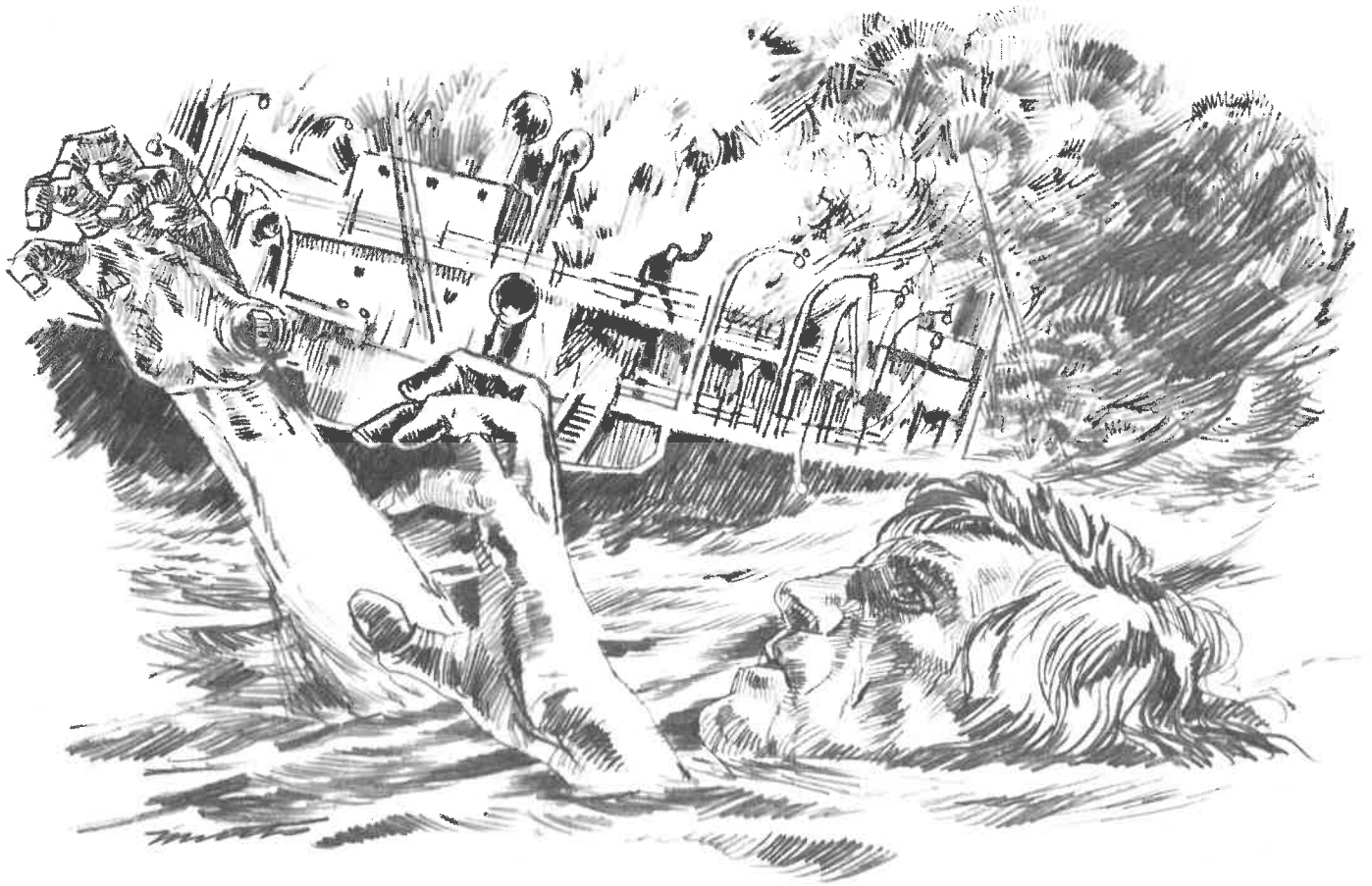
We do not deny that there is a great moral influence factor in the atonement. After all, did not Paul say that the love of Christ, demonstrated in His dying "for all," constrained him to live for Christ (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). The error of the moral influence theory of atonement lies more in what it denies. To be specific:

a. It denies the reality of the divine law, its sentence against sinners, and the wrath of God incurred because of sin.

b. It fails to appreciate that the reconciliation in Christ's act of atonement was something which took place for us and in our interest while we were still God's enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:20-22). This was therefore something which took place objective to us and was not a subjective process.

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²"Total depravity" does not mean that a man is as bad as he may be, but it means that there is no part of man's existence which is not tainted with sin.



c. It reduces the love of God to mere exhibitionism. If a man jumped into the sea and drowned just to prove his "love," he would be pronounced crazy. "Love" which is not based on some necessity is exhibitionism. If, on the other hand, a man jumped into a dangerous sea in order to save someone from drowning and lost his life in the process, we could appreciate this as genuine love. In like manner, the death of Christ was absolutely necessary for our salvation. Justice must be carried out. The honor of the law must be upheld. Only the One who is both Lawgiver and Offended Party could save us in this situation. ". . . without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins]" (Heb. 9:22). The divine process of saving us was as necessary as the love God had toward us. But in the moral influence theory the process of atonement becomes practically irrelevant.

It is undoubtedly true that Paul, being a lawyer and judge,³ taught the legal doctrine of atonement. It is especially his way of interpreting the Christ event. The juridical nature of his gospel is clearly borne out by his frequent use of such words as *law*, *justification*, *judgment*, *judge*, *righteousness*, *wrath*, *condemnation*, *guilt*, etc. Further, he sees the atonement as a *propitiation* (Rom. 3:25), a *reconciliation* (Rom. 5:10) and a *redemption* (Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13) which took place

³Paul was a former member of the Sanhedrin—a sort of supreme court in Israel.

external to us. Certainly Paul's Epistles bear out that a moral transformation is made possible through, and springs from, the atonement, but the atonement itself is seen as a juridical and legal transaction between the Father and the Son. It did for us, in reverse, what Adam's Fall did for us.

We must remember that the apostles wrote out of the background of the Old Testament and the whole history and education of Israel. The basis of this background was law and the demand for righteousness to match its claims. The evangelical message of the New Testament is always presented in its relation to the legal demand of the Old Testament. In the book of Romans, for instance, Paul is careful to reiterate the inexorable legal demand (Rom. 2:13) before he goes on to show how this demand is met in Christ's substitutionary work. This is not negation of the law but its true honoring (Rom. 3:31). Paul only negates law as a *method* of salvation, not as a valid demand of a righteous God.

The Reformers thought of the atonement primarily in terms of *satisfaction* rather than *moral influence*. In this they followed on from Anselm rather than from Abelard. In the eleventh century Anselm had done some great work on the doctrine of the atonement. He argued for the necessity of the atonement on the grounds of the holiness of God's nature, and in this he made a great contribution. But he still left the doctrine largely in the realm of the abstract. The Reformers were the first men

since the apostles to concretely relate the atonement to the law of God. Says Dr. George Smeaton:

A further explanation of truth was reserved for the Reformation, by penetrating more deeply into the nature of the divine Law than was ever discovered by the great scholastic [Anselm]. What his theory wanted, indeed, was a full recognition of the claims of the divine law, and of the atonement as a satisfaction of these claims in all their breadth and extent. . . .

Previous theories wanted a full recognition of the claims of the divine law, and of the atonement as a satisfaction of these claims in all their extent; and this became the element in which the theology of the Reformation moved, and by which all other truth was coloured. . . . Their main position, to which they were conducted by deeper views of the extent of the law, and of its unbending claims, was that Christ's satisfaction was perfectly identical with that which men should themselves have rendered; and in the atonement they read off the unalterable claims of the divine law.—George Smeaton, *The Atonement According to Christ and His Apostles* (republished by Sovereign Grace Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan).

We will not here take the time and space to cite many references from Luther and Calvin which amply support what Smeaton says. Anyone who takes the trouble to read these Reformers will know that they believed Christ's death was made necessary by God's law. They taught that the atonement was the *satisfaction* rendered to the divine law on our behalf. That which God's law required He provided for us in the doing and dying of Jesus Christ. His atonement was all that God's law requires of us, so that any man who believes in this is credited with all that Christ has done on his behalf and therefore stands as righteous in the eyes of the law. Faith in the atonement is not seen as a means of setting aside the demands of the law but as a method of meeting them.

A critic of the legal view of the atonement might argue that this is doing away with the truth of the moral influence of the cross. After all, does not the contemplation of God's love seen in the cross become a mighty factor in inward transformation? This we do not deny but gladly affirm. Yet what we must point out is that a correct moral influence is based on the correct (legal) view of Christ's atonement. When we see Christ's death in its relation to the law (legal), it shows us the perfect blending of justice and mercy, the sacredness of God's law in that it could not be set aside, and the unrelieved heinousness of sin, which is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Only in the light of this legal view of the atonement will the moral influence have proper content. Any reformation of life and conduct which is not based on God's law is a religious phony. Of course, God's love revealed in the cross demands something! Jesus said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). While the law points us to Christ, Christ points us back to the law. But the so-called "moral influence" of the cross cut



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loose from what the cross was primarily about (satisfaction to God's law) becomes the phantom of human sentiment.

We come back to our premise that the *legal* aspect of redemption is the root and the *moral* aspect is the fruit. The legal is primary and always takes precedence over the moral.

If anyone has the slightest doubt about the supremacy of the legal over the moral, let him consider how God dealt with Jesus Christ on the cross. As touching His moral condition, Christ was the righteousness of God. As touching His legal position, He was "numbered with the transgressors." Justice dealt with Him not according to what He was in Himself, but according to His standing in the eyes of the law. We might even say that when the sins of the world were imputed (legally reckoned) to Jesus Christ, He was treated according to His legal position and not according to His moral condition. The legal took precedence over the moral.

There is an eternity of comfort here for the believer. No man on earth is wholly without sin. There remains some depravity of nature in the best saints (1 John 1:8; Ps. 143:2). The man of God is often humbled and humiliated with a sense of his own sinfulness, but he is never cast down. He realizes that the righteousness of Christ is imputed (legally reckoned) as his, and in the eyes of the law he stands as righteous as Christ Himself. God does not deal with him on the basis of his *state* but on the basis of his *standing*. God does not behold iniquity in Jacob, for the new covenant promise declares, "... the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found..." (Jer. 50:20).

What comfort and security, therefore, is found in

the truth that the legal takes precedence over the moral! God does not deal with us on the basis of what we are in ourselves, but He treats us according to what we are in Jesus Christ.

3. In the Matter of Soteriology. If sin is primarily guilt before the law (legal) and if the atonement is a satisfaction to the law (legal), it follows that the legal aspect of salvation must take precedence over the moral aspect. The biblical word *justification* is a juridical word relating to trial, judgment and law. It is the verdict of the Judge that the one tried stands righteous in the eyes of the law. The best Protestant scholars have always maintained that the verb *justify* means to *declare righteous* and not to *make righteous*. If *justify* is taken as a *making righteous* in the subjective sense, then it becomes confounded with sanctification.

Any doubts about the forensic meaning of *justification* should be put to rest when the *how* of justification is considered. In Romans 4 the apostle uses the word *logizomai* (impute, reckon, count) eleven times. Its meaning is transparently clear. The believer is credited with Christ's righteousness because Christ obeyed, even unto death, in the believer's place (Substitute) and in the believer's name (Representative).

The Reformers were not only careful to maintain the legal nature of justification and to distinguish it from sanctification (the moral change), but they contended for the primacy and supremacy of justification over sanctification. Fellowship with God cannot be based on the experience of sanctification but on the imputation of Christ's meeting the claims of the law for us. We can never reach a point in sanctification where fellowship with God does not rest on forgiveness of sins.

It was Rome's great contention that the Protestant doctrine of forensic righteousness was subversive to sanctification. By making acceptance with God rest on inner transformation, Rome argued that she was putting the true value on sanctification.

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The legal aspect of salvation is the true root of moral renovation. Justification is the mainspring of sanctification.

Our fellowship with God is not founded upon our experience of sanctification but upon the oath of the covenant.

A true view of theology and history, however, will show us that here was Rome's most fundamental mistake. Calvin's Geneva or Anglo-Saxon Puritanism were not conspicuous for their lack of moral fervor. Could the same thing be said of communities in Spain and southern Europe where the light of the Reformation never penetrated? The fact is that the legal aspect of salvation is the true root of moral renovation. Justification is the mainspring of sanctification.⁴ Unless the moral aspect rests on the legal and derives its life and direction from the legal, it must wither and die. In fact, it is no longer moral but immoral.

⁴See our brochure, *How to Live the Victorious Life*, which discusses this point quite fully.

We might illustrate our point by referring to the institution of marriage. Marriage is a reflection of the divine-human relationship. Before a man and woman can rightfully live together, they must be *lawful* man and wife. The marriage contract is a legal *covenant*. Holy love is founded on a legal compact. No experience of living together will make the marriage legal. There are those who disparage the value of a marriage contract, calling it "a mere scrap of paper." They think that the only thing which counts is the *experience* of two people loving one another. But it is soon proved that marriage based on nothing more than experience has no stability or security and is plagued by all sorts of miserable doubts. It is a prostitution of love because it is not after the divine arrangement.

Our fellowship with God is not founded upon our experience of sanctification but upon the oath of the covenant. The idea of covenant runs through the entire Scripture. Covenant is a legal word. It is a contract. Justification constitutes us "married" (legally) to Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:4). God will be no party to spiritual fornication. We must become legally (lawfully, rightfully) His by divine pronouncement before He can live in union with us. Or to change the figure (but not the truth), we must be legally adopted as sons before God can send the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Gal. 4:5, 6).⁵

If fellowship with God rests on sanctification, what can the believer do in the day of darkness and trial when he stumbles or is surprised into failures and mistakes? What right can he now claim to fellowship with God when

⁵Prior to justification the Spirit works upon the heart of the sinner in a drawing, wooing process leading to repentance and faith. After justification the Spirit indwells the believer. The difference is as clear as the relationship of a man to a woman before and after marriage.

Babylon is every system that tries to establish a relationship with God on the basis of man's moral change.

Luther often said that if the article of justification is lost, all true Christian doctrine is lost at the same time.

he is vividly confronted with human sinfulness before the face of divine glory? How easily would faith falter, and he would stand disarmed in the midst of his enemies, if he had no oath and covenant to flee to for refuge in the day of storm! Happy is the man who in the hour of test and trial has something better than his own fickle experience upon which to rest.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

A woman who ignores a legal relationship and tries to establish a relationship with a man by experience alone is prostituting a fundamental law of life. In the Revelation of St. John, Babylon (which represents all false religion) is called a harlot (Rev. 17:5). Babylon is every system that tries to establish a relationship with God on the basis of man's moral change. Sanctification is a moral change. Justification is its legal basis, and without justification no true sanctification can exist.

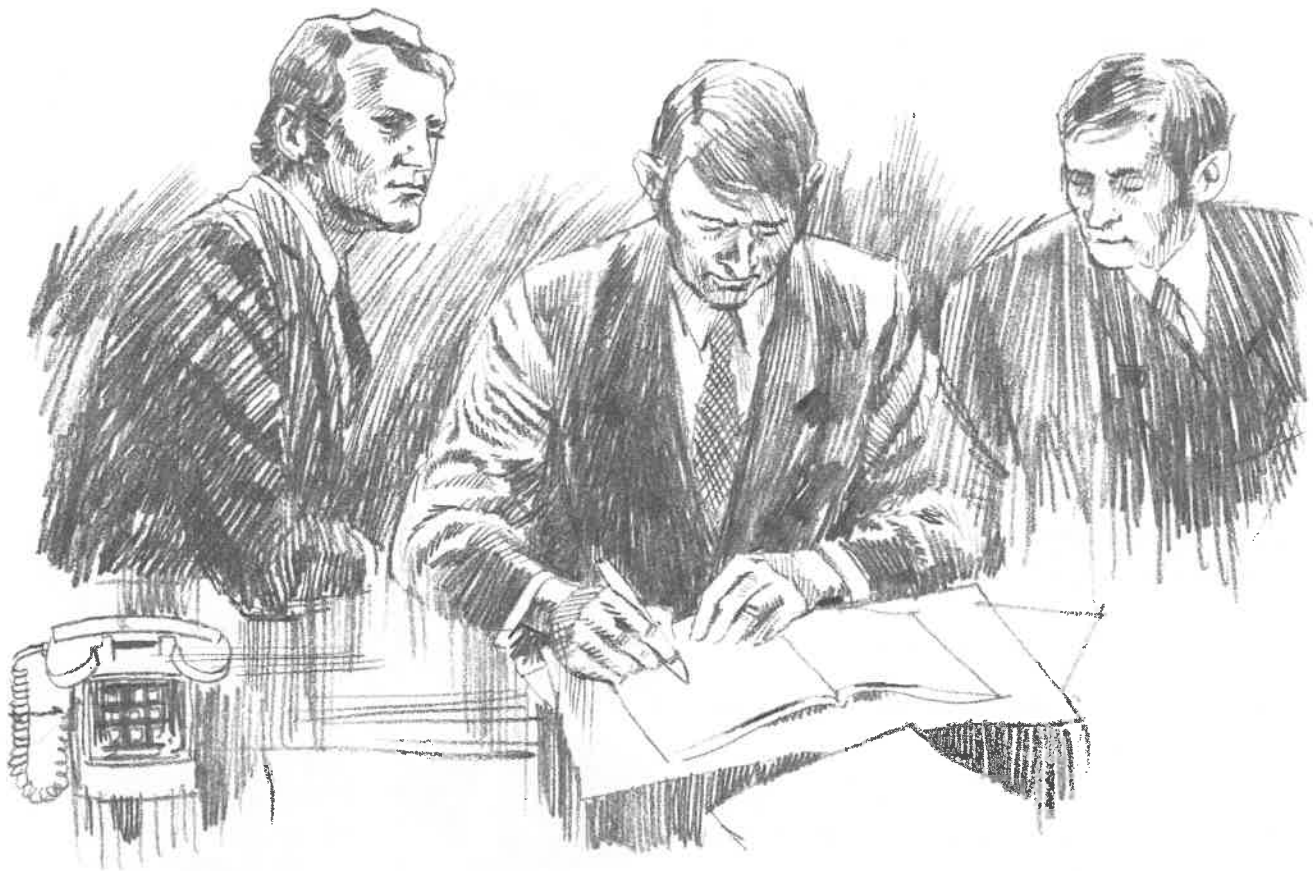
Let those who imagine that the legal transactions have no reality consider for a moment the world of economics and the great business empires which control manpower and resources. Somewhere in an office a decision is made, papers are drawn up, a contract is signed, and millions of dollars are legally committed to a certain enterprise. As a result of that "scrap of paper" (if you please), a thousand men put muscles into action, bulldozers move mountains, and the lives of a multitude are vitally affected. Any important enterprise must be legally transacted before it can be vitally carried out; and in this respect divine things are no different.

The Results of Neglecting the Legal Aspects of Salvation

Luther often said that if the article of justification is lost, all true Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. We will briefly draw attention to the consequences of neglecting the legal aspects of salvation.

1. First and foremost, the cross of Christ is emptied of real meaning. If Christ did not make satisfaction to the claims of the law on Calvary, then the cross becomes a senseless tragedy or some incomprehensible exhibitionism.

Also, as we pointed out in Part 1 of this series, if the sinner could be saved by moral renewal (Christ in the heart, Spirit baptism, etc.), then it would have been really needless for Christ to suffer and die. If there were no legal claims to meet for human salvation, the cross would be unnecessary and irrelevant. Perhaps this is why we hear so little exposition on the Christ event today but instead are drowned in the "gospel" of the changed life of the believer.



In the non-Christian religions any historical features (if they have any at all) can be eliminated without making any essential difference to the content of these religions. It almost seems that the same thing could be done with so much which passes as the Christian religion today.

2. When the legal aspects of redemption are neglected in favor of the moral renewal emphasis, man becomes the center instead of God. Instead of the New Testament's focal point being God's work in Christ, it becomes God's work in the human heart. Man and his experience inevitably take the spotlight. Man, and not God, becomes the center of religion.

3. When the legal aspects of redemption are removed, the believer has no objective foundation for his salvation. The great acts of God which were done outside of the believer in Jesus Christ are no longer the object and anchor of faith. Then there is no salvation by substitution, representation and imputation. Salvation is reduced to a subjective process in man himself.

4. The legal aspects of redemption are generally neglected in the interests of giving due honor to the reality of the believer's moral renewal. But sanctification which is not based on justification is not legal; and because it is not legal, it is immoral. It does not really build up the believing community but destroys it. Unless morality is based on divine law and the honoring of that law which took place at Calvary, it becomes immorality. This is why the Revelator declares that the religion of

great Babylon corrupts the earth (Rev. 11:18; 17:5).

5. The drift away from, and in many cases the outright repudiation of, the legal aspects of redemption betrays the cause of true Protestantism. It spells the triumph of the enemies of the Reformation.

It is commonly thought that the Reformation, being a revolt against legalism, had no such vital interests in the legal aspects of redemption. Such is the superficial view that many have today of the issues at stake in Reformation theology. In fact, many think that they imitate the Reformers and demonstrate their antipathy to legalism by despising the legal aspects of our redemption. They fail to see that *legal* is lawful, rightful and righteousness, whereas *legalism* is a perversion of the legal. Legalism is not legal but *illegal*.

We need close application of thought to reason correctly from cause to effect in this matter. The moral influence theory of atonement leads inevitably to legalism. The idea of acceptance with God on the grounds of moral renewal is legalism. The concept that sin is primarily pollution (moral) and that salvation is effected merely by the process of purging away this pollution is legalism. This whole system proposes that it is the human agent who meets and satisfies the claims of justice by some personal experience (attainment) of his own.

On the other hand, the legal view of sin (guilt before the law), the legal view of Christ's atonement (satisfaction to the law), and the legal doctrine of justification

(a setting right in the eyes of the law) kill legalism because they place our salvation wholly in what Another has done for us. The human agent is no longer left with the burden of trying to satisfy the claims of the law either by what he does or by what is done in him. Only that which satisfies God's law will pacify the human conscience; and man's God-created sense of justice will never really be satisfied with forgiveness which is not based on absolute justice.

Therefore the elevation of the moral aspects of salvation above the legal results in legalism and destroys all true morality. On the other hand, when the legal aspects of redemption are given their primacy, legalism is cast down and there is provided a strong and true basis of moral action.

The Reasons for Neglecting the Legal Aspects of Salvation

What we have covered so far amounts to this:

1. The doctrine of justification is neglected, downgraded, unappreciated, misunderstood or rejected outright in the current religious scene. Current evangelicalism, generally speaking, bears very little or no resemblance to Pauline theology or to the type of theology revived in the Reformation.

2. The sad status of justification in the contemporary church stems from a failure to recognize the tremendous importance of the legal aspects of redemption.

What we must now consider is the real *reason* why the contemporary church fails to come to terms with the legal aspects of redemption. It is because she has either neglected or rejected the proper place of the law of God in Christian theology.

Everybody knows that the Reformation was the great enemy of legalism. But somehow a subtle evolution has taken place whereby the antipathy toward legalism has been transferred to the law itself. Gordon H. Clark points out that legalism has now acquired a new meaning. Whereas it used to designate a theory of justification by works, now it is used to designate (and denigrate) any obligation to obey objective laws—as if amorphous love replaces definite commands.⁶ Clark blames the liberals for putting the odium of legalism on any attitude of respect for the law. Although Clark's point is well taken, we cannot agree that the liberal wing of the church is wholly responsible for this state of affairs.

The fact is that we evangelicals are often guilty of presenting the gospel in such a way that it engenders contempt and disrespect for divine law. A continual harping that we are saved by faith and not by good works can even convey the idea that God does not care for



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⁶See Art. "Concerning Justification," *Christianity Today*, Mar. 16, 1973.

law, justice or good works. The fact is that the righteous God has such a passionate regard for good works and such a high standard of acceptable obedience that fallen sinners are utterly unable to meet this just demand. A man who tries to be justified by the works of the law is not condemned because he keeps the law but because he fails to keep it (see Gal. 3:10).

Paul acknowledges that there is a valid righteousness of the law. If a man could keep it (at all times and without any default or failure in any point), he would be justified (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12; see also Ps. 106:3; James 2:10). Legalism is damnable not because it honors the law, but because it dishonors it! The legalist presumes that God's high and mighty demand of righteousness is going to be satisfied by the imperfect, broken obedience of a creature whose best actions are always defiled by the corrupt channel of human nature. The law, being no respecter of persons (for even Christ Himself had to suffer its penalty), will not accept any person who fails to render its due of perfect righteousness (see Rom. 2:13). Reflecting on this, Calvin says, "We therefore willingly confess that perfect obedience to the law is perfect righteousness."—*Institutes*, Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 7). "The Lord promises nothing except to perfect keepers of the law."—*Ibid.*, sec. 1. And Luther could even say, "The law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope."—*Luther's Works* (American ed.; Muhlenberg Press; Concordia, 1955-), Vol. 31, p. 348.

The gospel teaches us that we are saved solely by the work of Christ. But in what did His work consist? He did for us what we were obligated to do. Says Calvin, "For if righteousness consists in the observance

of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon Himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law."—*Institutes*, Bk. 2, chap. 17, sec 5. Faith is said to justify not because we are rendered righteous before God on account of faith and not because faith itself pleases God more than obedience to His law, but simply because faith lays hold of Christ's perfect obedience, with which the law is well pleased. Unless we clearly see that justification honors and establishes the law (Rom. 3:31), we are not seeing the biblical doctrine of justification by faith.

In an excellent discussion on the meaning of *justification*, Leon Morris points out that the whole biblical conception of justification "witnesses to the importance of law in the divine economy."—Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 293. This is so because justification is a legal term which relates to law and may be defined as a setting right before the law. Morris also says:

Justification is not an isolated concept. It is part of a whole way of viewing God and the world which sees in law a means of understanding the divine ordering of things. To the men of the Old Testament God was a God of law, and a very great deal in their religion cannot be understood if this is lost sight of. . . . Law is thus not simply a demand that God makes on His people: it is the way He can be relied upon to act according to law.—*Ibid.*, pp. 253, 255, 257.

But we cannot do without justification with its insistence that part of what was done on Calvary concerned the inflexible law which is at the very basis of the being of God. The law was honored in the process whereby forgiveness was wrought.—*Ibid.*, p. 296.

The message of justification can only make sense in a context where the law of God is taken in the radical seriousness that the Bible demands. A man has to be pressed with his obligation to meet the claims of the law, and he must realize that there is no hope of life eternal unless the law of perfect justice is satisfied. As Luther says, he must learn "through the commandments to recognize his helplessness" and to become "distressed about how he might fulfill the law."—*Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, p. 348. But does the hearer who sits under the invitation of modern evangelicalism ("Let Christ into your heart . . . solve all your problems . . . put zip into life . . . satisfy all your needs") become obsessed with a consuming passion to be right before the law of God? Does he cry out, "Here is God's holy will! How can I meet and satisfy these claims?" The following comments by Dr. J. I. Packer hit the nail on the head:

Protestants of today (whose habit it is to take pride in being modern) are accordingly disinclined to take seriously the uniform biblical insistence that God's dealing with man is regulated by law. . . . Thus modern Protestantism really denies the validity of all the forensic terms in which

the Bible explains to us our relationship with God.

The modern Protestant, therefore, is willing to see man as a wandering child, a lost prodigal needing to find a way home to his heavenly Father, but, generally speaking, he is not willing to see him as a guilty criminal arraigned before the Judge of all the earth. The Bible doctrine of justification, however, is the answer to the question of the convicted lawbreaker: how can I get right with God's law? How can I be just with God? Those who refuse to see their situation in these terms will not, therefore, take much interest in the doctrine. Nobody can raise much interest in the answer to a question which, so far as he is concerned, never arises. Thus modern Protestantism, by its refusal to think of man's relationship with God in the basic biblical terms, has knocked away the foundation of the gospel of justification, making it seem simply irrelevant to man's basic need.—"Introductory Essay" to James Buchanan's *The Doctrine of Justification*.

In the theology of the Reformers the relation between law and gospel was clearly defined and quite fully spelled out. They spelled out what became known as "the three uses of the law":

1. The law has a social use in the sense that its preaching and knowledge restrains sin in society in general.

2. The law has a "pedagogic" use in that it is a mirror which points out sin and causes us to see our need of Christ's free salvation.

3. The law is a rule of life for the believer in that it shows what works are good and pleasing to God and what sins to avoid.

The liberal wing of the church have advocated such things as ethical relativism and situation ethics, but they are not the only ones guilty of abandoning "the third use of the law." Evangelicals often have their own brand of antinomianism, cloaked in such pious-sounding phrases as "Christ will live the victorious life for you," "Love takes the place of any external commandment," "When you are guided by the Holy Spirit, you do not need the law." They are wiser than Paul, who filled all his Epistles with moral and ethical imperatives.

It is perfectly biblical to preach that the law is abolished for the believer as a means of salvation, but it is sheer antinomian heresy to say that it is done away with as a rule of life. All creature existence is subject to law, and the man who says "I am subject to no law" has immediately introduced his own law—just like the fellow who gets up and says "There are *no* absolutes" has introduced his own absolute.

Except for some Lutheran and Reformed groups and a few others, the evangelical movement proclaims that the law is done away with as a rule of life. In his book, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Bethany Fellowship), Lutheran scholar John Warwick Mont-

gomery draws attention to this widespread rejection of the law's third use and calls it "sanctification desanctified" (see pp. 423-428).

The matter really does not stop with a rejection of the law's third use. Upon the third use of the law depends the other two uses. It is not possible to pick and choose here, for the three uses hang together. If one goes, they all go.

Let us illustrate what we mean. How can the law effectively point out sin and lead to Christ (second use) if the law is not presented and accepted as a valid rule of life (third use)? It is only the person who comes to grips with the law's radical demand, knowing that he should keep it and *wanting* to keep it, who will be struck down by the law with a sense of sin and utter helplessness. If God does not seriously intend men to keep His law, how can it effectively point out sin?

Suppose that the preacher says what he really thinks: "Here is God's law. It is out of date, and God does not intend that believers should keep it or pay it any respect nowadays—only the legalists do that. But it does have a certain use: if you take a look at this antiquated law, it will act as a mirror and point out sin so that you will see your need of Jesus Christ." Ridiculous! Under these circumstances the law would not convict anyone, nor will it unless it is presented in what Calvin clearly saw was its original design—God's changeless rule of life (third use).

Furthermore, if the third use of the law is abandoned, so is the first use—as a restraint upon society. If what we say here is true, it means that a lot of the blame for the breakdown of morality in society, the spirit of permissiveness and disrespect for law, must be laid at the door of the church, which is supposed to be as salt (a preservative element) in society.

The opponents of the Reformation in the sixteenth century maintained that Luther and Calvin's doctrine of forensic righteousness would result in moral permissiveness and a great breakdown of the social order. Many good Roman Catholics today, looking at the condition of modern Protestantism, sincerely feel that their apprehension about the Protestant doctrine is justified. For the most part, modern Protestantism is soft and flabby through lack of moral discipline. There often appears to be more respect for the divine law and reverence for God among Catholics than among Protestants; and if there is to be another and final Reformation, the most favorable soil for it might well be found outside the mainstream of modern Protestantism.

One thing is certain. Justification, which concerns the legal aspect of human redemption, will never be understood or make any sense except to those who respect God's law and take its demands seriously. To them the doctrine of justification will be no root out of the dry ground but the sweetest message under heaven.

(To be continued)

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