

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

PT Vol. 5 #8

SPECIAL ISSUE

COVENANT (Part 2)

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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
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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 support is appreciated. All gifts are tax deductible in the U.S.A.

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To Contributors: Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome contributions from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone. If you wish a manuscript returned, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
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Letter from Markus Barth

Sir / Though in matters of style and taste there may be some different opinions on your and my side, the theological insights and assertions found not only in the magazine but also in the flyer, "The Gospel and Christian Behavior," have my full approval. By pointing to the fulfillment of the law by Christ you avoid the creeping antinomianism which is characteristic of much so-called New Testament theology. I assume you realize that a different attitude to (as yet unbaptized) Jews is a direct consequence of what you write.

Do you know my booklet on *Justification* (Eerdmans, 1971), in which I attempt—in a narrative way—to show why Christology (cross and resurrection), not just a (correct!) doctrine of grace and sin and new life, is the basis of justification?

Markus Barth
Professor of New Testament
Switzerland

Suggestion

Sir / You have done an excellent job in giving Christ honor in the first three of your *sola's* in your masthead on page 2 of *Present Truth*. May I have the temerity to suggest that you please consider whether you should not go a step further and show that Scripture points to Christ—that is, is the only God-ordained account of and witness of Him and all that He did. I agree with everything you say under the fourth *sola* in your masthead—*sola Scriptura*. But I suggest that you consider making a succinct statement under this *sola*, showing that Scripture is the way God has ordained to testify to Jesus Christ.

William C. Robinson
Professor Emeritus
California

Manipulative Preachers

Sir / Let me thank you for the article in your August issue, "The Gospel as the Power of God." How sorely needed

is this great truth! I will say that even when it is integrated thoroughly in every sermon, we are indeed in a time "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled [with bizarre and novel "experiences" of men], they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires" (2 Tim. 4:3).

I will testify that every person whom I have seen "drawn" to Christ by the power of the gospel is still growing for the Lord, and every person I have seen tricked into a decision by manipulative preachers has gone back into the world without compunction.

James A. DeWeerd
Baptist Pastor
Texas

Grave Responsibility

Sir / As you know, the church has a grave responsibility to educate, correct misgivings, and direct emotion to the benefit of the congregation. The pulpit should never be used to fire the emotion of the congregation in order to inflate the flagging ego of the speaker. Perhaps like others, over the past forty years I have heard many sermons but usually walked away unfulfilled because the message central to Jesus on the cross was all too seldom mentioned. The answers to my questions were found in *Present Truth*; and now I have a clearer perspective of who I am, where I am, and what I am in relation to Jesus.

Lewis Bailey
Maryland

No Thanks!

Sir / Please don't send me your magazine any more. Our Lord told us to preach the gospel to every creature, not to criticize each other.

Mrs. Lynn Karatz
New Jersey

Gospel Preaching

Sir / *Present Truth* has been a blessing and has encouraged me to "prove

all things" (1 Thess. 5:21), especially as to the manner in which the gospel is preached these days. The magazine has also been a help to me personally in that I do some informal ministry of the Word among believers and on occasion am invited to speak in public meetings.

Among believers we need to learn more fully (we who preach the Word, whether occasionally or part time or full time) what it is to "preach the gospel" for purposes of edification of believers. Your publication is a help to that end. May the Lord encourage you as you labor for the Lord until the day of His return.

Herbert Carpenter
New York

Christ Our Righteousness

Sir / Over a period of about one and one-half years I have been reading your magazine. *Present Truth* has given me a desire to dig deeper in the Scriptures to see if these things be. Indeed they are. Jesus Christ is our only righteousness. My preaching has taken on a "gospel color" rather than a "sanctificationism color." The dynamic truth of justification by faith alone has changed and is changing me—giving me a desire to live in accordance with God's law.

Quite frankly, many pastors are caught up in the "deeper life" movement, but some of their members are disillusioned.

Bruce Mercer
Minister
Alabama

One-sided

Sir / I appreciate your firm hold on "justification by faith (alone)" as being a judicial declaration. However, I sense a lack of warmth in this one-sided approach. Justification by faith is fine, but it is only *half* the picture. Sanctification by the Holy Spirit is the other half. I do not believe in the "primacy of justification."

Philip Stel
Canada

Eye-opener

Sir / I appreciate your objective stand taken in connection with your dissemination of "the Truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus our Lord according to the Holy Scriptures (both Testaments)." Your faithful propagation of propositional biblical truth as conceived and circulated by the Protestant Reformers has proven to be a real eye-opener and a tremendous blessing to my own mind and heart. The enrichment received with regard to my doctrinal knowledge and its practical outworking in my Christian life places me in a grateful indebtedness to the editorial staff of *Present Truth*.

Merle P. Estabrooks
Minister
Canada

"How to Live the Victorious Life"

Sir / I have been on your mailing list for several months, my pastor having recommended *Present Truth* to me. The articles contained in your magazine have been a constant source of enlightenment and guidance to me. I was particularly impressed with your brochure, "How to Live the Victorious Life," which I have shown to a number of our Youth Fellowship.

M. Shellard
South Africa

Sir / "How to Live the Victorious Life" was absolutely the best thing I have ever read!

Jerold Gliége
Minister
Canada

Whacking Away

Sir / I don't care to read *Present Truth* any more. A sister in the Lord said a while back that it is like dropping back from the eighth grade to kindergarten. After one has been justified by faith, he doesn't turn around and begin examining this. Faith in our God and His Christ presses on to glory and the victor's crown.

Those who keep on whacking away with the Word start to doubt it themselves; and we who read their articles see the error involved, but they don't know it. They know theology, but do they know the Saviour? Those who know Jesus are talking of His soon return and the rapture, and they are not of the holiness movement either.

Clarence Nagel
Oregon

Wasted Space

Sir / There is so much good about *Present Truth*, and yet it is so unbalanced. The Reformers I truly admire, and yet they were mainly very unclear concerning Israel's future and the glorious and enlightening dispensational truths of the Word. All your wasted space on the content of the gospel makes me feel very sorry for you.

S. Mountstevens
Canada

Not in Vain

Sir / I praise God for groups like yourselves that are dedicated to the preservation of the truth as God has proclaimed it in His Holy Word. May His blessings rest upon your labors. I am confident of soul that they are not in vain.

Ronald A. Litke
Lutheran Pastor
Florida

Rotten Theology

Sir / May I commend you for your excellent and outstanding magazine. It has changed a lot of my rotten theology. What a blessing! Keep on speaking for the truth.

Sam R. Baniqued
Presbyterian Minister
Illinois

Divisive Spirit

Sir / Thank you for the work that you are doing in helping to clarify issues. Much of what you are writing I have been saying for years, but you are saying it more precisely. With the charismatic movement dividing unrightly the Word of truth, it is refreshing to see your stand. Also, with the charismatics dividing our Protestant churches and sometimes taking over traditional non-Pentecostal churches with a divisive spirit, I am glad to see your magazine.

I think that once in a while you overstate. The Pentecostals who are personal friends of mine seem to have a strong understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith in regards to salvation. It is from that point on where I have my disagreements with them; and let us not forget that the different Pentecostal churches have their different understandings of all these teachings which they generally accept.

Richard A. Uzzel
Baptist Pastor
California

Profound Differences

Sir / I am an "ex-Pentecostal" and very interested in what you have to say about that movement and its relation to the type of justification advocated by Luther. I am doing a study of Romans, using F. F. Bruce's commentary on the book, and am realizing *profound* differences in "justification doctrine" between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals.

I had a very profound conversion and a year later got involved in a Pentecostal church and stayed there for about two and one-half years. Then (I believe) God began drawing me back to a noncharismatic faith. There are too many deep differences between the two for me to be satisfied that we are indeed "one in the Spirit."

I have been "baptized in the Holy Spirit" and have spoken in "tongues" but am energetically re-evaluating the experience in light of Scripture.

Stan Lucas
New Jersey

Negative Attitude

Sir / Your negative attitude toward Roman Catholics and charismatics has always disturbed me. Jesus Christ loves Catholics and charismatics as much as He loves you and me. Why do you waste time, effort, money and talent on negative ideas?

Mrs. Ray Pult
Wisconsin

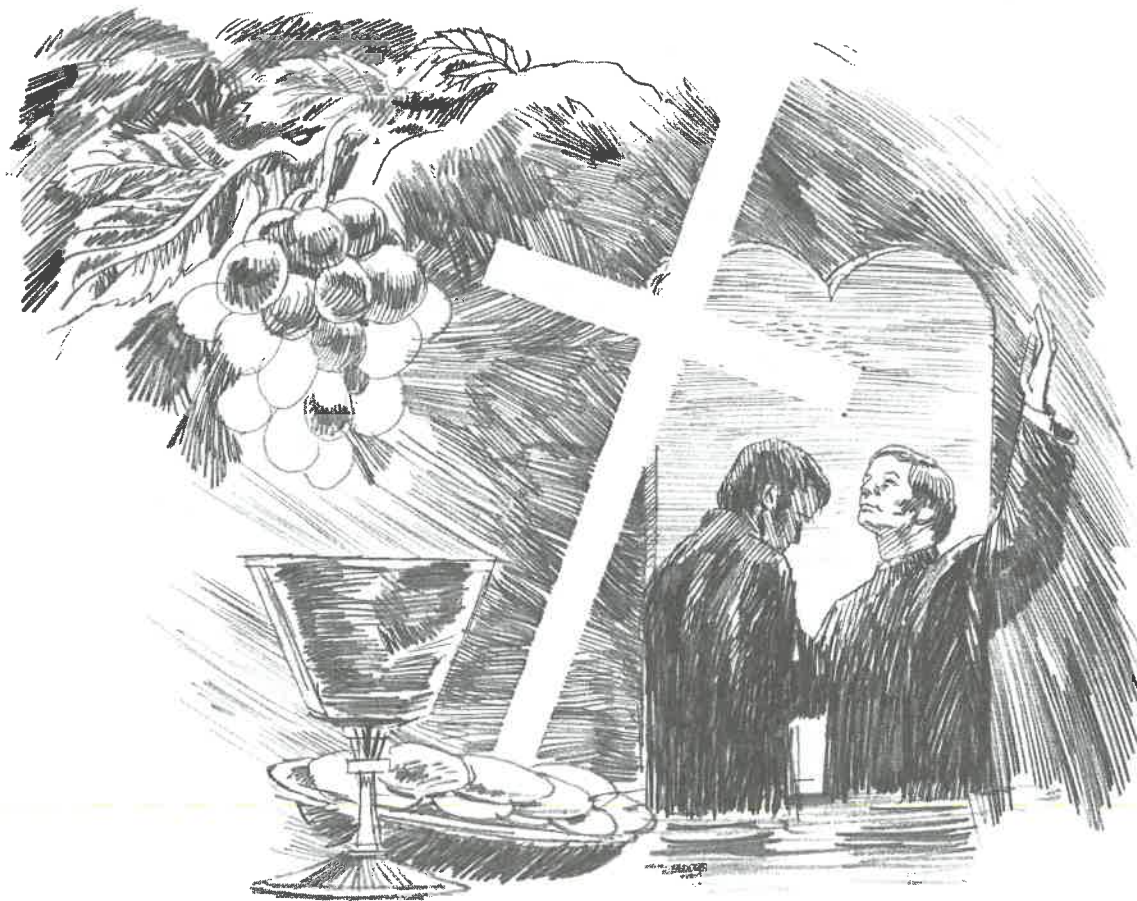
A New Reformation

Sir / I have been a Christian for about four years now, an offspring of the "Jesus Revolution." For the major part of those four years I have been seeking one experience after another in order to keep a spiritual "high." In living like this I had become very frustrated.

Not too long ago I was introduced to your magazine. The truth of the gospel (Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension) was presented by you in a way I had never heard before. My focus of attention has now gone from myself to Christ.

I thank God for your magazine. It has given me an objective view of Christ—something I had never even considered a year ago. I join you in the hope of a New Reformation which, by the grace of God, will unite believers without compromising on the clear teachings of Scripture.

Jeffrey Bynum
California



Editorial Introduction

This edition of *Present Truth* completes the presentation of “Covenant” which appeared in the previous issue. It presupposes that the reader has already read Part 1 and is familiar with the line of argument therein presented.

In attempting to deal with the great subject of *covenant* in a systematic way, we could hardly avoid the matter of signs and seals. That would be like going to a wedding and missing the reception. The problem is that the discussion of the signs and seals has not always been as pleasant as a wedding reception. It has often led to fierce and bitter battles in the church. For within the framework of covenant signs and seals there is the Supper and baptism; and as if the sixteenth century evangelicals did not have enough to argue about on these two matters, the seventeenth century Puritans introduced what they fondly called “the Christian Sabbath” as another sign and seal of the covenant.

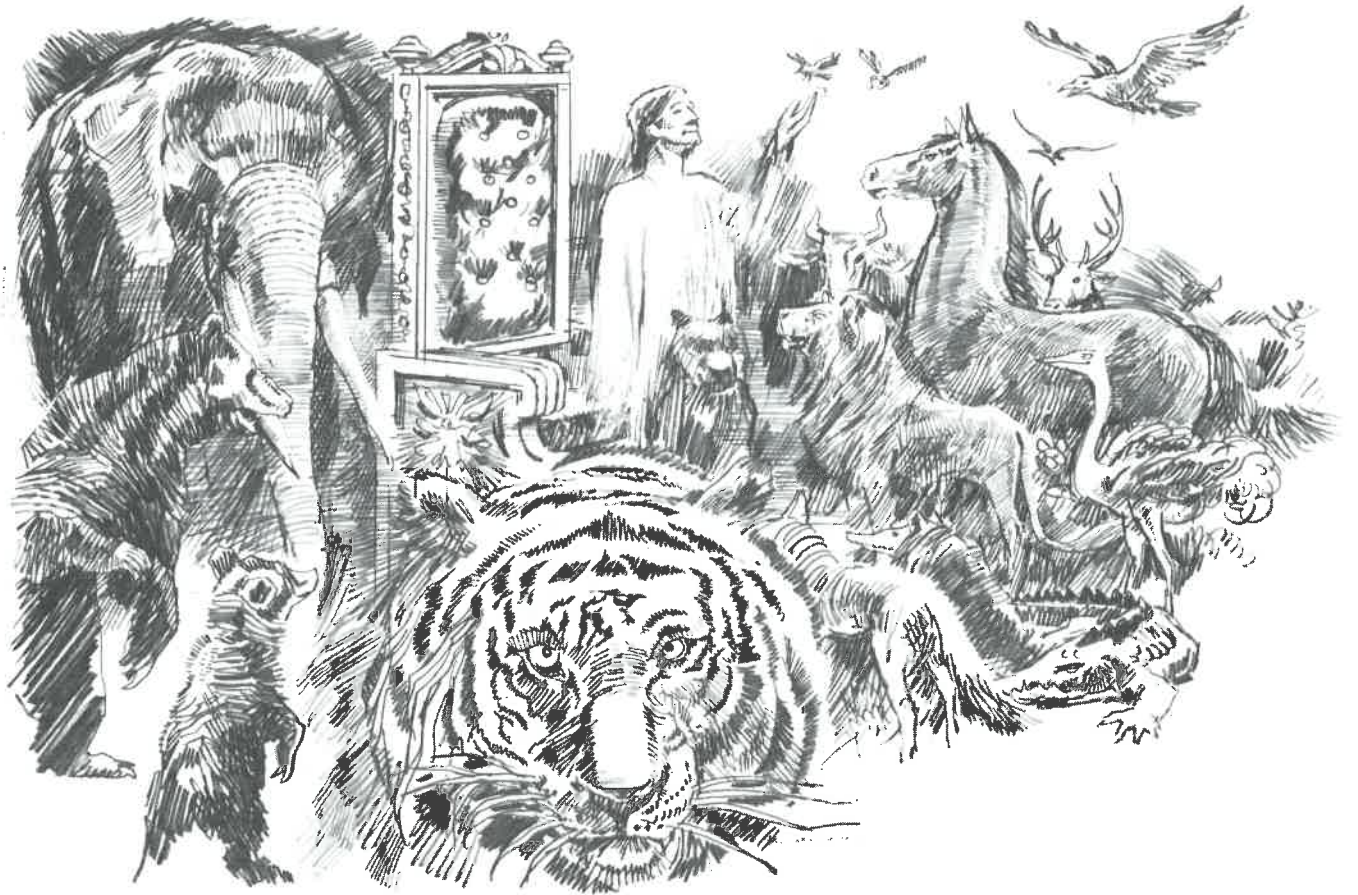
It is therefore with reticence that we reopen some

matters over which Christians have become so heated at times that they have spilled one another’s blood. But this issue of *Present Truth* will not be a call to war but a call to approach the whole subject in the joyful spirit of gospel celebration. We will try to look at covenantal principles which will give us a fresh approach to some thorny problems.

Too much theological controversy is motivated by the spirit of self-justification—individual and corporate. But surely the gospel should teach us that we are justified neither by our moral nor our doctrinal uprightness but by Christ alone. It is only as we keep this in memory that we can allow the truth of justification by grace alone to call all that we do and all that we teach into serious and radical question.

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.



Celebration of the Covenant

The Hebrew Scriptures breathe a spirit of celebration which at times is extraordinary for its exuberance. The reason for this spirit of celebration is the covenant.

The covenant gave life its real meaning. Man was created to be a covenant creature. Man is true man only when he is in covenant partnership with God. Life has no meaning outside the covenant, because apart from fellowship with God death stands over man to negate everything. In himself man possesses no great value, for he is only dust. Yet the covenant invests this "dust" with infinite worth. Just as a wife is the glory of her husband, so God's covenant community is the object of His supreme regard.

The Kingdom of God

In the first place, the covenant establishes the kingdom of God. We see this in Eden. God is the great Suzerain whose covenant invests Adam with the dignity and status of lord over all the created order (Gen. 1:28, 29; Ps. 8:6). In covenant union with God, Adam is king. Out of covenant union he dies and returns to the dust.

The Hebrew Scriptures breathe a spirit of celebration which at times is extraordinary for its exuberance. The reason for this spirit of celebration is the covenant.

When Israel was elected as God's covenant partner, she was incorporated into a kingdom (Ex. 19:5, 6). If she had remained a faithful covenant partner, God would have invested her with status, leadership, and dominion over all the earth (see Deut. 28-30).

The purpose of the Davidic covenant was also the establishment of an ideal kingdom. In this kingdom man would not only be subject, but he would be ruler over the works of God's hands.

The biblical expression, "kingdom of God," is a dy-

namic expression which means “the rule of God.” To be in God’s kingdom means to live under His rule. It means to be part of the covenant community which lives under the authority of God’s law. On the part of man the covenant requires exclusive, wholehearted obedience. On the part of God the covenant means that He is pledged to protect and succor His covenantal subjects.

Of Israel the prophet Balaam declared, “. . . the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them” (Num. 23:21). The Hebrews were often moved to heights of great joy as they celebrated the wonder of having God as their King. A number of the Psalms are known as “enthronement Psalms” (Ps. 47, 81, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99). In them we hear the glad strains of acclamation as the people celebrate the enthronement of Yahweh as Israel’s King.

According to Mowinkel, ancient Israel’s neighbors enthroned their gods and kings at the New Year’s festival in the autumn. So it was that in the climactic feasts of the seventh month (Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles) Israel celebrated the enthronement of Jehovah.

The seventh month opened with the feast of blowing of trumpets, which lasted ten days (Num. 10:10; Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1). On the tenth day, which was the Day of Atonement, the jubilee trumpet was sounded¹ (Lev. 25:9). The expression, “blowing of trumpets,” is from the Hebrew word *teruah*, which is also translated as *joy, joyful sound, jubilee, rejoicing, shouting, high sounding*. *Teruah* is preeminently used for the acclamation given at the appearance, presence or enthronement of the king (see 1 Kings 1:34, 39; 2 Kings 9:13).

The festival complex of the seventh month depicts the triumphal entry of Yahweh as King into His capitol city and His enthronement amid the acclamations of His people. The words of the *teruah* are, “Yahweh is become King” (Mowinkel’s translation of Ps. 93:1; 97:1; 99:1; cf. 2 Sam. 16:16; 2 Kings 9:13). Yahweh then begins His reign, His rule, His judgment. He enters His temple and thereby consecrates it and renews the covenant with His faithful vassal subjects. He “covers” His people with covenantal blessings and assures them of their inheritance. Israel’s unbounded joy in God their King is expressed in the following Psalms, which are a sample of the Old Testament spirit of celebration:

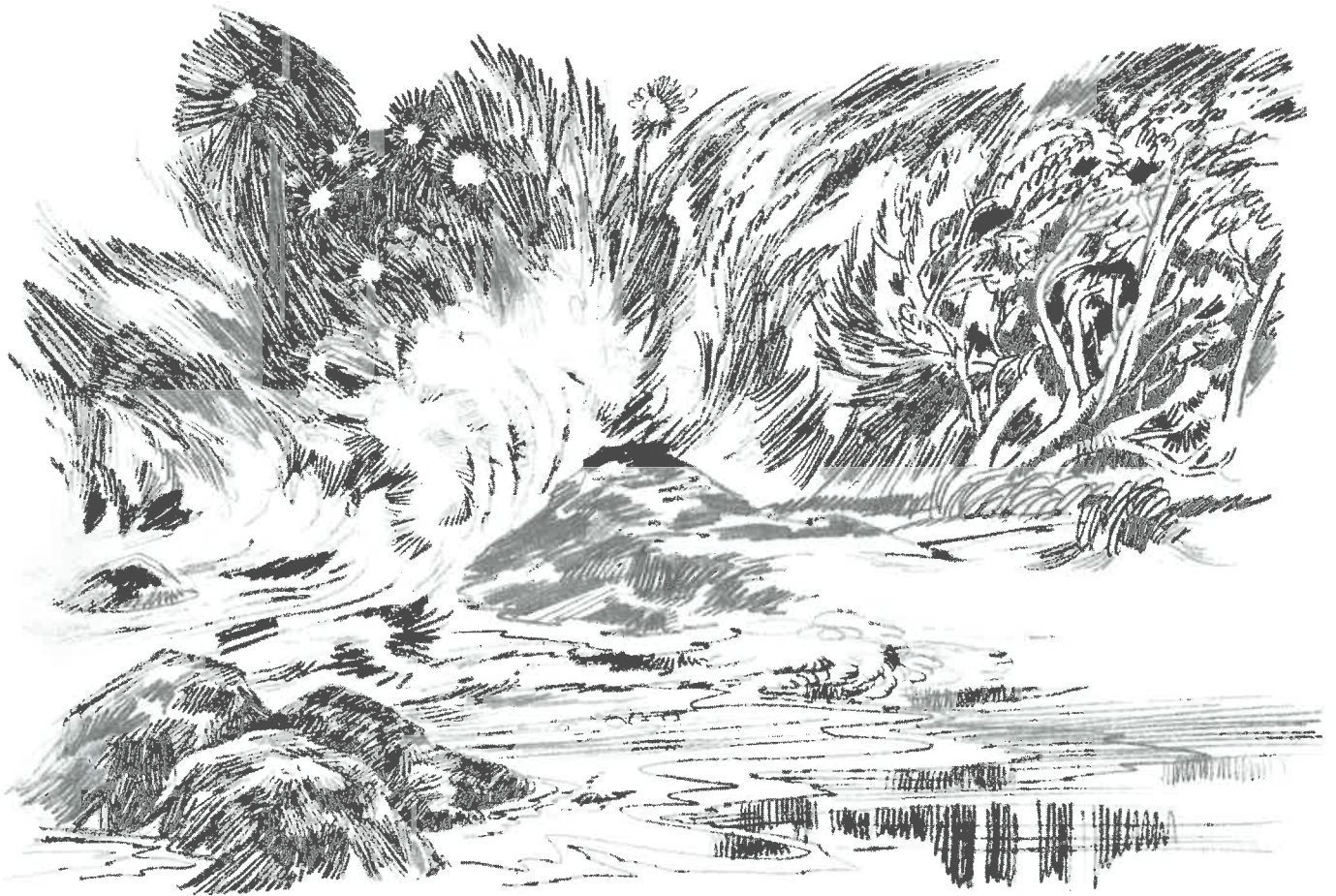
O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.—Ps. 95:1-3.

O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless His name; shew forth His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among

The Hebrews were often moved to heights of great joy as they celebrated the wonder of having God as their King.



¹On every fiftieth year.



the heathen, His wonders among all people. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before Him: strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into His courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him, all the earth. Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth.—Ps. 96.

The Righteousness of God

Closely associated with the concept of God's kingship was God's righteousness. The King was Judge, and as Judge He was covenantally pledged to deliver His people. God's acts of saving and rescuing His people from Egypt, from Babylon, or even from their sins were celebrated as His acts of righteous judgment. They were

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justice because God was showing Himself to be true to His "covenant of mercy."

It is in the Old Testament that we first meet this idea that *the justice of God means salvation* to all who put their trust in Him. Those who are children of the covenant have the right to appeal to the Judge for deliverance. The penitent Psalmist can even appeal for forgiveness on the grounds of God's justice (see Ps. 51:14). Daniel pleads for Israel's restoration to divine favor on the grounds of divine justice (see Dan. 9:16). The same idea also appears in the Qumran literature. A few quotations will illustrate the point:

By His righteousness He has wiped out my transgression.—1 QS 11:3.

And I, if I stumble the steadfast love of God is my eternal salvation, and if I totter in fleshly iniquity my justifi-

cation will be in the eternal righteousness of God.—1 QS 11:11b.

For You will forgive iniquity and purify men of guilt through Your righteousness. . . . I will take courage in Your covenant.—1 QH 4:37ff.

In passages like Psalm 71:1-3, 15, 24, Isaiah 51:5 and Isaiah 45:8 the “righteousness of God” means the saving acts of God on behalf of His people. Again we say, God’s justice means salvation to all those who put their trust in Him (as Paul later proclaimed in Romans 1:16, 17).

These saving acts of God are the theme of constant celebration.

In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in Thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline Thine ear unto me, and save me. Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: Thou hast given commandment to save me; for Thou art my rock and my fortress. . . . My mouth shall shew forth Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. . . . My tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.—Ps. 71:1-3, 15, 24.

Chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah constitute one great celebration of God’s righteousness in delivering His people from Babylon and renewing His covenant through the sin-bearing work of His suffering Servant.

Access and Fellowship

The covenant meant that Israel had access to God and the privilege of fellowship with Him. True, Israel was sinful and could not in herself stand in the presence of Yahweh. But God had provided a way of access (taught in the tabernacle ritual) by substitution (the sacrifice), representation (the high priest) and imputation (the sweet incense). By these God-ordained means the worship of sinful beings could be acceptable to Him. The Old Testament reflects the spirit of celebration in the covenant privilege of worshipping God.

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.—Ps. 95:6, 7.

Honour and majesty are before Him: strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into His courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him, all the earth.—Ps. 96:6-9.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with



The covenant meant that Israel had access to God and the privilege of fellowship with Him.

singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations.—Ps. 100.

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.—Ps. 16:11.

The whole texture of Old Testament religion was marked by the spirit of joyful celebration. Covenant life was a life of celebration. If Israel did not serve the Lord with “joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things” (Deut. 28:47), she did not serve the Lord in a way acceptable to Him. God had loved His people freely, fervently and unstintingly. Any insipid response would be an insult to divine love.

The numerous Hebrew festivals were to be grand occasions of celebration. Israel was to call to mind God’s marvelous acts in electing and saving His people. She was to remember and give thanks (see Ps. 106 & 107). In the feast of Tabernacles at the end of the year the people were commanded to put aside their work. God had said, “. . . ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days” (Lev. 23:40; see also Deut. 14:26).

The Sabbath was a weekly covenantal celebration. At the creation, when God’s work was finished, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). Adam had nothing to contribute to God’s perfect work. He had nothing to do on that first Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3) but to be thankful and celebrate. This day of celebration became a sign and seal of the covenant by specific command of God (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; 31:16, 17). So the fourth word of the covenant commands the people of God to “remember.” But further, the God who created does something to preserve His created order. He has not left His people to their own devices nor to the bondage of Pharaoh. So when the covenant is repeated to Israel on the plains of Moab, the Lord says, “And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut. 5:15).

On the seventh day Israel must cease her work. She must not find her satisfaction in what she has done. She is to find her joy and satisfaction in God’s work. The God who created heaven and earth has created Israel a nation by His redemptive activity, and she has nought to thank but His electing love, which is wholly unmerited. The Sabbath is the sign of the covenant (Ex. 31:16, 17), the pledge that Israel’s salvation and welfare are God’s business. The sign and the covenant are inseparable (Isa. 56:4, 6).

The unbounded exuberance with which the Old Testament saints celebrate having God as their King and Judge is astounding. Consider the following:

The whole texture of Old Testament religion was marked by the spirit of joyful celebration. Covenant life was a life of celebration.

Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let Thy saints shout for joy.—Ps. 132:9.

Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.—Ps. 149:5.

We may recall to mind the occasion of David’s dancing before the ark of God in the spirit of fervent celebration. Yet this was no light, frothy exuberance. It was a joy that was conspicuous for its fear and reverential awe before the holy One of Israel.



Covenant Life Is Praise

It is plain to see that the essence of life to these Old Testament saints was the praise of God. Life was to trust God and celebrate.

When King Hezekiah faced premature death through sickness, he “wept sore.” To the Hebrews death was a horrendous evil.² Hezekiah gives us an insight into this when he declares: “For the grave cannot praise Thee, death can not celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day . . .” (Isa. 38:18, 19). The Psalmist also says, “For in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?” (Ps. 6:5).

²Luther often remarked on this and pointed out that in itself death is an unspeakable disaster. To be sure, it has become a light thing because Christ has conquered it; but in itself it must not be treated lightly.

The reason why the Hebrew saint abhorred death was because life was celebration of God. He wanted to go on praising God. (We must remember that the full New Testament light on Christ’s conquest of death had not dawned on the Hebrews.)

If life means to praise God and continually celebrate His goodness, it follows that those who do not praise God and live in this spirit of celebration are already dead.

The Great Disruption and the Grand Renewal

The Old Testament spirit of celebration is not unclouded, however. It was disrupted when the covenant was broken. Only in covenant union with God can the people of God celebrate. So when the great disaster of the captivity overtook the Jews, the covenant was broken, and they had nothing to celebrate:



By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?—Ps. 137:1-4.

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because it was his doleful task to pronounce God's judgment upon His people. Yet with the prophetic spirit of unspeakable joy Jeremiah foretells that the time would come when God would renew His covenant:

Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd; and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the Lord.

Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border. . . .

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to

bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an Husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.—Jer. 31:12-17, 31-34.

Chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah take up the same grand theme of covenant renewal. The most sublime literature of all time appears in Isaiah's inspired poetry. He saw beyond the restoration which took place in the postexilic period and caught the inspiration of that great covenant renewal which would take place in the coming of God's Messiah. The old songs of celebration would never do. A new song of unparalleled joy must accompany God's ultimate act of intervention—an act which would renew His covenant with the remnant of Israel and provide salvation for the Gentiles unto the uttermost bounds of the earth.

The New Testament Celebration

Jesus' announcement of the kingdom was "glad tidings" or "good news." He had come to fulfill *all* that was promised by the prophets (Acts 13:32, 33; 2 Cor. 1:20). With Him and in Him the hour of God's ultimate act of intervention and salvation had arrived. Christ declared, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the

In Jesus were all the blessings of God's covenant. His presence was therefore an occasion of celebration.

Christ's death was to be the sealing of the new covenant which the prophets had promised. Therefore it must be celebrated.

brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound . . . " (Isa. 61:1). Of course, Isaiah goes on to declare that this day of Yahweh would also be a "day of vengeance of our God" (vs. 2). But Christ did not quote this portion of the scripture in sounding the good news (see Luke 4:18, 19). He came to bear God's wrath Himself so that sinners might bear God's favor. He would endure the curses of the covenant so that His people could have its blessings.

Jesus refused to allow men to make His disciples fast when He was with them. In Him were all the blessings of God's covenant. His presence was therefore an occasion of celebration. The gospel was likened to an invitation to a great banquet. Jesus went about eating and drinking. God's gift had come down to men. It was time to celebrate.

As the Master stood in the shadow of the cross, He did not invite His disciples to mourn but to rejoice (see John 16:33). His death was not to be mourned as some disaster. True, it was a baptism of infinite suffering for the Son of God, but this was the Father's gift and Christ's own gift to sinful man. As a true gift, it was poured out with a fullness of divine joy. Christ's death was to be the sealing of the new covenant which the prophets had promised. Therefore it must be celebrated.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.—Matt.

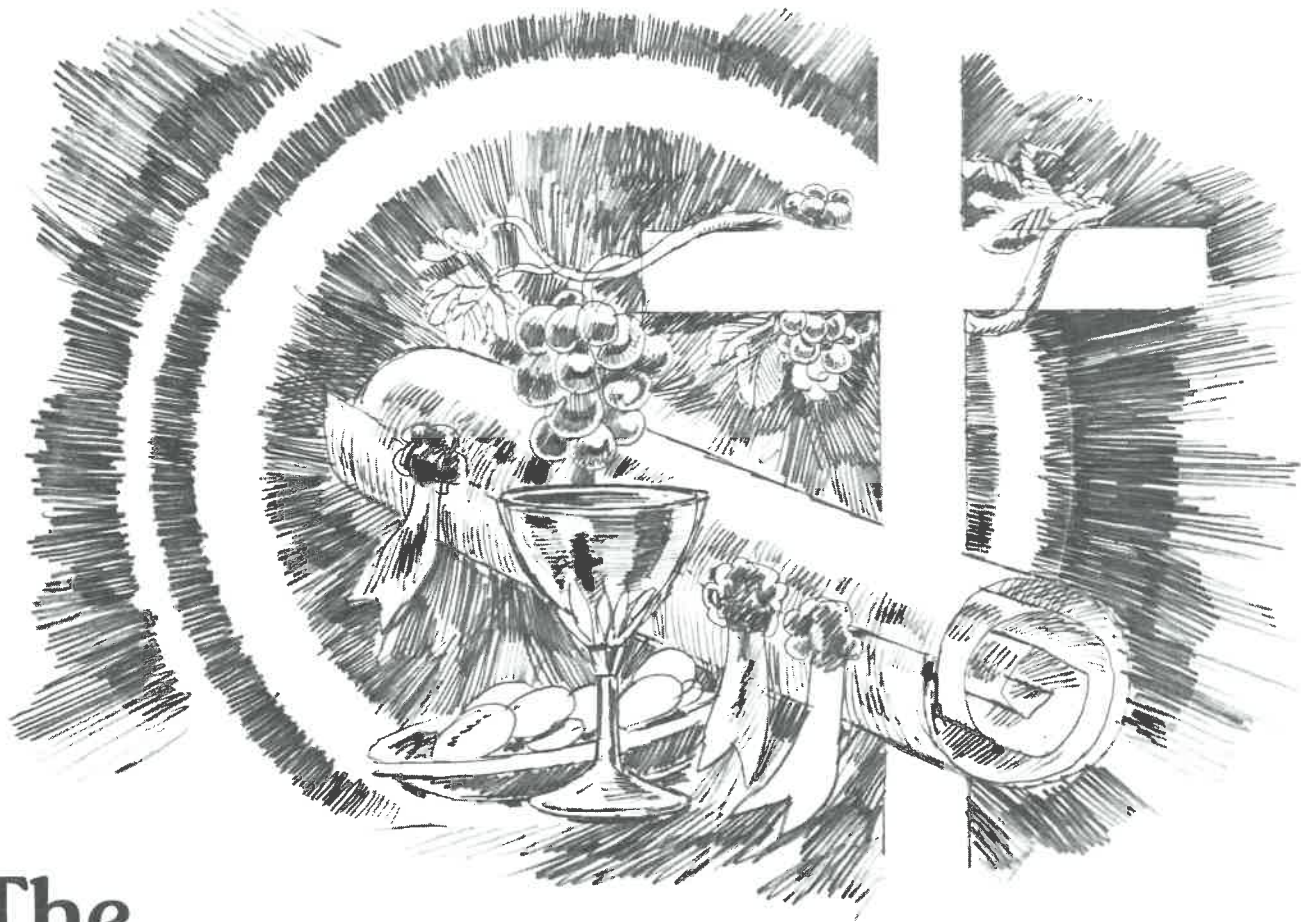
If the Old Testament's spirit of celebration was great, the New Testament's must surely be greater. God's act of redemption in Jesus has been completed. All things necessary for our full and free acceptance with God have been worked out and settled. We cannot contribute or add anything to what God has done on Calvary any more than Adam could add anything to God's original creation. What else can we do but rest in that completed work, give thanks, and celebrate the glorious benefits of this grand covenant renewal. We can only go on in the Christian life as we remember what has happened and what has been given to us.

The last book of the Bible appropriately ends the Bible story of the triumph of God's covenant. How fitting that its vision was on the day appointed by God for celebration! (Rev. 1:10; cf. Isa. 58:13, 14). With the apostle we are permitted to stand on the threshold of the eternal world and hear the unceasing songs of the inhabitants of heaven as they celebrate the victory and triumph of the Lamb.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.—Rev. 5:9-13.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.—Rev. 19:6, 7.

If we expect to celebrate when God makes all things new, we must learn to celebrate here and now. But let us be sure that we celebrate the right thing. None of the songs in the book of Revelation are celebrating the worshipers' own religious experiences. They do not celebrate their changed lives, their victory over sin, or even their sinless state. Not one thing is heard about what they have done or suffered. They do not glory in their Spirit-filled existence. This book of praise is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it makes almost no mention of the Holy Spirit. Where Christ and Christ alone is celebrated, the Spirit's work is complete.



The Signs and Seals of the Covenant

The matter of the signs and seals of the covenant has become a subject of many arguments and divisions in the church. This is unfortunate, for the signs and seals of the covenant are given as vehicles of covenant celebration.

The covenant is a treaty, a contract, a carefully-formulated legal arrangement respecting the union and fellowship between God and man. It is the nature of the covenant to have a definite form. This form includes signs and seals. Signs and seals appear in both the Old and New Testaments.

For instance, the rainbow was the sign of the Noahic covenant. Circumcision was the sign or seal of the Abrahamic covenant. In Acts 7:8 the covenant with Abraham is referred to as "the covenant of circumcision." This is an interesting expression, because it shows us that the sign or seal, by way of metonymy, may be spoken of as the covenant itself. The Sabbath was the sign of both the Adamic and Israelitic covenants (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 31:16, 17). So also, by way of metonymy, the Sab-

The signs and seals of the covenant are given as vehicles of covenant celebration.

bath is spoken of as if it were the covenant itself (see Isa. 56:4, 5). This relationship between the sign and the thing signified is a very important matter in understanding the Bible's covenantal way of speaking (e.g., the words of institution of the Supper, "This is My body," must be understood as reflecting this covenantal way of speaking).

The following statement from the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* is not only true in identifying the signs and seals that appear in the Old Testament, but it is also true in expressing the facts in a covenantal way:

The Sabbath, the rainbow, and circumcision are, in fact, the three great covenants established by God at the three critical stages of the history of mankind, the creation (Gen. 1:1, 2, 3; Ex. 31:16f.), the establishment of mankind after the flood (Gen. 9:1-17), and the birth of the Hebrew nation (Gen. 17).—eds. Botterweck & Ringgren (Eerdmans), Vol. 2, p. 264.

Three Signs and Seals in the New Testament?

In the New Testament we find that the believer has a covenantal relation with the Triune God. It is therefore suggested that there are also three signs and seals attached to the new covenant.

Not all are agreed in identifying these signs and seals. Some have proposed that they are (1) the regenerating gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), (2) baptism and (3) the Supper. Others point out that the purely inward, invisible work of the Holy Spirit (apart from baptism) does not qualify as a sign or seal, since a sign or seal, by very nature and meaning, must be some visible token of the covenant.

The Puritans, who made the study of the covenant a point of great attention in their theology, proposed that the third sign and seal was what they fondly called "the Christian Sabbath." They pointed out that the Sabbath was inseparably related to the covenant and its renewal (i.e., the new covenant prophecy in Isaiah 56:2-6 and 58:12, 13). It was due to this Puritan idea that Sabbatarianism became a marked feature in the tradition of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. The Reformed South African scholar, Francis Nigel Lee, seeks to perpetuate this Puritan concept in his published doctoral thesis, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London: The Lord's Day Alliance Society, 1966). The Puritan view is also reflected by some of the Westminster men like the late John Murray.

Then there are others who have agreed with the Puritans about the link between the Sabbath and God's grand covenant renewal which was fulfilled in the Christ event, but they disagree as to the form of the Christian Sabbath. These maintain that because it is the one sign and seal which belongs to the actual words of God's eternal covenant (Ex. 34:27-29; Deut. 4:13) and because, like the institution of marriage itself, it reaches back to man's sinless state in Eden, it must remain the unchanged seventh day of the Decalogue. According to their view, this seventh-day Sabbath is also identified with the apocalyptic "seal of God" because, it is pointed out, the Revelator is using Old Testament (Jewish) symbolism (see Rev. 7:1-4) as well as language which is covenantal (see Rev. 11:19; 15:5).

If here is not room for argument enough, consider also how different sections of the church have practiced the rite of baptism or celebrated the holy Supper. There

have been times when controversy over these signs and seals has become so inflamed that people have actually lost their lives at the hands of other Christians. Those who wanted to practice baptism by immersion so irritated the Reformers that the Reformers felt justified in fighting them with violent forms of persecution. Zwingle and his friends punished them, as they thought proper, by protracted "immersion" in the nearest river. If death by drowning was not shocking enough, think how Cranmer and Ridley consented to give a young Welsh lassie over to the stake because she was simply a "Baptist." The Lutherans were certainly not outdone in their zeal to preserve the purity of the faith. A Lutheran pastor who was careless enough to fumble the element of the Supper got his fingers cut off by way of punishment. And Melancthon's son-in-law was put in prison for ten years because he leaned to Calvin's view of the Supper.

Of course, today we are sophisticated, so we do not treat fellow Christians in such a barbaric way when they disagree with the faith we ardently espouse. Besides, the law of the land prevents Christians from practicing these uncharitable acts toward each other. If our religious persuasions are strong enough, we simply bring all sorts of ecclesiastical and social pressure on our friends to make them see and practice "the light." And if they do not conform, we ostracize them as if they were dangerous lepers. This can hurt as much as drowning or burning. But this form of torture has one advantage—the process is more prolonged.¹

Unless we are prepared to overlook a very important area of covenantal theology, we cannot push the signs and seals of the covenant under the rug in the interest of keeping everybody happy. But some of the problems will be solved if we deal with the principles behind the signs and seals before we try to settle questions about the correct form.

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¹Some ultradispensationalists and others do not have any sacraments at all in their religious community. They feel that visible things like being washed with water and eating bread and wine do not reflect mature spirituality, which, they say, does not need to depend on such "carnal" things. The Salvation Army is not founded on any dispensational loyalty, but it has no sacraments. (Booth did not want to perpetuate the habit of alcoholics by giving them wine at the Supper.) At least those who take the "no sacraments" line have gotten rid of the problem of deciding what the correct form is in the signs and seals of the covenant!

The Relation Between Form and Spirit

In order for anything to qualify as a sign and seal of the covenant, it must have a form. Something which is completely spiritual and invisible does not qualify as a sign. A sign has to be related to some visible token.

This brings us to the whole question of the relation between *form* and *spirit*. We will make two propositions about this relationship.

1. Our first proposition is that spirit needs form.

God is spirit. His love is spiritual. But this love has been given form. First, it was given form in the creation of man and a material world. The things which God made were an expression of His infinite love. Second, God's love was given form in the incarnation. His love became flesh-and-blood reality in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The human mind is spirit. But God created man in such a way that the human mind would find expression in a material body. The body is the only medium through which the human spirit finds expression. No brains, no thought!

Form is important—at least it was in the truly Hebraic and biblical view of man. The Greeks depreciated form (matter, body). They said that the body is a prison from which the soul awaits release to the immaterial world of pure idea. But the Bible teaches that the body is a temple which God made and which Christ died to redeem. The Old Testament taught the Hebrews to respect even the form of human existence, for the whole man was made in God's image.

Human existence must have a form. Spirit not only affects form, but form affects spirit. If a person lives in an untidy and disordered environment, it will affect the spirit. A sagging posture tends to a sagging spirit. Let women take on male forms of dress and actions, and this will modify the feminine spirit. The reverse process is true with males.

Human love needs form. It cannot exist without expression. Marriage is a holy and spiritual union, but it has a form. Also, the legal contract (covenant) on which it is founded cannot be dismissed as a scrap of paper without prostituting a fundamental principle of life.

Faith is spirit. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit and cannot be seen. Yet faith needs form. It is given form in Christian baptism.² Faith is also given form in a life of good works. This is what James 2 is all about. Faith cannot

²This is why faith and baptism can be used interchangeably in the New Testament. Faith saves; baptism saves. Faith cleanses; baptism cleanses. Faith unites and incorporates the sinner into Christ and His mystical body; baptism unites and incorporates the sinner into Christ and His mystical body. Of course, faith itself does not save, but these things are attributed to faith because it is affixed to Christ. Since baptism is the form of faith, we can attribute to baptism what belongs to faith. This is a covenantal way of thinking. When this biblical mode of expression is ignored, people either look upon baptism as a useless form or as a thing with magical powers.



Understanding the essential relation between spirit and form throws light on some vital problems in church history.

live without expression. Without works faith is dead.

Human thought (spirit) needs form. That form is language. Helen Keller's mind was locked in isolation and could not develop until her teacher taught her a language. As soon as her mind was given a vehicle of expression, it blossomed out remarkably.

The church, as the invisible and mystical body of Christ, needs form. There has to be a visible church—a visible community—a ministry, an order and discipline. The visible aspect of the church cannot be ignored. There must be church order, the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments. Spirit needs form.

Understanding the essential relation between spirit and form throws light on some vital problems in church history. To start with, it helps us to understand what Paul was up against in the problems which developed at Corinth. A Greek influence became plainly visible in this believing community. The Greeks depreciated matter. In Greek philosophy the essence of salvation was a flight away from the material world. The church at Corinth experienced the development of an exaggerated spirituality which depreciated form. The human body was depreciated in the interest of super-piety. It was even said that if one were truly spiritual, he could not sin even if he committed fornication ("Every sin that

a man doeth is without the body," 1 Cor. 6:18). Some were behaving scandalously at the Supper. Others thought that spiritual ecstasy gave them liberty to ignore the orderly conduct of church meetings. The resurrection of the body at the last day was repudiated in the interest of a present pneumatic experience.

In his letters to the Corinthian church Paul countered this false spirituality by dealing with such questions as the preaching of the gospel, the body as God's temple, marriage, the celebration of the Supper, the orderly conduct of church gatherings, and the resurrection of the body. Paul showed that even redeemed life will have form.

The early apologists of the Christian church had to counter the Gnostic (Greek) influence by contending for three fundamental things—the creation of a material world by the Father of Jesus Christ, the flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnation, and the resurrection of the body. The Gnostics denied that the material world could be a work worthy of God. They said that God, being pure spirit, could not have become real flesh and blood in the incarnation. And they repudiated the idea of the resurrection of the body. They were anxious to get rid of the body, not to have it resurrected; so they showed their contempt for it either by neglecting it or by indulging in flagrant bodily sins which were regarded as no sins at all. It was against these heresies that the Apostles' Creed boldly confesses: ". . . God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. . . . Jesus Christ . . . born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate. . . . the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."

This tendency to depreciate form reappeared among the Enthusiasts at the time of the Reformation. The relation between form and spirit throws a lot of light on Luther's conflict over the whole question of the Supper. The catch cry of the Enthusiasts was, "The Spirit, the Spirit!" They said that the preaching of the Word in the fashion of the Reformers was a dead letter. They despised the study of languages. In the matter of the Holy Spirit's reception they advocated *immediacy*—the idea that the Spirit is imparted directly to man apart from the means of grace in the preaching of the Word and the sacraments (i.e., *mediate* grace). Some advocated an exaggerated spirituality that would do away with the magistrate, the state, the visible church, all church forms, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and even the institution of marriage itself. This movement—which is often called the radical Reformation—was so broad that it had both its saints and fanatics. Not all were wild-eyed enthusiasts, as the Reformers sometimes depicted them. Yet the element which depreciated form was in the movement, and Luther would have none of it. He opposed it with great vehemence. His great stubbornness on the issue of the Supper was a sort of expression of his determination not to tolerate the least approach to the spirit of Enthusiasm.

In the true relation between form and spirit there is union without fusion; there are both harmony and distinction.

There are, of course, two sides from which to fall off the path of truth. On one side there are the "spiritualists," who feel that they can dispense with such "carnal" things as mere water, bread and wine, or church forms and organization of any sort. They do not realize that spirit needs form and cannot continue without it. On the other side there is the ditch of "formalism." Here form is confounded with spirit or even becomes a substitute for spirit.

In the true relation between form and spirit there is union without fusion; there are both harmony and distinction. For instance, the Bible has a form which is distinctly human. The modes of expression, grammar and historical situations are all human. Yet the spirit of the Bible is divine. While the divine spirit of the Bible comes clothed in the human form of the Bible, there must be no transference of attributes from one to the other.

Faith is spirit. Good works are the form in which faith is expressed. While there is union here, there must not be fusion. We attribute the instrumental means of our justification before God to the faith and not to works.

2. Our second proposition is that spirit comes in form.

God came to us clothed in human form. The spirit of man comes clothed in a human body. The Holy Spirit comes to us "riding in the carriage of God's Word" (Luther). The Spirit does not come outside and apart from this form. It is a very dangerous thing to look for the Holy Spirit apart from hearing the Word of God (Gal. 3: 1-5). We cannot honor the Spirit while we despise the channel through which He comes to us. God proposes to send His Spirit to men by "the foolishness of preaching." This is why we can say that the preaching of the Word is the means of grace. If we despise and reject the form through which God has chosen to send His Spirit, we reject the Spirit Himself.

We need to look at the signs and seals of the covenant (gospel) in this light too. They are forms which God has ordained to be associated with His covenant of grace. Not only does the gospel (spirit) need these signs and seals (form), but we must conclude that the Spirit of the gospel comes to men in these signs and seals. This does not mean that there is any saving efficacy in the form (e.g., water or bread), for we must not transfer to



God's form is not empty when it is accepted in faith. Just as Christ is truly present wherever the Word of His gospel is preached, so He is truly present in the signs and seals which He gives.

Faith is maimed wherever there is neglect or improper use of God's seals and signs.

form that which can only belong to spirit. Neither should we confound spirit and form. But we can say that God's form is not empty when it is accepted in faith. Just as Christ is truly present wherever the Word of His gospel is preached, so He is truly present in the signs and seals which He gives.

This means that the signs and seals of the covenant cannot just be a memorial of Christ's atonement. The Christ who died is a risen Saviour. The preaching of His gospel and its celebration through signs and seals point to His death. But because the Spirit of the resurrected Christ comes in and with these forms, Jesus is more to the believer than a dim historical figure. He is both the transcendent Christ and the immanent Christ.

Yet we must repeat, we dare not confuse form with spirit any more than we would divorce them. The sign or seal of the covenant may be called what it signifies only by way of metonymy. For example, the Bible refers to both circumcision and the Sabbath as the covenant (Acts 7:8; Isa. 56:4, 6), not because either sign is in itself the covenant, but because it is the sign of the covenant. The much-debated words of Jesus, "This is My body," must also be understood as covenantal language. This is plain from Jesus' other words on the same occasion, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26-28). The Supper is a sign and seal of the covenant, and therefore it is quite proper to call the bread and the wine the body and blood of Christ in a covenantal mode of expression.

Is Salvation Possible Without the Signs and Seals?

We have to acknowledge that people can be saved apart from the signs and seals of God's covenant. If this were not so, it would be impossible that both Lutherans and Reformed, Sabbatarians and non-Sabbatarians could be saved. There was a time when Christians were of such strong persuasion about these signs and seals that they were adamant that dissenters would of necessity be damned. First the Lutherans were damned by the Catholics for rejecting the Roman sacraments. Then the Lutherans damned the Calvinists for dissenting from Luther's view of the Supper. And the Calvinists hurled their own anathemas against their own dissenters. Fortunately, time itself made it transparently clear that God had saints in all these segments of the church. Each party will now generally acknowledge that salvation is still possible while a different form is practiced.

There are still some hard-liners in captivity! Some insist that all who are not baptized by immersion according to their particular teaching cannot be saved. There have been Sabbatarians who have wanted to brand non-Sabbatarians with "the mark of the beast." But they certainly have not outdone the non-Sabbatarian Fundamentalists who affirm that any Sabbatarian is "fallen from grace" and cannot possibly be saved.

We need to acknowledge that salvation is by grace alone. This means that the Lord is in the business of saving sinners. Just as no one is without sin, so no one is without error. If error damns us, then we must all be damned. Of course, if one's particular error is an expression of his hostility to grace, then he is rejecting salvation; but we must remember that we are not the judge of human hearts. There will be many great saints in heaven who held queer ideas on earth. We never deny salvation by grace so much as when we deny grace to those we judge as being in error.

Having acknowledged that salvation is possible with-

out the signs and seals of God's covenant, we must also say that faith is maimed wherever there is neglect or improper use of God's seals and signs. They are God's gifts to strengthen faith. They are the Lord's tokens and pledges of His covenant promise. Of course faith is maimed without them or by their improper use!

There is something even much worse. If one deliberately rejects God's sign or seal, knowing what it stands for, then he does reject the covenant itself. This is why back in Old Testament times God told Abraham that whoever refused to be circumcised would be "cut off" for despising God's covenant (Gen. 17:14). To neglect God's signs and seals through ignorance may be one thing, but to reject them in the light of what they stand for is sinning against grace with a high hand. Yet we must leave judgment with God at this point.

The Essential Qualifications of a New Covenant Sign and Seal

1. In order for a thing to qualify as a sign and seal of the covenant, it must have a form. It must be a visible token or pledge of God's promise.

2. A sign and seal must be God's gift. It is not something we give to God, but it must be something which God gives to us. It is His pledge to us. Therefore whoever accepts God's sign and seal accepts God's pledge of the thing signified. As long as he holds onto God's pledge, he holds onto God's covenant. It is in this sense that baptism is said to save us (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is not something we do and give to God. It is something which is given and is done to us. It is not a sign and seal of our dedication but of the Lord's death. Neither is it a sacrament of the authority of the church. If the church thinks up a way to honor Christ, it cannot make that into a sign or a seal.

3. Christ as Mediator must both give and keep the sign and seal. The new covenant is primarily between God and Jesus Christ. It is made with the believer only in a secondary sense—i.e., as he is joined or incorporated into Christ. As Mediator, therefore, Christ must both give and submit to a sign and seal in order to make it valid for us. For example, He is both the Baptizer and the Baptized. *A thing cannot be a new covenant sign or seal if Christ as God did not give it. Neither can it be God's sign or seal if Christ as man did not also accept it from God and give God thanks for it.* Furthermore, we could not keep it in a way acceptable to God if Jesus' perfect keeping of it were not imputed to us.

4. Since this new covenant (*diatheke*) is not only a treaty and compact but also a will and testament, the signs and seals must be attached and all in place prior to the death of the Testator (Heb. 9:15-17). No new feature can be added to this will and testament after the death of Jesus Christ. Nothing which came in after Calvary can qualify as a sign or seal of this covenant.

The spirit in the signs and seals of God's covenant is the spirit of celebration.

Thus baptism and the Supper had to be instituted before Christ's death.

5. A sign and seal must be plainly commanded by the great Suzerain. No seal or sign is merely suggested or implied. God's command to observe it must be as plain and as open as the visible form of the sign and seal itself. We dare not originate our own signs and seals as if any features of the covenant could originate with man's initiative. Everything about the covenant is unilateral in origin. We dare not accept anything as a sign and seal which does not rest on the explicit command of God. We must have God's own pledge of covenant union with Himself. Faith cannot rest on man's theological supposition. But where there is a clear word of the Lord, faith can accept the sign and seal, saying, "I accept this as God's pledge of salvation."

The Spirit in the Signs and Seals

The spirit in the signs and seals of God's covenant is the spirit of celebration. No one can truly celebrate unless he believes what God has done for him in Jesus Christ. The signs and seals are for believers. God visited this planet in the flesh-and-blood reality of Jesus of Nazareth. He redeemed the race and made all things new by the representative work of this second Adam. When Christ died on the cross, crying, "It is finished," the great work of atonement was completed. Every condition of the covenant was fulfilled, and every barrier between God and sinful men was removed. God's work in Christ was as complete as His work at the first creation (Gen. 1:31; 2:1-3).

Adam could contribute nothing to God's finished work of creation, and man today can contribute nothing to salvation. Both creation and redemption are covenantal. They are unilateral in origin and execution. In His covenant with Jesus Christ, God has furnished all things needful for our present and eternal welfare. The gospel invitation is like an invitation to a feast which has already been prepared and lavished with all good things. ". . . all things are ready: come unto the marriage" (Matt. 22:4). The sinner is called to believe and celebrate what God has done.

When God finished His first creation, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). That was a great covenant celebration indeed (see p. 10).

In the gospel God wants us to know that, in spite of sin, we can still celebrate, for God has dealt with sin in

The signs and seals are forms which God has ordained to be associated with His covenant of grace.

Jesus Christ and made all things new (2 Cor. 5:17). "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). Since justification by faith means that we are accepted as if we had never sinned, the justified may still celebrate as if sin had never entered to disrupt that original celebration. The new Israel still need to remember what has happened and what has been given to them. They need time to celebrate.

This is not celebration for the mere sake of celebration. Covenant celebration is celebration with content. The people of God are not called to celebrate their "new life in the Spirit" or their victorious experience. (That would be celebrating their celebration.) If one were invited to honor a great citizen in an after-dinner speech, he would not want to spend the time talking about himself. That would be completely out of taste with the occasion. The signs and seals of the covenant are given to celebrate the death of Jesus Christ—His finished work.

We might even inquire at this point why baptism and the Supper are signs and seals which celebrate Christ's death rather than His resurrection. The resurrection gives birth to faith and hope, for without the empty tomb we could not believe that Christ's finished work on the cross was acceptable to the Father on our behalf. By the resurrection God shows us that our sins have indeed been put away by Christ's death. Therefore we have great joy and peace in believing. But we do not celebrate our joy and believing. The resurrection enables us to celebrate with all heaven in Christ's act of self-giving.

In the gospel God wants us to know that, in spite of sin, we can still celebrate, for God has dealt with sin in Jesus Christ and made all things new.

The signs and seals of the covenant are given to celebrate the death of Jesus Christ—His finished work.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.—Rev. 5:9-12.

Apart from the gospel the signs and seals of the covenant are mere form. Church history demonstrates that apart from the gospel they become signs and seals of our own legalism. Instead of expanding the spirit of the church to invite all men to share in covenant celebration, they nourish a cultic rather than a catholic spirit. Most obnoxious of all, they are used in a cultic way as if they were badges and signs of our own cultic piety.

How can men celebrate if they do not believe the gospel? We are not called to preach about signs and seals as if they were the gospel, but we are commanded to believe and preach the gospel, which alone can invest the signs and seals with any meaning. When men hear and understand the gospel as God intends they should, they will not only accept the correct forms, but they will embrace them in the true spirit of gospel celebration.

(Concluded)

We are not called to preach about signs and seals as if they were the gospel, but we are commanded to believe and preach the gospel, which alone can invest the signs and seals with any meaning.

Questionnaire

Dear *Present Truth* Reader,

People the world over are rejoicing in the message of justification by faith alone as *Present Truth* seeks to uplift the great objective gospel of Jesus Christ. It may be that you would like to help us more directly with our work. If so, please fill out the following questionnaire and return it to us. We will be delighted to hear from you.

Sincerely,



Norman Jarnes
Publishing Editor

Yes, I want to help . . .

- publicize seminars through the use of promotional material provided by *Present Truth*:
 - bulletin inserts
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- increase the circulation and impact of *Present Truth* by
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About me . . .

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About my reading of *Present Truth* . . .

I read . . .

- all of it
- most of it
- some parts

I like (number 1 to 4 in order of interest)

- _____ letters
- _____ editorial contributions
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Comments welcome: _____

Announcing

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