
The
WORK
of the
Holy Spirit

David J. Engelsma
Herman Hanko

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Foreword



“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,” Jesus once declared to the unbelieving Jews at a feast in Jerusalem (John 5:17). Everything that the Father works, He works through the Son. In fact, the Father always works through the Son *and in the Holy Spirit*. This is the glory and beauty of the Triune God, always at peace and rest, and always working.

This book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, develops a worthy theme. In the Bible, we read of the Spirit working from the very first chapter (Gen. 1:2) to the very last (Rev. 22:17). He wrought the creation (Gen. 1:2) and He has been working “hitherto” (cf. John 5:17).

Before the world was or, more accurately, in the timeless Trinitarian God, the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:17) is the perfect, personal bond of love between the Father and the Son. To the Holy Ghost is ascribed the blessed work of searching “the deep things of [the Triune] God” (I Cor. 2:10).

The hidden wisdom of God in Jesus Christ (I Cor. 2:5-10) is now “revealed” to us by the Spirit (v. 10; cf. vv. 11-16) in the Scriptures God breathed forth by the Spirit (II Tim. 3:16). Moreover, “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17) is active in faithful saints and churches illuminating us so that we understand the Word by faith (Eph. 3:17-18).

Nothing, and no one, less than the Holy Spirit Himself has been working through the preparing and delivering of the eight speeches on the Holy Spirit’s work which are now the eight

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chapters of this book. Here is biblical, creedal and soul-refreshing teaching that honours the Holy Spirit who glorifies Jesus Christ and, thereby, the Triune God (John 16:13-15). May the Spirit bless to the hearts of the readers this book which explains and applies the biblical truth of His work!

A word about the origin of this book. Part I contains the six main lectures by Profs. David Engelsma and Herman Hanko at the tenth biennial British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference at the Share Centre on Upper Lough Erne in Co. Fermanagh, N. Ireland (August, 2008). Part II consists of the two Lord's Day sermons at this conference by the same two brethren. The members of the BRF decided to include these two addresses in this book because they further develop aspects of the Holy Spirit and His work.

One of the chapters is significantly longer than the rest: "The Holy Spirit and Assurance." Given the erroneous and harmful teaching of many conservative Presbyterian and Reformed men, past and present, Prof. Engelsma developed and expanded this lecture for the written page. This more detailed and polemical chapter adds to the value of the book and, we trust, will bring many to greater consolation in the gospel of Christ through the work of the Comforter!

Thus we send forth *The Work of the Holy Spirit* to the reading public. It is a worthy addition to the two previous BRF publications by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma: *Keeping God's Covenant* (2006) and *The Five Points of Calvinism* (2008).¹

The special lecture on "Charismaticism" which I gave at the BRF Conference on "The Work of the Holy Spirit" will be published, God-willing, in a future issue of the *British Reformed Journal* (*BRJ*). For information about the *BRJ* (and the BRF), see the Appendix, "About the British Reformed Fellowship."

¹ These books and many others are available from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Bookstore (www.cprf.co.uk/bookstore).

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“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (II Cor. 13:14).

Rev. Angus Stewart
BRF Chairman

PART 1
Chapter 1

The Person of the Holy Spirit



Prof. David J. Engelsma

Scripture: John 15:26-16:16

Introduction

The subject of the Holy Spirit and His work is especially timely and worthwhile. There is a great deal of interest today in many Christian circles in spirituality and spiritual experience. Much of what passes for spirituality and spiritual experience is, in fact, mysticism—one of the great, perennial threats to true Christianity. The Holy Spirit is God dwelling in us and the Spirit of Jesus Christ working salvation in us, so that all genuine spirituality and all real spiritual experience are due to the Spirit. In this book, we teach a genuine spirituality and spiritual experience. This is the spirituality and spiritual experience caused by the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus calls the “Comforter” in John 14-16.

Another reason why the subject of the Holy Spirit is timely and worthwhile is that we live in a time when a false and dangerous teaching and practice concerning the Holy Spirit and His presence and operations are popular: the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement, which lately has taken form as the movement of “signs and wonders.”¹

¹ For a description and critique of the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement, see David J. Engelsma, “Try the Spirits: A Reformed Look at Pentecos-

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The Charismatic movement exerts a powerful appeal upon churches and individual Christians, as is evident from its enormous popularity, worldwide. The movement allures Reformed churches and Christians. A number of Presbyterian and Reformed churches in North America have taken decisions that the extraordinary gifts have not ceased (as the Reformation had declared!) and have approved the Charismatic movement as being a genuine work of God in the last days. In Grand Rapids, Michigan in the United States, historically a centre of the Reformed faith, thousands of Dutch Reformed people, old and young, have left the Reformed churches and abandoned the Reformed faith for large, growing Charismatic churches.

The appeal of the Charismatic movement is its promise of life, power, excitement and feeling, in contrast, the movement charges, with the lifelessness, the powerlessness, the monotony and the coldness of the historic Protestant denominations, particularly the Reformed churches.

It is the need of the hour, not only to expose and condemn the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement, but also to assure believers and their children concerning genuine spiritual life, power, joy and experience.

Still another reason why a concentrated study of the Holy Spirit and His work is timely and worthwhile is that it is possible that there is a neglect of the Holy Spirit and His work among us. Reformed people then can be deceived by the Charismatic life, power, excitement and feeling because they are ignorant of the real spiritual life, power and experience. They open themselves up to the spirit of the Charismatic movement because they do not know the Spirit of Christ as they should.

talism" (South Holland, IL: South Holland Protestant Reformed Evangelism Committee, 2001); David J. Engelsma, Wilbur Bruinsma and Charles Terpstra, "Pentecostalism: Spirit-Filled Blessing ... or Dangerous Heresy?" (Holland, MI: Evangelism Committee of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, 2001).

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I am quick to add that there is a perfectly proper lack of attention paid to the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught that the Spirit He would send on Pentecost would not call attention to Himself, but to Jesus. “He shall testify of me” (John 15:26). “The Spirit of truth ... shall glorify me” (John 16:13-14). One sure proof that the neo-Pentecostal movement is false is that its spirit calls attention to itself, consigning Jesus Christ to the background.

Nevertheless, without at all obscuring Jesus Christ, Scripture says much about the Spirit and His work. If we ignore this teaching about the Spirit, or even neglect it, so emphasizing in our preaching, study and meditation the Father and His work of election and the Son and His work of redemption as to minimize the Spirit and His work of sanctification, the consequences will be a lack of spirituality, of healthy Christian experience and of power to live a holy life. Then the Charismatic winds will rush in to fill the vacuum.

There are Reformed commentaries on the *Heidelberg Catechism* that are expansive in their treatment of the first and second parts of the *Catechism*, but thin in their treatment of the third part of the *Catechism* on the Holy Spirit and His work in the child of God. Some Reformed preaching can suffer a similar imbalance.

Personal Interest

I confess my own special interest in the Holy Spirit and love for Him. My first congregation was influenced by the theologian, Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrugge (1803-1875), who, although born in the Netherlands, carried out his ministry in Germany and wrote most of his theological works, including a commentary on the *Heidelberg Catechism*, in German. Strong on the depravity of the natural man, Kohlbrugge was weak on the renewing, sanctifying work of the Spirit.² Some of his disciples virtually denied the

² Kohlbrugge's weakness surfaces in the opening question and answer of his (German) commentary on the third part of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: “*Welches ist das dankbarste Geschöpf Gottes? Der hund*” (“Which is the most thankful creature

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work of the Spirit in the elect children of God, as though holiness of life were a threat to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. My calling, therefore, was especially to teach the truth described in Question and Answer 24 of the *Catechism* as “God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification.”

During the time of my first pastorate—the 1960s and early 1970s—the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement exploded. Virtually all the other churches in the city and surrounding area accepted, practised and enthusiastically promoted the neo-Pentecostal movement. I was forced carefully to try the spirit of neo-Pentecostalism, as John commands in I John 4:1. In that testing of neo-Pentecostalism’s spirit, I had to examine the teaching of the Bible and the confessions concerning genuine spiritual life, experience, joy and power.

My second pastorate in the 1970s and 1980s was a congregation in a predominately Reformed community. There a prominent, gifted Reformed preacher claimed to have been baptized with the neo-Pentecostal baptism with the Spirit. He contended that he would unite Reformed doctrine with the neo-Pentecostal enthusiasm. This compelled me, for the sake of my own congregation, as well as for the sake of the Reformed community, closely to investigate the possibility of a “Reformed Charismatic.”³

of God? The dog”) (H. F. Kohlbrugge, *Erläuternde und Befestigende Fragen und Antworten zu dem Heidelberger Katechismus* [Elberfeld: Len & Wiegandt, 1922], p. 151).

³ The project of the “Reformed Charismatic” preacher was not successful. He soon abandoned the Reformed doctrines he once espoused, sarcastically offering to give away “my dusty books of Reformed doctrine.” He found himself comforting a dying church member by assuring her that he would at once raise her from the dead. This he attempted to do with a vial of holy oil, until the offended funeral director chased him from the premises. The Charismatic faith and life are diametrically opposed to the Reformed faith and life. Wherever professing Reformed churches and people foolishly and wickedly welcome or tolerate the Charismatic religion, the Charismatic faith and life will destroy or drive out the Reformed faith and life.

More recently, post-graduate study of the relation between the Trinity and the covenant, without my intending it, put the Holy Spirit, especially His place and activity in the life of the Triune God, in the forefront of my theological thinking.

With this, we begin this little book: Who the Holy Spirit is, and what His place and activity are in the Godhead.

I will demonstrate that, so far from being abstract and impractical, the identity of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Holy Trinity is the basis of everything that will be said about the Spirit in this book, of everything that can be said rightly about the Spirit in any forum, and of everything that the Spirit is and does in the church and in the elect believer. Jesus points this out in John 15:26: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.” Jesus can send the Spirit to us only because the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Because in the Godhead the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, the Spirit’s great work of salvation is that He testifies of Christ. And only by testifying of Christ is He the “Comforter.”

The Teaching of the Creeds

I begin with a brief survey of the church’s creedal statements concerning the Holy Spirit. There is good reason for this beginning. The church of the present time must allow herself to be guided in her understanding of the truth by the church of the past, especially by the church’s creeds or confessions. It is a serious weakness of many contemporary Christians that they are ignorant of the creeds. It is a grievous fault of many churches that they ignore the creeds. The result is that these Christians and churches wander from the truth. In that great passage on the Holy Spirit—John 14-17—Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the church into all truth: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). One aspect of this work of the Spirit has been the church’s writing of her creeds.

The Creed of Nicea/Constantinople (A.D. 325/381)

Both the earliest and most important confessional statement about the Holy Spirit and His work is the *Nicene Creed* (A.D. 325). In this early creed, the Holy Spirit saw to the testimony, not only about Jesus Christ, but also about Himself. The ecumenical council of bishops met to decide the controversy, whether Jesus is God. It declared that Jesus is “of one substance [i.e., essence] with the Father.”⁴

All that the original *Nicene Creed* of A.D. 325 said of the Holy Spirit was, “And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost.” Brief as the statement was, it implied that the Holy Ghost is a person and that He is God.

Nevertheless, the identity of the Spirit as both a person and as God was not conclusively settled by that brief declaration in A.D. 325. For some fifty years after the Council of Nicea, controversy raged in the Christian church concerning the Holy Spirit. The great issues were two: Is the Spirit a person, and, if He is, is this person God? Some theologians denied both. Others were uncertain. Some said that the Spirit is a mere power; others, that the Spirit is a creature; others, that the Spirit is more than a creature but less than God.

One of the great church fathers of that period, Gregory of Nazianzus, writing in A.D. 380, frankly described the confusion and controversy in the church regarding the Holy Spirit:

Of the wise men among ourselves, some have conceived of him [i.e., the Holy Spirit] as an activity, some as a creature, some as God; and some have been uncertain which to call him ... And therefore they neither worship him nor treat him with dishonor, but take up a neutral position.⁵

⁴The Greek word translated “of one essence” is *homoousion*.

⁵Quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development*

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Let us appreciate that one of the reasons for the uncertainty and debate over the Holy Spirit was the relative silence of the Bible about the Godhead of the Spirit. Hear Gregory again: “[Scripture itself does not] very clearly or very often call him God in so many words, as it does first the Father and later on the Son.”⁶

The church council of Constantinople held in A.D. 381 settled the controversy over the Holy Spirit, making explicit what the Council of Nicea had left implicit concerning the Spirit, namely, that He is a person and that He is God. Constantinople added the following description of the Spirit to Nicea’s brief statement, “And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost”: “the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets.”

By this addition to the *Nicene Creed*, the Council of Constantinople plainly confessed that the Spirit is a person, rather than an impersonal energy or power. Constantinople used personal pronouns in referring to the Spirit, “who” not “that.” Also, Constantinople ascribed to the Spirit personal activity: He spoke through the prophets. The council had I Peter 1:11 in mind:

[The prophets searched] what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Constantinople’s addition to the *Nicene Creed* also confessed that the Spirit is God. It did this by calling Him “the Lord”; describing Him as the “Giver of life”; and saying of Him that He is “worshiped and glorified” with the Father and the Son.

Four aspects of the early church’s confession of the Holy Spirit

of Doctrine, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 213.

⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 212.

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ought to be noted. First, on the foreground, as the centre of the church's attention, comprising the main message of the *Nicene Creed* as completed by the Council of Constantinople, is, not the Holy Spirit, but Jesus Christ. This is not offensive to the Spirit. This is exactly what the Spirit wanted and, in fact, accomplished. In that great biblical passage on the Spirit—John 14-17—Jesus said that the Spirit would not testify about Himself, but would testify about Jesus. This proved to be true in the creedal formulation of the truth of the Trinity.

If the neo-Pentecostal movement were to draw up the creed, the Holy Spirit would be front and centre, and Jesus would be in the distant background.

Second, the main activity ascribed to the Spirit by the *Creed of Nicea/Constantinople* is the Spirit's speaking by the prophets—His ministry of teaching, specifically, His ministry of teaching the cross and resurrection of Jesus, as I Peter 1:11 describes His ministry (“the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow”). If the modern Charismatic movement were to describe the outstanding work of the Spirit, how different their emphasis would be: tongues; signs and wonders performed by church members; feelings of enthusiasm and excitement. The teaching of the sufferings of Christ and His subsequent glory might not even be mentioned. If it were mentioned, it would certainly not be honoured as the main work of the Spirit.

Third, Constantinople's addition to the *Nicene Creed* attributes to the Spirit the entire work of the gathering of the church and of the application to elect sinners of the redemption of the cross. Immediately following the description of the Spirit quoted above, Constantinople said this:

And [I believe] one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and
I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the
world to come. Amen.

The church, the remission of sins, resurrection and the new world are the gracious, mighty, renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, Constantinople's confession of "one Baptism for the remission of sins," based on Ephesians 4:5, is simply the condemnation of the Charismatic movement's fundamental teaching of two baptisms, one of which, and the more important in the view of the movement—the "baptism with the Spirit"—has nothing to do with the remission of sins. The Charismatic movement, therefore, is not the continuation of historic, creedal Christianity. It is heretical and schismatic.

The Reformation Creeds

The Reformed confessions, particularly the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Standards*, adopt the doctrine of the Holy Spirit set forth in the *Creed of Nicea/Constantinople*. Thus, the Reformed churches show their oneness with the early Christian church.

We believe and confess also that the Holy Ghost from eternity proceeds from the Father and Son; and therefore is neither made, created, nor begotten, but only proceedeth from both; who in order is the third person of the Holy Trinity; of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son; and therefore is the true and eternal God, as the Holy Scripture teaches us.⁷

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.⁸

In one extremely important respect, the Reformed confessions go

⁷ *Belgic Confession* 11.

⁸ *Westminster Confession* 2:3.

beyond the *Creed of Nicea/Constantinople*. They add a truth about the Holy Spirit that is not found in *Nicea/Constantinople*, at least, not explicitly and in detail. This truth about the Spirit I will point out and explain in the chapter in this book on the Holy Spirit and the covenant of grace.

Now I must look more closely at the two great aspects of the identity of the Spirit decided by the councils of Nicea and Constantinople, namely, that the Spirit is a person and that the Spirit is God.

A Divine Person

The Council of Constantinople decided that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, like the eternal Father and the eternal Son, because Scripture teaches this. Among other passages, the baptism formula of Matthew 28:19 was compelling for the fathers of Constantinople: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” One who is so closely related to the Father and the Son must, like the Father and the Son, be a divine person. If the Holy Ghost shares the one “name” with the Father and the Son and if believers and their children are baptized into His “name,” He must be both a person and God.

Another passage that was of great importance for Constantinople’s confession of the Holy Spirit was John 14–17. This passage was Jesus’ farewell address to His disciples and to the church on the eve of His leaving us with regard to His bodily presence in the crucifixion on the day following and then in the resurrection and ascension into heaven. The passage begins, “I go to prepare a place for you” (14:2).

But the passage is not merely a sad announcement of leave-taking. Rather, it is Jesus’ promise of His continued presence and fellowship with the church, even though He will be absent from her bodily. Christ will be present by the Holy Spirit, whom He will send to the church (15:26).

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The passage, therefore, is one of the most full and important passages on the Holy Spirit in all of Scripture. It contains the clear promise of the Holy Spirit's coming to the church (14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 12ff.). The Spirit is given names that reveal who He is and what He does: "Comforter," "Spirit of truth," the "Holy Ghost" or "Spirit." His work regarding the church is indicated: teaching (14:26); testifying of Jesus, so that the church also will testify of Jesus (15:26-27); guiding the church into all the truth (16:13). He also has a work regarding the ungodly world: reproving the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-11).

A Person

John 14-17 teaches that the Spirit is a person, not an impersonal power or energy or influence. We must be clear what the church has always meant, and what we are to understand, by a person, specifically, in our confession that the Spirit is a person. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is the self-conscious subject of all His thinking, willing and working and one who consciously lives in a relationship with other persons. The Spirit can and does say "I," conscious of Himself in relation to, but different from, the other persons in the Godhead.

The Spirit thinks—of Himself, of the Father, of the Son, of the church, of you, of me, of the ungodly world. He wills—the glory of God, the honour of Jesus Christ, the salvation of the elect church, the shame and destruction of the ungodly world. As a thinking, willing person, He works—in the eternal Godhead; in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ; in creation and providence; governing history; regenerating every elect, redeemed child of God; hardening the reprobate ungodly.

The Spirit is not an evolutionary force in nature. He is not a movement in history, for example, a movement effecting a Marxist, socialist utopia. He is not the soul of the universe. He is not the power of love.

In John 14-17, Jesus clearly teaches that the Spirit, whom He is

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about to send, is a person. The Spirit is a “Comforter,” like Jesus Himself: “another Comforter.” He is “another Comforter” by doing what only a person can do, namely, teach: “he shall teach you all things” (14:16, 26).

Jesus refers to the Spirit with the personal pronoun “he”: “he shall testify of me” (15:26). Literally, the Greek original has, “*This one*—this one *person*” (shall testify of me). Jesus’ reference to the Spirit with the personal pronoun is especially significant because the Greek noun, “Spirit,” is neuter in gender, grammatically demanding the neuter pronoun, “it.”

In John 16:7-16, Jesus ascribes personal actions to the Spirit: re-proving, guiding, hearing, speaking, showing us things, glorifying Christ by receiving and showing the truth of Christ.

No one should respond, “This is deep theology, and quite impractical.” On the contrary, this is theology that every Christian can and must know. It is doctrine that is practical in the extreme. Only if the Spirit is a person is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity true, and upon the truth of the Trinity rests the entire Christian faith. I mean that the entire structure of Christian truth depends upon, and centres on, the Trinity. I mean also that if the Spirit is not a person in the Godhead, the Father and the Son can have no personal fellowship with each other, so that God would not be a living God in Himself. Without the personal Spirit, God is a lifeless, bifurcated monad. Bluntly put, denial of the personhood of the Spirit means the death of God.

That the Spirit is a person is practical with regard to His presence and work in the church. Only as a person can He know the needs of the church, including every true congregation, and thus supply those needs. An unknowing force, whether of love or power, cannot give a minister who is at his wit’s end a word in season, make an elder who is naturally timid courageous at a crucially important session of synod, humble the proud member who is causing division in the church or lead a Reformed congregation seduced

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by the heresy of a universal, resistible grace of God—prevalent today in apostatizing Reformed and Presbyterian churches as the doctrine of a “common grace” of God in the preaching of the gospel—to take an uncompromising stand for the truth of sovereign, particular grace.⁹

With regard to each believer personally, the Spirit dwells in us as the “Comforter.” It is not my purpose here to explain this rich name. We may take it simply as “Helper.” The Spirit helps those who are grieved by their sins; tempted by Satan, the world and their own powerful lusts; troubled by all kinds of earthly afflictions; fearful of impending death.

This help requires a person—a person within us, but a person—who knows our griefs, burdens, struggles, anxieties and fears—knows them as well as we do, indeed better—and who, with infinite wisdom, knows how to apply the balm of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No blank, unknowing, impersonal force or power can be our “Comforter/Helper.”

In addition, only a person can do the outstanding work of the Spirit in each of us personally. That work is not making us emotional basket-cases, as is the work of the spirit, not only of the Charismatic movement, but also of those churches that emphasize the believer’s inner experiences and feelings, rather than Jesus Christ. That work is not causing deluded church members to jabber gibberish, as is the work of the spirit of the Charismatic movement. It is not even empowering people for extraordinary feats, as is the work of the spirit of the signs and wonders department of the Charismatic movement.

What the main work of the Spirit in every Christian is, Jesus tells us in the great passage on the Spirit, John 14-17. John 17—the

⁹ For a refutation of the false doctrine of a common grace of God, particularly in the preaching of the gospel, and an apology on behalf of sovereign grace, see Herman Hanko and David J. Engelsma, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: British Reformed Fellowship, 2008).

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high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ—is the conclusion of the passage about the Spirit. And what does Jesus ask of the Father for you and me, as the great work of the Spirit whom He will send? “Sanctify them through thy truth” (v. 17). This includes keeping us from the evil (v. 15).

The outstanding work of the Spirit is making us holy: cleansing us from sin and consecrating us to God in love for God, which love expresses itself in the fruits of good works, as Jesus teaches in John 15:1ff.

The one who sanctifies us must be a person—a person within, but a person—who thoroughly knows our unique nature, our besetting weaknesses, our present temptations and our special place in the kingdom now, as well as the place God has ordained for us in the kingdom everlastingly, and who then wisely works in us the holiness of the risen Jesus Christ.

No impersonal power could sanctify any of us.

The Christian must live in the consciousness of the personhood of the indwelling Spirit. What a difference this makes! Parents sometimes remind their teenage children, “Remember, God sees all you do!” This is true, and this can be motivation to resist temptation. But God can be far, far off, as we think of Him, whether as a teenager on a date in a car on a Friday night or as a parent slipping a video into the player in a bedroom after services on a Sunday evening. Parents and teenagers alike must remember that the person, the Holy Spirit, is *in us*, day and night, in our private life, as well as our public life. He knows what we read, what we watch, how we behave when we are alone. He knows our thoughts and desires: whether we love the competitor or heartily wish him a failure; whether we take delight in public worship or are bored silly; whether we strive to be sexually pure or amuse ourselves with pornography (which is like amusing oneself with a rattlesnake) or by lusting after another man’s wife or another woman’s husband; whether I am writing this chapter to glorify God or merely to accomplish an academic end.

The apostle makes this very point—our consciousness that the indwelling Spirit is a knowing, willing, feeling Spirit—in Ephesians 4:30: “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” The text establishes that the Spirit is a person. Only a person can be made indignant or sad. You cannot grieve the chair you are sitting on, not even if you take a hammer to it and smash it to pieces. The Christian (and only the regenerated Christian can grieve the Spirit, as only a friend can grieve a friend) grieves the indwelling, sealing Spirit by deliberate wickedness of life, whether bitterness towards God or anger towards a fellow-saint within himself or “clamour and evil speaking” outwardly. The result is that the Spirit grieves us; He makes us feel His grief by inflicting on us some grief of our own: lack of assurance of salvation, depression, joylessness, anxiety, fear. The penitent adulterer, David, cried out, in Psalm 51:11, “Take not thy holy spirit from me,” adding in explanation, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (v. 12).

God

This person is God.

Nowhere does Scripture explicitly call the Spirit God, as it does Jesus. It was this silence of Scripture that partly explained the difficulty of some in the early church with the truth of the Deity of the Spirit, as Gregory Nazianzus pointed out. Nevertheless, in many places Scripture teaches the Godhead of the Spirit by ascribing to Him divine names and perfections, as well as by attributing to Him works that only God can perform.

A passage that was important for the fathers at Constantinople, in addition to the baptism formula of Matthew 28:19, was Acts 5:3-4, where Ananias and Sapphira are said to have lied “unto God” by lying “to the Holy Ghost.” I note in passing that this passage also teaches that the Spirit is a person. One cannot lie to his dog or even to the universe.

John 14-17 is conclusive regarding the Godhead of the Spirit

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whom Jesus promised to send. According to John 15:26, the Spirit proceeds from the Father, that is, originates from the being of God the Father. Whoever has the origin of His being thus from the being of God must Himself be God.

This proceeding Spirit accomplishes works that no one but God can perform. He guides the church into all truth (16:13). He sanctifies sinners, who are by nature dead in sin (17:17). He creates the oneness of the church (17:21). Finally, by raising us from the dead, He will achieve Jesus' purpose for us: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (17:24).

The very name of the Spirit—"Holy Spirit"—proves His Deity (14:26). Only God is thus essentially holy.

How necessary, regarding His work, that the Spirit be God!

As God, He is able to sanctify sinners, to the end that their everlasting future may be dwelling with Jesus Christ in the house of His Father. Our dwelling in the house of Jesus' Father is both the beginning and the conclusion of Jesus' instruction concerning the Spirit in John 14-17 (14:1-4; 17:24). Dwelling with the holy God requires that we be sanctified. Only God the Holy Spirit can cleanse us from the defilement of sin. We, who are accustomed to do evil, can no more effect in ourselves the doing of good than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots (Jer. 13:23). "O heart of mine, be not troubled by the clinging, seemingly ineradicable, dirty, powerful sinfulness of nature! The sanctifying Spirit is God!"

As God, the Spirit is able to preserve the church. This especially was the fear of the disciples at Jesus' leaving of them, and the reason for Jesus' assuring word promising the Spirit, in John 14-17. The church is left in the world. The wicked world is hostile to the church. It hates the church, because it hates Jesus. It persecutes the church. In the form of the false church, the world attempts to deceive the true church by the lie. "The world hateth you"; "they

will also persecute you”; “they shall put you out of the synagogues” (15:19-20; 16:2).

And the church thus left in the hostile world, without the bodily presence of her head, is small, weak in herself and sinful besides.

I can all too readily identify with the disciples’ fear on behalf of the church.

Nevertheless, let not our hearts be troubled, or afraid, on behalf of the church. The church will survive. The church will flourish spiritually. The church will withstand the pressure of persecution. The church will continue to believe and confess the truth despite the allurements of false doctrine. The church will steadfastly testify of Jesus Christ. The Spirit who indwells the church is God!

O, let us, as Constantinople exhorted, worship and glorify the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, for His salvation of us and for His preservation of the church!

Having said that the Spirit is a person and having said that the Spirit is God, we have not yet said all that we can and must say about the person—the identity—of the Spirit.

The Proceeding Spirit

In an exceedingly important teaching about the “Comforter,” the Spirit whom He would send on Pentecost, Jesus said that the Spirit “proceedeth from the Father” (John 15:26). This describes the relation of the Spirit and the Father, the Third Person and the First Person of the being of God, eternally in the Godhead. The proceeding of the Spirit is an eternally perfect and eternally on-going activity in God. The Spirit’s proceeding is the eternal origin of the Third Person, as the begetting of the Son is the eternal origin of the Second Person.

It is this proceeding of the Spirit that is the personal property of the Third Person, constituting Him a distinct person in God, with His own personality, different from the Father and from the Son.

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The Spirit is a unique person. Although He shares the same being with the Father and the Son and thus is one with them, He is not the same as the Father and the Son personally.

The Reformed confessions emphasize the personal differences among the three persons of the Trinity. “[The] three persons [are] really, truly, and eternally distinct, according to their incommunicable properties.”¹⁰

That, and that alone, which makes the three persons different are their personal properties:

How many persons are there in the Godhead?

There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; *although distinguished by their personal properties.*¹¹

How must we think of this proceeding of the Spirit, especially so that our conception of it is not the same as our conception of the begetting of the Son?

Scripture must form our right thinking about the procession of the Spirit and it does so by the name of the Holy Spirit. His name is Spirit. The meaning of this name both in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Greek of the New Testament is “Breath.”¹² The Spirit is the divine Breath and He is the personal Breath, but the Bible wants us to think of the proceeding of the Spirit as similar to our own breathing out of a breath of air. Thus does the Spirit eternally proceed from the Father, as my breath goes out from me when I breathe. In fact, the Greek word for the

¹⁰ *Belgic Confession* 8.

¹¹ *Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. & A. 9*, in *The Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Publick Worship, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1969), p. 52.

¹² The Hebrew is *ruach*, for example, in Genesis 1:2 and Ezekiel 37:14; the Greek is *pneuma*, for example, in John 14:26 and John 20:22.

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Spirit, the word used, for example, in John 15:26, is *pneuma*, from which comes our English words “pneumatic” and “pneumonia,” which refer to air and breathing.

Sometimes, the Bible describes the Spirit as a wind, for example, John 3:8, concerning the regenerating Spirit, and Acts 2:1ff., of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, but we must always understand this wind as the unique, personal, almighty wind that is the Breath of God.

“Ghost,” of course, means the same as Spirit, that is, “Breath.”

When we understand the Spirit’s personal property of proceeding as His being the Breath of God, many important passages of Scripture take on a new meaning. Genesis 1:2 teaches that the Spirit of God moved over the created chaotic mass as the Breath of God who will order the creation, so that it becomes the cosmos of Genesis 1:31. The Breath God breathed into Adam’s nostrils, according to Genesis 2:7, was the life-giving Spirit. The wind of Ezekiel 37 that made the dry bones live was the Spirit as the regenerating Breath of God. Several times the Authorized Version rightly translates the Hebrew word meaning “Spirit” as “breath,” for example, verse 5: “Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you.” Because the reference is to the Spirit, it ought to have capitalized the word. John 20:22 is a marvellous, vivid preview of Pentecost: Jesus breathed on the disciples, saying, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” that is, the Holy Breath of God. On the translation of the Authorized Version, II Timothy 3:16 describes the origin of Scripture as “given by inspiration.” The original Greek is “God-breathed”: “all Scripture [is] God-breathed.” Thus the Bible is described as the product—the Word—not of the human writers, but of God the Holy Spirit. As we breathe out our words, God breathed out His Word, the Scriptures.

We may draw some implications from the identity of the person of the Spirit as the Breath of God, eternally proceeding from the Father.

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First, He is the Breath of life both in creation and in salvation, the life-giving Breath of God. He is the divine source of all physical life in nature, whether plant, animal, or human. “Thy Spirit, O Lord, makes life to abound,” we sing, in a version of Psalm 104.¹³

Especially is the Spirit the source and worker of the spiritual life of salvation in Jesus Christ. On Pentecost Sunday, as He foreshadowed by His symbolic act recorded in John 20:22, Jesus breathed the Breath of God upon the one hundred twenty believers and created the New Testament, mature form of the church. Whenever it was for a believer, whether in infancy as the elect child of believers in the covenant or as an adult on the mission field, every believer was born again by God’s breathing His Breath into him or her. And every believer continues to live and believe, because God never stops breathing His Breath, that is, the Spirit, in him or her. On the great day of the resurrection, Jesus Christ will breathe the Spirit on our dust and we will arise from our grave in our re-created body.

Second, the Spirit is almighty Breath or Wind. He is the Breath of Almighty God. The tornadoes common in the mid-western United States, before which nothing can stand, are an earthly indication of the mighty power, indeed, the irresistibility, of the Spirit as the Breath or Wind of God. Irresistibly, the Spirit ordered all the vast universe. Irresistibly, the Spirit gathers, preserves and perfects the church. Irresistibly, the Spirit saves each elect sinner. Irresistibly, the Spirit performed the greatest wonder, the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. “The power of the Highest,” who is the “Holy Ghost,” overshadowed Mary (Luke 1:35). Therefore, “with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

Third, as the Breath of God the Spirit can penetrate within the church and within each believer—into our deepest, inmost recesses—thus to dwell in us and save us. This is why it was expedi-

¹³ Psalter No. 287, stanza 1, in *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 249. The Psalter continues, “The earth is renewed, and fruitful the ground.”

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ent for Jesus to leave and for the Spirit to come, as Jesus Himself assured the sad and fearful disciples in John 16:7: “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” We need the presence and fellowship of Jesus within us, not next to us on the couch, in the pew or at the head of the table in the consistory room. And only the Spirit, as the (personal) Breath of Jesus, can dwell in us.

Fourth, there is something forever mysterious about the Spirit and His work—His moving, His coming and going—whether in creation, in the church or in the individual Christian. Christ alluded to this aspect of the Spirit’s operations when, comparing the Spirit’s regenerating work to the blowing of the wind, He said, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). There is no doubt about the fact of His saving presence and operations. Like the wind, He leaves conclusive evidence. In the case of the Spirit, the evidence is spiritual life, belief of Scripture, vision of the kingdom of God, faith in Christ, love for God, sorrow over sin and holiness of life.

Also, as one can hear the unmistakable sound of the wind, one can hear the sound of the Spirit for He moves by the preached Word of God, the Word that has Christ Jesus crucified and risen as its content.

Nevertheless, the Spirit’s ways are deep, wonderful and past finding out, whether they be the generation of a child in the womb of its mother or the regeneration of that child in its heart. We marvel and worship, when we cannot comprehend.

“And the Son”

The Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, also proceeds from the Son. The phrase, “and the Son,” which is found in the received text of the *Nicene Creed* of the Protestant churches (“who pro-

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ceedeth from the Father *and the Son*”), was not included in the original creed of A.D. 325. Neither was it added by Constantinople in A.D. 381. The phrase was added to the *Creed of Nicea/Constantinople* in A.D. 589 by the church of the West, although Augustine had taught the procession of the Spirit from the Son much earlier.

This addition to the *Nicene Creed* by the church of the West was, and still is, controversial. It was the doctrinal cause of the schism in the church in A.D. 1054 that divided the church of the West from the church of the East (the Eastern Orthodox Church). The doctrine of the procession of the Spirit from the Son divides the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran and Reformed churches confess the addition to the *Nicene Creed*. Because the words, “and the Son,” are in Latin one word, *filioque*, the controversy over the procession of the Spirit from the Son is known as the “*filioque* controversy.”

The truth expressed by the Latin word, *filioque*, is that, in the being of God, the Spirit does not proceed from the Father only, but also from the Son. It is not only the First Person who breathes forth the Third Person, but also the Second Person, the eternal Son. Nevertheless, these are not two disparate acts of breathing. Rather, they are one eternally perfect and ongoing activity. Father and Son breathe forth the Spirit simultaneously, in one, two-fold activity of breathing, although in the order of the Trinity the act of the Father is first and the act of the Son is second. In this one, two-fold breathing, the Spirit Himself actively proceeds from the Father and the Son.

As it is a mistake to conceive the breathing forth of the Spirit by the Father and the Son as two different, separate acts of divine breathing (which would result in two different Spirits, one of the Father and the other of the Son), it is also a mistake to conceive the breathing forth of the Spirit by the Father and the Son as simply the eternal origin of the Spirit. It is this, of course, as the begetting of the Son by the Father is the eternal origin of the

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Second Person. But the breathing forth of the Spirit by the Father and the Son is intensely relational: The Father breathes forth the Spirit to the Son, and the Son breathes forth the Spirit to the Father. And in this one, two-fold breathing, the Spirit Himself actively proceeds, in one, two-fold, eternally perfect and ongoing activity, from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has always objected to the doctrine of the *filioque* on the ground that it lacks biblical basis. That church notes that John 15:26 states that the Spirit proceeds from the Father: “which proceedeth from the Father.” However, the text also says that Jesus sends the Comforter, who is the Spirit. Although this sending certainly refers to the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost, Jesus cannot send the Spirit on Pentecost unless, as the eternal Son, He “sends,” or breathes forth, the Spirit eternally in the being of God. The theological truth under-girding this affirmation is that the fundamental activities of the persons of the Godhead in salvation reveal, and are based on, the activities of these persons in the being of God. For instance, the begetting of Jesus as a human in the womb of the virgin reveals and is based on the eternal begetting of the Son in the Godhead. Likewise, the Spirit proceeded from Jesus on Pentecost Sunday because He eternally proceeds from the Son in the being of God.

Only this accounts for the fact that the Bible calls the Spirit the “Spirit of Christ,” in the immediate context of calling Him the “Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:9), and the “Spirit of his [i.e., God’s] Son” (Gal. 4:6), where the person of the eternal Son is in view (v. 4: “God sent forth his Son”).

Conclusive, explicit biblical proof that the Spirit proceeds also from the Son is Jesus’ own act and words in John 20:22: “He [i.e., Jesus] breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” The procession of the Spirit, the Breath of God, as the name Spirit reveals, is His being breathed forth. And it is Jesus, the eternal Son of God in human flesh, who breathes forth

the Spirit, as He Himself revealed by this symbolic act with its explanatory word. The man Jesus might not, and could not, have performed this otherwise daring, indeed, blasphemous, act, unless He is the eternal Son, who eternally breathes forth the Holy Spirit as His very own Breath.

The Significance of the *Filioque*

But is this controversial doctrine of the Spirit's procession also from the Son of any real significance for the church's knowledge of God and for the life of believers and their children?

Indeed, it is, and, first, for the church's knowledge of the very life of the Triune God, which must be the pattern for the spiritual life of the church and her members. Proceeding from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father, the Spirit is the living, personal fellowship of God. God is a living God, not merely an existing God, by virtue of the communion in love among the three persons. This communion in love is the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. The Father breathes forth the Spirit to the Son as His personal love, and the Son breathes forth the Spirit to the Father as His reciprocal, personal love. In the breathing forth of the Spirit to the Son, the Father gives Himself, as personal gift, to the Son, and the Son, breathing forth the Spirit to the Father, gives Himself, as personal gift, to the Father. By the Spirit, the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, as Jesus teaches in John 17:21: "as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee"—the profound, intimate, delightful, incomprehensible (though understandable) communion of the Trinity of God.

This life of God Himself is the original spiritual life, and this life God shares with His elect church, and every member of the elect church personally, by making His covenant with the church and its members in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. The covenant is essentially communion with God, which is eternal life, the highest good and bliss.

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The same apostle John who wrote of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and being breathed forth by Jesus the Son, in his gospel, tells us in his epistle that the purpose of the revelation of Jesus Christ is “that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (I John 1:3). This fellowship we have by the Spirit. Indeed, the Spirit is our union and communion with God.¹⁴

A second reason why the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit from the Son is of greatest importance has to do with the work of the Spirit in the church and in each elect child of God by which the Spirit establishes, maintains and perfects the covenant and bestows the benefits of the covenant. As the Spirit who proceeds from the Son, the Spirit comes to the church and to each of her members on behalf of the Son, to give the church what the Son has obtained for her by His lifelong obedience and atoning death, to make known the Son and to glorify the Son. This is the teaching of John 14-17: “He [i.e., the Spirit of truth] shall testify of me [i.e., Jesus]” (15:26). The Spirit does not operate apart from Jesus Christ; He has no independent mission or purpose; He does not draw attention to Himself, in order to glorify Himself.

Since the Son is the Word of God, according to John 1:1ff., the Spirit accomplishes His saving work with and by the Word of God: Scripture, the preaching of Scripture, sound doctrine, the confessions of the church.

Thus are exposed both the religion of Eastern Orthodoxy and the Charismatic movement. Both cut the Spirit loose from the Son as the Word of God; both proclaim a saving work of the Spirit apart from the preaching of sound doctrine, received by faith alone; and both make the Spirit the centre of attention, rather than Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

¹⁴ For a more thorough account of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead as the fellowship of the Father and the Son and the implications for the church and her members, indeed, for all creation, see my *Trinity and Covenant: God as Holy Family* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006).

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The unmistakable evidence of a Spirit-filled church, therefore, is not that a church in all kinds of ways cries, “The Spirit, the Spirit.” Rather, the evidence is that a church preaches Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Similarly, the mark of the Spirit-filled Christian is not that one ostentatiously exhibits extraordinary powers of the Spirit. Rather, he or she knows, trusts in, confesses and obeys Jesus Christ.

“He shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness [of me]”
(John 15:26-27)!

Chapter 2

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Prof. Herman Hanko

Scripture: Acts 2

Introduction

The Holy Spirit of Christ was poured out on the church on Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's resurrection from the dead and ten days after our Lord ascended into heaven. It was an event of utmost importance to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was important because it was the transition from the old dispensation to the new, from the dispensation of types and shadows to the dispensation of the reality. As such, it was the completion of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was pictured in the Old Testament in all the types and shadows of the law. But God's promise, made to the fathers, was fulfilled when Christ suffered, died on the cross, arose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Pentecost is the climax of all this work. Christ sent His Spirit in order that all that He had done for His church might now, through the Spirit, be given to His church.

Further, the outpouring of the Spirit was the establishment of the kingdom of heaven. Prior to Pentecost, the kingdom had been present only in picture form. It was, for example, pictured in the kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon. But that kingdom was only a picture of the coming kingdom, established in the work of Jesus Christ, including the outpouring of the Spirit.

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Hence, as Peter makes plain in his sermon on the first Pentecost, it was the beginning of the end of the world when the kingdom will be perfect. The kingdom was established in seed form in the work of the Spirit in the one hundred and twenty disciples in Jerusalem. But from that seed the kingdom grows into a mighty kingdom, not in this world, but in heaven itself and will reach its full perfection when our Lord comes again.

The outpouring of the Spirit made a profound difference in the lives of the people of God. We need think only of the anxious query of the disciples on the Mount of Olives when Jesus was ready to ascend into heaven: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). They were still thinking of an earthly kingdom, a sort of restoration of the kingdom of David and Solomon. But listen to Peter’s Pentecostal sermon only ten days later. He suddenly, by the work of the Spirit, understood all Jesus work and understood it to be the fulfilment of all the Old Testament Scriptures in the great heavenly work of the ascended Lord. The difference was that the Spirit made all God’s people prophets, priests and kings.

It is, therefore, a great grief that modern interpreters of Scripture distort this marvellous work so completely. The proponents of revivalism point to Pentecost as the first great new dispensation revival, when, in fact, it was nothing of the kind and bore no resemblance to revivals at all.

The Pentecostals, having no conception of the work of the Spirit in the church, define the signs that accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit as on-going signs in those who receive the second blessing.

The proponents of the heresy of the Federal Vision do not really know what to make of Pentecost. Doug Wilson, for example, speaks of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit as the time when all the Jews were born again.¹

¹ John Robbins and Sean Gerety, *Not Reformed At All: Medievalism in “Reformed” Churches* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2004), p. 70.

Against all these heresies, the church has cherished the great work of God performed through Christ on Pentecost.

The Event of Pentecost

The history of Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2. Christ poured out His Spirit on the church on the first day of the week, which we call Sunday or the Lord's Day. The Feast of Pentecost was the feast of thanksgiving for the completed harvest on Israel's farms. It was Christ's work fifty days after His resurrection from the dead. He poured out His Spirit, therefore, as the ascended Christ who had completed His work.

Christ had died on the cross to make full payment for the sins of the church. He had risen from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit for our justification and as God's seal on Christ's perfect work. He had ascended to heaven as the Head of the church. His glorification was His universal rule at the right hand of God, where He is given all authority in heaven and on earth. It was the completion and climax of His work, for He gave Himself and all He had done for the church to the church. He did this through the Spirit who now dwells in the church.

The Spirit was poured out not only on the church on earth, but also on the church in heaven, on the souls of just men made perfect who had lived in heaven only by the power of God's promise of Christ. Thus the whole church was, by the Spirit, joined to Christ in living union with Him, for He is the Head and the church is His body.

As far as the history is concerned, one hundred and twenty believers were, at the command of Christ Himself, waiting in Jerusalem in an upper room for the Spirit. It was probably in the house of John Mark where Jesus had celebrated the last supper with His disciples.

The outpouring of the Spirit was accompanied by three signs. The first was the sound as of a rushing and mighty wind. It was also

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the means by which God brought the inhabitants of Jerusalem, crowded because of the feast day, to the street outside the upper room. The second sign was the sign of tongues of fire on the heads of the one hundred and twenty disciples. The third sign was the God-given ability, bestowed on the one hundred and twenty disciples, to speak in different languages. As the crowd assembled in the streets, the disciples went about talking to the people from all parts of the Roman Empire in their own dialects and languages. It was not necessary that the disciples were given this power, for all or almost all the people assembled were Jews or proselytes who understood the Aramaic spoken in that day in Canaan. But it was a sign. If one of the disciples confronted a citizen of Phrygia, he spoke the Phrygian dialect. If the person was from Mesopotamia, the language spoken there was used by the disciples to speak to a Mesopotamian. And the content of what they spoke was “the wonderful works of God.” It was a great miracle.

The signs themselves explained the meaning and significance of the outpouring of the Spirit.

As Jesus Himself had told Nicodemus, the wind was a sign of the work of the Spirit, for the Spirit is irresistible in His power and yet mysterious in His operations—just as the wind (John 3:8). One need only see the devastation left behind of a tornado or cyclone to marvel at the power of the wind.

Fire speaks of purifying through burning away dross, as Peter points out in I Peter 1:7. The sign pointed to the sanctifying power of the Spirit who destroys the sin in us to make us pure and holy as Christ is. So also does Peter speak of this old world under the curse purified when it is burned with fire, that out of its destruction may be created the new heavens and the new earth (II Peter 3:12-13). Malachi speaks of the purifying of the sons of Levi through fire (Mal. 3:2-3).

The speaking in other tongues also indicated the work of the Spirit. The meaning was clear. The work of the Spirit of Christ

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is the work of the gathering of the church for which Christ died. Christ died and rose again that His church might be saved. That great work was done by Christ through His Spirit. But the foreign tongues in which the disciples spoke were a sign of the work of the Spirit in saving a *catholic* church, that is, a church saved from every nation under heaven.

In the old dispensation God saved only Jews. There were, of course, countless Gentiles saved as well, but these Gentiles were saved only by becoming Jews, first through the rite of circumcision and then by being incorporated into the nation of Israel where they lost their national identity as Moabites, Hittites, Amorites and all the rest. Salvation was limited to the Jews, for the Jewish nation was a type, a picture, of the New Testament church. But now, in the new dispensation, as the Spirit does His work, a catholic church is saved. That is, Gentiles are saved as Gentiles. They are saved in such a way that God preserves their racial, national and personal characteristics. God saves the human race; not the natural human race that fell in Adam, but the true human race according to His eternal decree of election. God's purpose never was to save all mankind head for head. It was His purpose from eternity to save His elect. That elect body, for whom Christ died, is the true church composed of Jews and Gentiles. It is the human race gathered from every nation, tribe and tongue that, with all its vast diversity of language, race, national characteristics, etc., is a unity in Christ, all of which reveals the riches of God's grace in all its power and beauty.

The Difference the Spirit Makes in the Church

Pentecost must never be interpreted as a mere revival, which it was not. Such an interpretation of Pentecost is a degradation of God's mighty work through Christ. It is to reduce pure gold to fool's gold. It is far different from such a silly interpretation of this mighty event.

For the first time in the history of the world, the Spirit of Christ was given to the church. He was not present until Christ's ascen-

sion. Jesus Himself makes this unmistakably clear in John 7:37-39: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"² The meaning of the Lord's words is not, however, that no Holy Spirit existed in the Old Testament, for we read of the work of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the world; in the prophets, priests and kings; and in the salvation of the Old Testament church. But the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ did not exist in the old dispensation, because, as John says, "Jesus was not yet glorified."

Nevertheless, just as Christ was revealed in the Old Testament as the Angel of Jehovah, so also the Old Testament was characterized by a certain manifestation of Christ's Spirit. Those who were anointed with oil to prophesy of the coming of Christ, to offer sacrifices that were pictures of Christ and to rule in a kingdom that was a type of the kingdom of heaven were equipped with the Spirit of Christ to do their work. Without that Spirit of Christ, they could not work in the Old Testament dispensation of shadows.

Further, the Spirit saved the saints in the old dispensation as well as in the new. The Spirit regenerated, called, gave faith, justified, sanctified and preserved the saints. In that respect there were no differences between the old and the new dispensations.

But a profound difference was that all the work of the Spirit was limited to the use of types and shadows.

Two truths are bound up in this statement. First of all, the Holy Spirit always and under all circumstances binds Himself to the

² The AV includes in the text the word "given," so that the text reads: "for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*." But the word "given" is in italics, which indicates that it was added by the translators. The text reads literally, "for the Holy Ghost was not yet."

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Word of God.³ Except in the unusual circumstances of elect children who die in infancy and handicapped children who have no understanding, the Spirit chains Himself to God's Word so tightly that He does not operate apart from it in any way. He works always through the means of God's Word.

God's Word came to the saints in the old dispensation in the form of a picture book. To appreciate what this means, let me use an illustration. I have stood on Tor Head on the Antrim Coast. It is a spectacular view enhanced by the wind blowing in one's face, the sun shining warmly on one's head and the crashing of the waves echoing in one's ears. I have pictures of that spot, which I have shown to people in the United States. They see the pictures and marvel at the beauty of them. But I am forced to tell them that these are only pictures and can give you only an incomplete idea of what one sees from Tor Head. They themselves realize this, because they say, "I hope I can go there some day." I assure them that no picture can do justice to being there and feeling the wind and the warm sun and hearing the crashing of the waves. The picture is great, but is a far cry from standing there.

So it was in the Old Testament. The people of God saw the sacrifices, but they were pictures only. As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it,

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins (Heb. 10:1-2).

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob saw the earthly Canaan, but they "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

³ For more on this, see chapter 6, "The Holy Spirit and the Church."

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To these pictures the Holy Spirit was bound in His work. I speak as a man: the Holy Spirit could not work the reality of salvation in the hearts of God's people because all He had to use was a picture book. A parent cannot explain the significance of the fall of Jericho to a child who can only look at some pictures of that event. I cannot explain to anyone the mysterious and wonderful work of salvation by showing some pictures of it—whatever those pictures may be of such a spiritual work.

The Scriptures sum up the drastic and wonderful change that the Spirit made when they tell us that, while the offices of prophet, priest and king were limited to a few individuals in the Old Testament, they are now given to every saint on Pentecost. It was the fulfilment of Moses' desire: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets" (Num. 11:29). Peter refers to this wonder in his sermon on Pentecost when he tells the throng assembled in the street that the prophecy of Joel is fulfilled:

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:17-18).

We must understand the significance of this.

We must not understand Joel's prophecy as meaning that today also we shall see revelatory visions and dream revelatory dreams. Joel was speaking in the Old Testament and was speaking of the way God revealed Himself in those times to the prophets; but now God reveals Himself through Jesus Christ and dreams and visions are not necessary any more.

Further, the Scriptures never use the word "prophesy" as simply meaning "predict the future." The meaning is rather, "speak the Word of God." In the Old Testament that meant speak the Word of God about past events and their meaning, of present events and their spiritual significance, and of future events and why God

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does what He does. No one today is able to predict the future—beyond what the Scriptures themselves tell us, for prophesying is speaking the Word of God as it is contained in the Scriptures.

To prophesy is the gift given to all God's people. Peter emphasizes that. Men shall prophesy, but also women; adults shall prophesy, but also children. All who have the Spirit of Christ are able to understand the Word of God and speak it.

This truth was one of the great gifts of God to the church through the work of Martin Luther. Rome had done everything in its power, including murder, to keep the Word of God from the people, because, in Rome's conceited judgment, only the clergy could understand God's Word. Peter says the opposite and with that agree the rest of the Scriptures.⁴

In every area of the Christian life, we are called to function as prophets, made such by the Holy Spirit. Whether we are in our homes, in the church, at our places of work or in society, we are called to speak the Word of God, for Christ has anointed us with the Spirit He has sent on the church. Such is God's work that it has brought about a radical and fundamental change in the lives of the people of God. Men, women and children are able to know and understand the Scriptures. The world speaks of the equality of men and women and uses it to destroy the creation ordinance of marriage that the man is the head of the woman. But husband and wife are indeed equal, each in their own place, in possessing Christ's Spirit. The woman can understand and speak the Word of God as well as the man. Women can and must teach their

⁴ Hebrews 8:10-11: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." I John 2:27: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

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children at home. Women can and must engage in studying the Word of God with their fellow saints and must speak of what they have believed. They have the right and the spiritual ability to go to an erring saint and bring the Word—even if that erring saint is a minister of the gospel. Just as the disciples on Pentecost had a sudden and wonderful understanding of God’s Word, so do also all in the church who have received the Spirit.

The office of prophet in the old dispensation was shared by prophets, priests and kings. It is the fundamental office, because every one holding an office is bound to and has the right to speak the Word of God. But that prophetic office manifested itself in three different offices: the office of prophet alone; the office of priest, and the office of king.

In the old dispensation, the people of God could come to God only through the priesthood. To worship God, to seek at God’s altar the forgiveness of sins, to pray to God—all this required the priesthood. To seek forgiveness of sins, the people had to come leading a cow by the halter. To pray individually was very difficult and we have only a few examples of it, and then usually of office-bearers. To call on God as “Our Father” was impossible. But now Christ in His exalted state is our mediator and intercessor who prays for us in heaven and who opens the way for us into the inner sanctuary. And that we may go that way to God, He gives us His Spirit so that we are all priests. We are able to offer our sacrifices of praise daily. We can pray when our hands are in the dish-water doing dishes or when we are driving down the road. We can pray in our inner closets and with our fellow saints. We can pray with the family in our devotions. And, wonder of wonders, we are able to call on God as “Our Father.” Believing children, old men, grey-haired women, young people—they are all priests. There is no need of a priest in his coop to whom we must confess our sins. That is nonsense.

God’s people are priests and the women in God’s church are priestesses.

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But we are also kings.

In the old dispensation, the people of God needed a king to tell them what to do and how to apply God's Word to their lives. That went fairly well when the king served God, as David and Solomon or Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. These were themselves God-fearing kings and they could and did instruct the people. But it was quite different when a wicked king sat on the throne. The people of God could do little about it. They had to endure it and try to keep themselves, not always successfully, from the wicked instruction of the king. It was like having to go to church when the minister and most of the people are outright heretics. We can, of course, join ourselves to the true church and leave the false; but they could not do it, for the only church that existed and would exist was the nation of Israel.

But it is that way no longer. We have Christ, our prophet and king. He not only reveals to us His will for us, but He also rules in our hearts so that we become His willing and joyful slaves. We desire to do His will. We know it and can do it. We understand the Word of God and are able to apply that Word to all our life. To apply the Word to our life is the great gift of wisdom and "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

The principle of our royal kingship is also the principle of Christian liberty. Christ gives to each of us the freedom to decide for ourselves, in the circumstances in which God has placed us, to determine how the Word of God applies to us particularly in the circumstances of life in which God has placed us. And because He has endowed us with consciences, we must be sure that our consciences are enlightened by the Word of God and that we never do anything contrary to our consciences.

Men are kings, but remember, women are queens, for they too have the Spirit of the exalted Christ.

The Establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom of heaven was not established in the old dispensation.

If we may picture the kingdom of heaven as a great walled city with massive gates, although its character is heavenly, the people of God could not enter that kingdom during the sobering years of the dispensation of types and shadows. They knew of it and knew it was the fulfilment of God's promise, but they could see it only "afar off" (Heb. 11:13). As the weary years of the old dispensation passed, they came nearer to that city, but the gates remained closed.

One blessing God did give them was the pictures of the kingdom that God painted on the massive door of the kingdom. These were beautiful pictures in their own way, and the nearer they came to the door the more clearly they could see the pictures. But the gates remained closed.

Christ came to open the doors of the kingdom. Its true spiritual characteristics then became manifested. It was a true spiritual kingdom, a theocracy in which church and kingdom are truly one, but a kingdom in which Christ, who is the head of the church, is also the king. It has no earthly characteristics about it, although when it is fully realized it will include the earthly creation as well as the heavenly. But both shall be made new and both united into one, glorious, spiritual realm. Its chief characteristic is the righteousness of God revealed in Christ and imputed by faith to all the elect.

This kingdom was established on Pentecost, principally by the outpouring of the Spirit. It can be compared with an invasion of a foreign land. Christ has "invaded" this corrupt and sin-cursed world by the power of His Spirit that He poured out. He sets up His headquarters, as it were, in this land. He begins, by His Spirit, to conquer the people, partly by defeating them and partly by making them citizens of His kingdom. Gradually, moving from

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victory to victory, He goes conquering and to conquer through the Spirit so that those whom He enlists in His cause become representatives of His kingdom in this foreign land. When the last of the citizens of His kingdom is gathered and established as a soldier marching under the banner of the cross, the king Himself comes, visibly and in power. His coming is the last smashing defeat of the enemy, the utter destruction of this realm now under Satan's control, the full salvation of all His citizens and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Christ, by His Spirit, rules supreme from Pentecost on. He rules over all the wicked—although they remain His enemies. He rules over His people by the power of His saving grace so that He sets up His throne within their hearts and makes them His subjects. Even in this world they serve Him joyfully and obediently. Hence, the outcome is never uncertain and the victory is never in doubt. The wicked in all their war against Christ are merely His pawns on the chessboard of history so that they can do nothing apart from His will. Every move they make helps the cause of Christ.

This is the reason why Peter can quote Joel further when, in fact, Joel is talking about the end of the world:

And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come (Acts 2:19-20).

In the certainty of victory, Peter speaks of Pentecost as if it were the end of the world—which indeed it is in principle.

We are called to live as citizens of the kingdom of Christ. We are empowered to that by the Spirit within us. We are called to do that in this present world: to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven in our homes, our churches, our jobs, our daily walk. We are called

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to live in all the institutions of society antithetically, condemning evil and standing for the cause of Christ.

We have the manual for warfare in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit inspired them, with the exact purpose of preparing for us a handbook when the time comes to make us citizens of that kingdom. Through that inspired soldier's manual, the Spirit tells us all the counsel of God, all that lies in the future, all that Christ has done for us and all the directions to fight in the ranks of Christ as soldiers of the cross. The Spirit gives us the courage to be faithful, the strength to fight daily, the wisdom to know how to use the weapons of our warfare and the absolute assurance of victory. By that Spirit, Christ Himself rules over us and sways the sceptre of His rule over all our life.

When the battle is over and the victory is won, we shall receive the crown of life to wear forever.

Chapter 3

The Holy Spirit and the Covenant of Grace



Prof. David J. Engelsma

Scripture: II Corinthians 3

Introduction

The great work of the Holy Spirit is to bring salvation with all its several benefits to the elect people of God. This is evident from the Old Testament feast that was fulfilled by the New Testament coming of the Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. That Old Testament feast was Israel's celebration and consecration to God of the first-fruits of the harvest that was now ready for Israel's life and enjoyment (Lev. 23:15ff.). As the spiritual reality of that Old Testament feast, the New Testament Pentecost was the Spirit's bringing to the church the first-fruits of Christ's salvation, now ready for the spiritual life and enjoyment of elect believers and their children. Romans 8:23 assures every believer and every true, spiritual child of believers that they have the "firstfruits of the Spirit."

The great work of the Spirit is not, and never was, the bestowal of extraordinary gifts, including tongues and the performance of signs and wonders, as is the teaching of the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement. According to this novel movement, salvation from sin, which is signified by water baptism, is an important work of the Spirit. The baptism with the Spirit, however, which the movement understands as a distinct, special work of the Spirit bestowing the gift of tongues, as well as other extraor-

dinary gifts of the Spirit, is a second, better, greater work of the Spirit.

There was a work of the Spirit bestowing extraordinary gifts in the apostolic age, as I Corinthians 12 and 14 show. But this work of the Spirit did not even in the apostolic age have the importance attributed to it by the modern Charismatic movement. Not all believers had, or were expected to have, the gift of tongues (I Cor. 12:30). In contrast to the emphasis on the exercise of extraordinary gifts by some in Corinth, an emphasis renewed and even exaggerated by the modern Charismatic movement, the apostle commends rather the ordinary Christian life of “charity” towards fellow-saints for God’s sake—a central aspect of the Spirit’s saving work of sanctification (I Cor. 13). Not the work of bestowing extraordinary gifts but the work of bestowing salvation from sin was the greater work of the Spirit in those days.

Further, putting tongues and, by implication, the extraordinary gifts in their inferior place, the apostle urged the spiritual activity of prophesying, which was the speaking of the word of God to the church and her members in an intelligible way. Thus, the church was edified.

Besides all this, the Spirit’s work of bestowing extraordinary gifts on certain of the members of the church was not permanent. It was strictly limited to the age of the apostles. The purpose of that work, as of the extraordinary gifts themselves, was to validate the office and work of the apostles as ministers of the new covenant. So Paul describes the extraordinary gifts in II Corinthians 12:12: “The signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” With the passing of the office of the apostle, the work of the Spirit of bestowing extraordinary gifts was finished.

Because the bestowal of the extraordinary gifts was not the great work of the Spirit, the New Testament does not much concern itself with this temporary, secondary work. It is mentioned only in a very few places—Acts and three chapters in I Corinthians, and

hardly any other place besides. On the other hand, the spiritual salvation of all of God's people from sin by the Spirit of Christ is *the* message of the New Testament everywhere.

This great work of the Spirit is the subject of this chapter.

Covenant Salvation

Why then is the title of this chapter, "The Holy Spirit *and the Covenant of Grace*?"

The explanation is that the Spirit bestows on each elect child of God the blessings of salvation by establishing God's covenant with him or her. All the benefits of salvation from regeneration to the resurrection of the body in the day of Christ are comprehended in the covenant of grace. The Spirit's work of saving elect sinners is covenant-work.

This is how the Reformed faith views the entire work of salvation, specifically the saving work of the Spirit within the sinner consisting of calling, faith, justification, sanctification and glorification.

Doth God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

God doth not leave all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery, into which they fell by the breach of the first covenant, commonly called the Covenant of Works; but of his mere love and mercy delivereth his elect out of it, and bringeth them into an estate of salvation by the second covenant, commonly called the Covenant of Grace.¹

Viewing all of the saving work of the Spirit as the making of the covenant and regarding all the benefits of salvation as gifts

¹ *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 30, in *The Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Publick Worship, the Form of Presbyterial Church Government* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1969), p. 57.

of the covenant are solidly based on Scripture. In II Corinthians 3, the apostle describes his ministry, which is the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen (as chapter 4:4 makes explicit: “the glorious gospel of Christ”), as the ministry of the “new testament”: “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament” (3:6). The purpose of the office and preaching of the apostles was to establish “the new testament” with the elect church and people of God. The salvation bestowed by means of the apostolic labour was, and *is*, simply the realization and enjoyment of the new testament. But “testament” in II Corinthians 3 is to be understood, and should be translated, as “covenant.” The Greek word that the Authorized Version translates as “testament” in II Corinthians 3 is *diatheekē*, the word referring to God’s covenant and usually rightly translated as “covenant.” Rarely, the word should be translated as “testament,” in the sense of a testator’s last will and testament, as is the case in Hebrews 9:16, where the subject is the testamentary character of the covenant. In II Corinthians 3, as in the vast majority of other places in the New Testament where it occurs, the word means covenant.

The contrast in the chapter between the *new* testament, that is, covenant, and the *old* testament, that is, covenant, makes plain that the apostle is teaching that the work of the Spirit by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ is nothing less than the fulfilment of Jehovah’s promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

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

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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.

In Jeremiah 31, God promised salvation in the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, simply as the making of a new covenant. In II Corinthians 3, the apostle affirms that by the ministry of the apostles God was fulfilling that Old Testament promise. He also defends this new covenant with its salvation and glory against those who come to the church with a perverted ministry of the old covenant.

The making of the new covenant is the work of the Holy Spirit. That the making of the new covenant would be the work of the Spirit was implied by the promise of Jeremiah 31. Only the Spirit can penetrate our inward parts and our hearts. The apostle makes this explicit in II Corinthians 3. The congregation at Corinth, enjoying the covenant, has been “written ... with the Spirit of the living God” (v. 3). This is the covenant with the church. Also, II Corinthians 3 describes the saving work and experience of the new covenant as one’s being “changed into the same image ... by the Spirit of the Lord” (v. 18). This is the covenant with each believer personally.

The New Covenant

The new covenant, which is the main work of the Holy Spirit, is communion with the Triune God in Jesus Christ. It is a real, living, spiritual union with God, which each elect child of God knows and experiences as God’s friendship towards him or her, as his or her Father, and as his or her own friendship Godwards, as God’s very dear son or daughter. The new covenant is like a woman’s real, living, earthly union with her husband or a man’s union with his wife; like a child’s relationship with his or her parents or a parent’s relationship with his or her child; and like one’s real, living, close fellowship with a dear friend. All of these earthly relationships, of course, are actual biblical symbols of the covenant.

The new covenant is not a bargain or an agreement or a contract or a promise of God that depends upon the sinner's fulfilment of a stipulated demand, that is, condition.

John Calvin was right in the 1536 edition of his *Institutes* when he spoke of "Jesus Christ our Lord, who ... put on our flesh, to enter a covenant with us and to join us (far separated from God by our sins) closely to him."² "Join us closely to him" defines the covenant.

The new covenant is not merely the means to an end different from, higher than and better than the covenant, whether this end be conceived as salvation itself or as a second blessing of the Spirit that empowers for witness, enables for ministry and incites enthusiasm. Rather, the new covenant itself is the one, great work of the Spirit of Christ. It is itself the end or goal of the saving purpose of the Spirit. II Corinthians 3 makes this plain. Of this new covenant, the apostles were the ministers (v. 6). The saving work of the Spirit consists of establishing this covenant with the congregation (v. 3) and with each member of the church individually (v. 18).

That the covenant is communion with God is evident, both in II Corinthians 3 and in John 14-17, the important passage on the Holy Spirit referred to in chapter one of this book. In II Corinthians 3, the apostle teaches that the work of the Spirit by means of Paul and the other apostles is to establish the new covenant *in fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34*. What the new covenant would be, Jehovah God explained in Jeremiah 31:33: "and [I] will be their God, and they shall be my people." This is fellowship, a living bond of fellowship in love, between God and His people. The essence of the new covenant, therefore, is communion with God in Christ.

Although John 14-17 does not use the word "covenant," this

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), chapter I, D, 5, pp. 17-18.

grand passage on the Spirit describes the presence and work of the Spirit whom Christ would send on Pentecost as accomplishing the fellowship of the church and each member of the church with Christ and with God, His Father. The theme of the entire passage is the continuation of Jesus' fellowship with His disciples after He leaves them in His ascension. Our fellowship with Jesus and in Him with God is the all-important thing to our Saviour. With this, the passage begins: I go to prepare a place for you in my Father's house, where there are many dwelling-places; I will come again to receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also (14:2-3). With this, the passage concludes: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (17:24).

But the great concern of Jesus, and the outstanding promise, is that He and His Father will be with us, so that we will have close communion with Jesus and the Father, *in the time between His leaving in the ascension and the day when He returns to take us to Himself*. In the present time of our earthly life and of the history of the church, although Jesus is not with us in the body, we have continuing communion with Christ, indeed, more intimate, more delightful, saving fellowship with Jesus than the disciples had when Jesus was present with them bodily.

Jesus has come to the church and to each member on Pentecost in such a way that He is *in* us: "I will come to you ... [so that] I [am] in you" (14:18, 20).

The fellowship between Jesus and us is comparable to the relation between the vine and its branches (15:1ff.): "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (v. 5). The relation of the branch and the vine is such that the vine lives in the branch and the branch lives from the vine, sharing the life of the vine. This earthly reality, familiar to all, pictures our relation now to Jesus Christ and in Him to God Himself: Christ is *in* us, and we are *in* Him. Our relation to Him is a spiritual oneness: "Abide in me, and I in you" (v. 4).

Even though the word "covenant" is not used in John 15:1ff., the

passage refers to and describes the covenant of grace. By the figure of vine and branches, Jesus refers to that which Paul calls the “new covenant” in II Corinthians 3. There can be no question that the figure of the vine and its branches in John 15:1ff. refers to the covenant, for Jesus is deliberately applying to the New Testament church God’s description of His relation to Israel as that of a vine and its grape-bearing branches in Isaiah 5:1-7, and that relation was the (old) covenant.

Describing the new covenant by the figure of vine and branches, Jesus identifies the new covenant as the living communion of Himself and His disciples.

Sealing the teaching of John 14-17 that the essence of the new covenant is fellowship in love is Jesus’ remarkable word in John 15:15: “Henceforth I call you not servants ... but I have called you friends.” The essence and experience of covenant salvation are friendship.

By applying to the New Testament church Isaiah’s figurative description of the covenant of Jehovah God with Israel as the relation of a vine and its branches, Jesus intimates that the old covenant with Israel and the new covenant with the church are essentially one covenant. Paul’s comparison of the two covenants in II Corinthians 3 does not imply that they are two essentially different covenants with two different, separate peoples.

Comparison of the Covenants

In II Corinthians 3, the apostle compares the *new* covenant and the *old* covenant. He compares them in order to teach not only that the new covenant is better than the old but also that the new covenant is the real and lasting covenant, doing what the old covenant could not do, namely, save the people of God.

The old testament or covenant in II Corinthians 3 is the covenant with Israel, with specific reference to the dominant feature of that covenant, namely, the law. The apostle refers to the ten command-

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ments, which were the heart of the law of the old covenant, in various ways in the chapter: “tables of stone” (v. 3); the “letter” (v. 6); “written and engraven in stones” (v. 7).

Then there is the reference to, and application of, the striking history of Moses’ face shining with the reflected glory of God at the time God gave Moses the ten commandments on Sinai (vv. 7-18). The apostle recalls this history in verse 13: “And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished.” The history is recorded in Exodus 34:29-35. Moses was in the presence of God for forty days on Mt. Sinai. All the while, God was talking with Moses. By this instruction, God was making the old covenant with Moses and Israel (Ex. 34:10). The effect upon Moses of being in the presence of Jehovah God was that “the skin of his [i.e., Moses’] face shone” with the glory of God, the lawgiver (Ex. 34:29). This reflected glory of God in Moses’ face terrified Aaron and Israel. Moses, therefore, put a vail over his face after he had delivered the law to Israel by speaking to them all the commandments of God.

The apostle explains the shining of Moses’ face as the glory of the old covenant, the chief feature of which was the ten commandments, “the words of the covenant” (Ex. 34:28):

If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance ... (II Cor. 3:7).

The new testament or covenant in II Corinthians 3 is the covenant with the New Testament church, with specific reference to the dominant feature of this covenant, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen. This covenant is realized by Jesus Christ Himself in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 3). The apostles are the ministers of the new covenant by their preaching of the gospel: “able ministers of the new testament [i.e., covenant]” (v.

6). This covenant is written, “not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (v. 3).

The comparison of the two covenants in II Corinthians 3 emphasizes the important differences between them. The old covenant kills (v. 6). It was a “ministration of condemnation” and of “death” (vv. 9, 7). Its glory has passed away (v. 11).

The new covenant, in contrast, gives life (v. 6). It is a “ministration of righteousness” (v. 9). Its glory excels that of the old covenant and lasts forever (vv. 10-11).

How must this comparison be understood—this comparison between the covenant with Israel and the covenant with the church, between the law and the gospel?

Not as though the old covenant and the new covenant are two essentially different covenants and as though the new covenant replaced the old covenant! In this case, the old covenant was all law without any gospel or Spirit. All that the old covenant did was condemn and kill. Under the old covenant there was never any writing of the law of God on the fleshy tables of the heart of anyone. And, in this case, the new covenant is gospel without any law. It condemns no one.

Against this erroneous explanation of the comparison between old and new covenants in II Corinthians 3 stands the plain truth that the old covenant saved many Israelites, for example, David, the prophets and all the ordinary members of Israel who could sing the psalms from the heart. Many under the old covenant had the law written on their hearts, so that they could confess and live Psalm 119: “O how love I thy law!” (v. 97). There was salvation in the old covenant, the same salvation from sin that believers now enjoy in Jesus Christ. Of this salvation especially the sacrifices of the old covenant were the signs and efficacious means, inasmuch as they foreshadowed the cross of Christ.

The Spirit of the living God worked also in the old covenant, for salvation from sin and the writing of the law upon the heart

so that one loves God are always and only the work of the Holy Spirit.

Even though the dominant feature of the old covenant was law, that covenant was fundamentally a gracious covenant. There was gospel in the old covenant. The very preface to the ten commandments was gospel: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2). Indeed, the gospel was proclaimed on the occasion of the making of the old covenant with Israel on Mt. Sinai. Before God gave Moses the ten commandments, thus making the old covenant to which Paul refers in II Corinthians 3, God Himself proclaimed the gospel: “The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex. 34:6-7). This is the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ and of justification by faith alone.

The old covenant with Israel was essentially the same as the new covenant with the church, as Jeremiah 31:32-33 teaches when it describes both old and new as God’s fellowship with His people: “I was an husband unto them [i.e., Old Testament Israel] ... I ... will be their God, and they shall be my people [i.e., the New Testament church].” The old covenant was not a different covenant from the new covenant (though there were important differences), but a distinct, preliminary administration of the same covenant. The new covenant does not replace the old covenant but fulfils it.

The question remains: What of Paul’s comparison in II Corinthians 3, emphasizing the differences?

First, the comparison is between the outstanding features of both covenants, namely, law and gospel, *considered in themselves*. The law, that is, the demand, “Do this!” “Love God perfectly!” cannot justify sinners, cannot save sinners, cannot give life to sinners, cannot even make sinners obedient. The law, considered in itself, can only condemn and kill. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ

with its gracious, powerful promise can justify, save, give life and sanctify. Calvin explains this aspect of the comparison correctly. Commenting on II Corinthians 3:7, where the apostle calls the law of the old covenant the “ministration of death,” Calvin writes,

The law ... as it simply prescribes the rule of a good life, does not renew men’s hearts to the obedience of righteousness, and denounces everlasting death upon transgressors, can do nothing but *condemn* ... the office of the gospel is, to bring a remedy to those that were past hope. For as the law leaves man to himself, it condemns him, of necessity, to death; while the gospel, bringing him to Christ, opens the gate of life.³

Second, the comparison is between the law of the old covenant *as false teachers misused and misuse it, teaching law as the way of salvation*, and the pure gospel of grace as preached by the apostles. God never intended that the law of the old covenant be the means of salvation by the people’s obedience to it. The law never could give life (Gal. 3:21). God’s purpose with the law of the old covenant was that it be the people’s “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). When false teachers in the New Testament church, like old Israel with a veil upon their heart, present the law as the means of justification, salvation and life, the absolute contrast holds, “the letter [of the old covenant] killeth, but the spirit [of the new covenant] giveth life” (II Cor. 3:6).

Third, the comparison is between the old covenant *as false teachers resurrect it after the new covenant has fulfilled it* and the new covenant, which is now in force and brooks no rival or even supplement, including the old covenant with Israel. The old covenant “is done away” (v. 11).

In light of the comparison in II Corinthians 3 between the two

³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), vol. 2, p. 178.

covenants, there may be no attempt in the church to go back to or restore that old covenant. Premillennial dispensationalism makes this attempt by its teaching of the implementation of the entire economy of the old covenant, especially its law, in a restored nation of Israel. Also postmillennial Christian Reconstructionism makes the attempt to restore the old covenant by its teaching that the civil laws of the old covenant will be binding upon a future carnal kingdom of Christ on earth.

The contrast between law and gospel in II Corinthians 3 also forbids any teaching that corrupts gospel by law, that is, any teaching that makes a sinner's obedience to the law his righteousness with God and a work of saving himself. This teaching takes many forms today, as it did already in the apostolic age: obedience to the law earns salvation; obedience to the law is the sinner's righteousness with God in whole or in part; obedience to the law is a condition upon which God's salvation of the sinner depends. All such law-teaching in the nominally Christian church turns Spirit into letter, condemns, kills and makes the new covenant a ministration of death. All who thus teach the law as the means by which the sinner justifies and saves himself have a veil upon their heart as much as do the Jews who are blind to Jesus Christ as the end of the old covenant.

Only the new covenant saves and it saves as a covenant of grace, ministered by the gospel of grace.

Benefits of the New Covenant

The new covenant, which is union with Christ and in Him with the Triune God, is salvation, the highest good and eternal life. The new covenant is actually established with the elect child of God personally in what the church has called the "mystical union."⁴ The mystical union is the same spiritual reality and work

⁴ "Mystical union" is Calvin's explanation of Jesus' words in John 14:20, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you"—words describing the saving work of the Spirit in the elect: "[We] know what is the

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of salvation in a man or woman as that described in Question and Answer 20 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: “Are all men, then, saved by Christ, as they have perished by Adam? No; only such as by true faith are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits.” The mystical union or ingrafting into Christ is the actual salvation of the elect, redeemed, but in himself totally depraved, child of God: living, spiritual union with Christ, so that he receives Christ and all His benefits, as the branch receives the life of the vine. And this is what faith essentially is: union with Christ.

One experiences this union with Christ as knowledge of and trust in Christ as friend by the redemption of the cross. In Him, one knows God as his Father, being reconciled to God through the forgiveness of sins.

In this union with Christ, there come to the member of the covenant a number of distinct benefits of the covenant. They come in a definite order both regarding the divine giving and regarding the human experience. The benefits are regeneration or the new birth, by which one who was spiritually dead is renewed with the eternal life of the risen Christ; calling, which is the mighty address of the regenerated child of God in his consciousness by the Word of God, so that he is converted, repenting of his sins and turning to God in faith; faith as the activity of the regenerated, converted child of God, consisting, essentially, of the knowledge of Christ as the only saviour from sin and death and of a trust in Him for forgiveness and eternal life; justification, which is the verdict of Christ in one’s soul that he is righteous before God the judge by the imputation of the obedience of Christ; sanctification, which is the work of Christ (who is not only the saviour from the guilt of sin but also the saviour from sin’s power) cleansing the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, delivering the sinner from the ruling power of sin and making him holy, so that

sacred and mystical union between us and him, and again, between him and the Father ... when he diffuses his life in us by the secret efficacy of the Spirit” (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949], vol. 2, p. 95).

he performs good works; and preservation, which is the work of grace that keeps the regenerated believer in faith, holiness and salvation to the very end, thus assuring that every one united to Christ as member of the new covenant will be raised from the dead in a body like the glorious body of Christ, in order to inherit the new world.

All these blessings of salvation are covenant benefits. They belong strictly to the new covenant and its members by God's sovereign, gracious determination in the decree of election. They were merited for the covenant people by the death of Christ, the head of the covenant. They are bestowed, not simply as so many wonderful blessings of salvation, but as particular aspects of the wonderful, saving covenant of grace.⁵

All of the blessings of salvation *unfold* the new covenant with the individual member of the covenant. They bring the elect sinner into ever richer, deeper, more intimate communion with God in Christ. Regeneration introduces one into the family of which God is the Father, as physical birth introduces one into an earthly family, although at the time he may be unconscious of it. Calling turns the sinner towards God consciously. Faith is a casting

⁵ *Canons of Dordt* II:8 establishes as authoritative, binding doctrine for Reformed churches, theologians and people that all the blessings of salvation are *covenant* blessings; that Christ earned all these blessings, explicitly and especially including "justifying faith," for the elect, and the elect only, as members of the covenant by His death; that Christ's death earning the covenant and its blessings for the elect had its origin in, and was governed by, God's eternal decree of election; and that Christ the redeemer and saviour is head of the covenant of grace: "For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, *whereby he confirmed the new covenant*, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death ..."

of oneself upon God in Christ for salvation in the assurance of the love of God for him. Justification not only renders the elect sinner righteous with God, but also adopts him as the child of God and heir. Sanctification, which is progressive, consecrates the saint more and more to God in love.

All of the benefits together end, finally, in the dwelling of the member of the covenant in Father's house with Jesus Christ forever.

Justification and Sanctification

Of these benefits of the new covenant, Paul stresses two in II Corinthians 3: justification and sanctification. These two benefits comprehend the whole of the Christian experience of the salvation bestowed in the new covenant.

The apostle refers to justification as the outstanding benefit of the new covenant in verse 9: "the ministration of righteousness." Since "righteousness" is contrasted in the text with "condemnation," the righteousness spoken of is that of justification: God's legal act of declaring the guilty sinner righteous by imputing to him the obedience of Christ. Justification is the outstanding benefit of the new covenant: the entire new covenant is summed up as the "ministration of righteousness." This benefit is what the old covenant, conceived now strictly as law, could not give. The old covenant could only condemn. It was a "ministration of condemnation." It is this benefit, namely, the righteousness that is received by gracious justification, that we must have, if we are to live. This benefit we do have by faith alone, if we are in the new covenant.

The second, vitally important benefit of the new covenant that the apostle stresses in II Corinthians 3 is sanctification. This is the blessing that the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 emphasized: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (v. 33), that is, in the new covenant My people will love me and obey My commandments.

With this benefit, the apostle concludes the chapter on the new covenant: “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Cor. 3:18). Being changed into the same image from glory to glory is our lifelong becoming more and more holy, thus showing by our behaviour the image of God in Jesus Christ. Although never perfect in this life, holiness is always increasing in the member of the covenant, until in the day of Christ the change, or “metamorphosis” as is the Greek original, into the image of Christ, and therefore of God Himself, is complete. This holiness is the true glory of a human.

Like justification, sanctification is a blessing of the new covenant. The new covenant sanctifies. It sanctifies by the power of the gospel of grace that realizes the new covenant. Only the new covenant sanctifies. No more than it can justify can the old covenant sanctify. The law cannot justify the sinner but neither can it sanctify him. The law cannot save from sin in any sense whatever. It is glorious with the revelation of the holiness of the lawgiver, terrifyingly so. But it cannot make the shameful sinner glorious. It cannot make stony hearts “fleshy.” It cannot write its commandments in the heart. Only the gospel of the new covenant can do this.

The Work of the Spirit

The new covenant saves because in it is present and works the “Spirit of the living God” (II Cor. 3:3). In fact, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ *is* the new covenant and *is* all the benefits of salvation. The new covenant is fellowship with God in Christ, and the Spirit in the church and in the heart of the child of God *is* this fellowship, just as He is the fellowship of the Father and the Son in the Godhead.

In John 14-17, Jesus assures the church that she will always enjoy His nearness and fellowship, and He tells us that this fellowship is the Holy Spirit in the church.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The phrase in the apostolic benediction, “the communion of the Holy Ghost,” ascribes communion or fellowship to the Holy Ghost as His characteristic work because He Himself is the communion of the saints with God and with each other (II Cor. 13:14).

With unerring insight, Calvin begins Book 3 of the *Institutes*, regarding the way we receive the grace of Christ this way: “The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”⁶

As He Himself is the (personal) bond of union with Christ, so also the Spirit Himself is the salvation of the elect sinner. Almost at once Calvin adds to his affirmation that the Spirit is the bond who unites us with Christ, “He [i.e., the Holy Spirit] is also the root and seed of heavenly life in us.”⁷

Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit is our salvation in two startling expressions at the end of II Corinthians 3: “the Lord is that Spirit” (v. 17) and, as is the literal translation of the Greek in verse 18, “by Lord Spirit.” The apostle identifies the Lord Jesus and the Spirit. They are one and the same. His meaning is not, of course, that they are one as to person. The apostle was no antitrinitarian. Rather, they are one with regard to the work of the Spirit. The Spirit simply and exclusively brings the crucified and risen Lord Jesus to the church and her members. The Spirit applies to the church the redemptive work of Christ. Having the Spirit, we have Jesus Christ and all the benefits of His salvation.

The apostle’s strong identification of the Lord and the Spirit in this sense exposes the error of neo-Pentecostalism, which proclaims a spirit that has a ministry independent of Jesus Christ, supposedly imparts gifts that outstrip the redemption of the cross and is heralded as a presence that surpasses the Jesus received by

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.1.1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.1.2.

faith. The spirit of neo-Pentecostalism is not Paul's "Lord Spirit" but a spirit different from and beyond the Lord Jesus.

The Holy Spirit of the Christian faith, who is union with Christ and salvation, comes to whomever He pleases and enters and abides by His own sovereign power.

Sovereign Worker of the Covenant and Its Salvation

The Spirit is the sovereign worker of the salvation of the new covenant. He establishes the covenant with and bestows covenant salvation upon the elect sinner as a work of grace.

The new covenant and its salvation are unconditional. The new covenant does not depend upon the will, the works or the worth of the sinner. Nor does the sinner cooperate with the Spirit in establishing, maintaining and perfecting the new covenant. The elect member of the covenant is active. He repents, believes, struggles against sin, consecrates himself to God in love, walks in good works and perseveres, but his activity is always the effect of the Spirit's gracious, irresistible work in him.

That the establishment of the new covenant, the saving of the member of the covenant and the bestowal of the benefits of the covenant, from the mystical union to preservation and glorification, are the work of the Holy Spirit in sovereign grace, that is, unconditional, is clearly and conclusively taught by II Corinthians 3. This is the teaching, first, of the Old Testament prophecy that II Corinthians 3 is explaining, Jeremiah 31:31-34. God will make a new covenant by putting His law in the inward parts of His chosen people and by writing the law in their hearts.

God will make the new covenant. He will make it according to His own sovereignly gracious will, altogether apart from the will of those with whom He will make the covenant, except that He will make them willing. He will make the new covenant by the act of His own power, altogether apart from the working of those

with whom He will make the covenant, except that He will make them active in the covenant.

Further, Jeremiah 31:31-34 teaches that God's making of the new covenant will consist of His writing His law on the hearts of the members of the new covenant. Having the law in one's heart refers to his spiritual activity of loving God and the neighbour; it consists of one's obedience to the will of God. The spiritual activity of the member of the covenant, therefore, his obedience to the will of God, is not a condition of the covenant, that is, a work of his upon which the covenant depends, whether with regard to the initial establishment of the covenant or with regard to the maintenance of the covenant. Rather, the spiritual activity of the member of the covenant—*all* spiritual activity—is the fruit of the work of God in him, is God's writing His law upon the heart of the chosen member of the covenant. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33).

How foolish, how absurd, how wickedly opposed to the gospel of grace to preach that obedience to God is a *condition* of the covenant, as though the covenant and its grace depend upon a work of the member of the covenant! It is as if a beggar to whom a rich man has shown favour by freely giving the beggar a thousand dollars were to boast that, in fact, the favour of the rich man was conditioned by the beggar's having the thousand dollars (that the rich man has given him). Would this not be madness? But it is this covenant theology that passes for wisdom and orthodoxy in the majority of Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

II Corinthians 3 itself clearly teaches the unconditionality of the new covenant. According to verse 3, the making of the new covenant with the church by the writing of the law "in the fleshy tables of the heart," in fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:31-34, is the work—the *efficacious* work—of the "Spirit of the living God." Comparing the New Testament church, as recipient of the new covenant, to an epistle or letter, the apostle declares, "Ye are ...

written.” The church did not write herself, that is, make herself what she is, namely, the covenant people of God.

For the church to claim that she has helped to make herself what she is, namely, the covenant people of God enjoying all the blessings of the covenant, would be the same as a letter’s claiming that it has written itself. For the church to affirm that God’s work of establishing and maintaining the covenant with her depends on a condition she must perform would be the same as a letter’s affirming that the writer of the letter depended in some way upon his letter.

Not the church herself, not the member of the church, but the Spirit of the living God writes the epistle of Christ, which is the church as the new covenant people of God.

II Corinthians 3:18 ascribes the ongoing sanctification of the member of the covenant and, therefore, his preservation and glorification to the Holy Spirit. “We ... *are* changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” We do not change ourselves, even though we are active in this changing. This great work is not ours, not at all. It is wholly and exclusively the work of the Spirit of the Lord.

That the new covenant and its salvation are the sovereign work and gracious gift of the Spirit is the condemnation of every form of the heresy of salvation by the will, works and worth of the sinner, whether Roman Catholicism, Arminianism or the teaching of a conditional covenant that is now spreading in nominally Calvinistic circles. All these errors proclaim a covenant of condemnation and death, and rob the new covenant of its surpassing glory. All their demands for obedience as the sinner’s own righteousness with God and conditions upon which the saving work of God depends are the “letter [that] killeth.”

Giver of Faith

Particularly, the Spirit gives the faith which is the elect sinner’s

union with Christ in the new covenant and by which he is justified. Faith is not a condition of justification, salvation or the new covenant, but a gift. The Scottish Presbyterian George Smeaton remarked on this truth, which is fundamental to the gospel of grace.

The Reformers connected faith as the receptive organ or hand by which men receive the imputed righteousness which justifies us in the closest possible way with the operation of the Holy Spirit as its author or producing cause. While they asserted the first point, that justification before God proceeds only from faith, they asserted not less strongly the second point, *that faith in the heart proceeds only from God's Spirit*. And on all occasions they declared that if there be allowed in man any natural power or natural capacity for believing without the operation of the Holy Spirit, this inevitably overthrows at the second stage the very doctrine of grace which had been laid as the foundation of all.⁸

Development of the Doctrine of the Spirit

Smeaton, himself a Presbyterian holding the *Westminster Standards*, went on to make the profound observation that that creed of the Christian church which more than any other “correctly and fully” exhibits all of salvation to be the renewing work of the Holy Spirit is the *Canons of Dordt*.

This great Synod, equal in importance to any of the Ecumenical Councils, is the glory of the Reformed Church. Since the first FOUR GENERAL COUNCILS, none have ever assembled with a more momentous charge or commission. It gave forth in its decrees a full and all-sided outline of the doctrines of special grace; and nobly was its work discharged. The decrees of the Synod were not only made the fundamental articles of the Dutch Church, but

⁸ George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), p. 347; italics Smeaton's.

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continue, as part of the literature of these questions, to have a significance for all time. And it may be questioned whether anything more valuable as an ecclesiastical testimony for the doctrines of sovereign, special, efficacious grace was ever prepared on this important theme since the days of the apostles. Its great point was to show that THE SPIRIT PRODUCES ALL, AND MAN ACTS ALL. Nowhere has the renewing work of the Holy Spirit been more correctly and fully exhibited than in the Canons of THE SYNOD OF DORT ...⁹

Smeaton then quoted Articles 8-14 of the third and fourth heads of the *Canons* in full.¹⁰

In this way, Smeaton called attention to the significant development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by the Reformation and particularly by the Reformed creeds. This development did not

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 358-359. The, to us eccentric, capitalizations are Smeaton's.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-361. Immediately upon quoting these articles of the *Canons of Dort*, Smeaton turned his attention to "Amyraldism, sometimes called hypothetical Universalism." He condemned this false doctrine, masquerading as a legitimate version of the Reformed faith, out of hand: "in the last degree disastrous to French Protestantism"; "a subtle form of Arminianism." The toleration of this false doctrine by the Reformed church in France "was the death-blow of French Protestantism ... The French Protestant Church virtually ceased to be a witness for the doctrines of grace" (pp. 361ff.). This condemnation of Amyraldianism by the Scottish Presbyterian of the nineteenth century as a subtle form of the denial of salvation by the sovereign, gracious Spirit of Christ is of the greatest importance to those who are contending for the Reformed faith today. The popular doctrine among professing Reformed and Presbyterian theologians and churches that, in addition to the discriminating love of God of the decree of predestination, there is also an eternal love of God for all men without exception—a love that sincerely desires their salvation and that expresses and carries out this desire in a "well-meant [impotent] offer of salvation" in the preaching of the gospel—is nothing but a slightly modified form of the hypothetical universalism of old Amyraut. Of late, this error corrupts the biblical and Reformed doctrine of the covenant by the theology that calls itself the Federal (Covenant) Vision. According to this theology, in love for all the physical children of believers alike God establishes His covenant with all of them, unites all of them savingly to Christ and begins to bestow upon them the blessings of salvation at baptism. Whether any child is finally saved, however, depends upon condi-

consist of further insights into the person of the Spirit. Concerning the person of the Spirit, the Reformed creeds simply expressed agreement with the testimony of the *Nicene Creed* as expanded by the Council of Constantinople, including the Western Church's insertion of the *filioque*.¹¹ But the Reformed creeds developed the truth of the *work* of the Holy Spirit, ascribing the entire work of the application of Christ's redemption to the church and the individual elect to the Spirit of Christ, affirming that this work is gracious, sovereign and particular, and expressly denying that any part of this work is the contribution of the sinner.

Honouring the Spirit

By its confession that the Holy Spirit is the sole and sovereign worker of the new covenant and giver of its salvation, the Reformed faith honours the Holy Spirit and His wonderful work.

On the other hand, every form of the teaching of conditional salvation dishonours the Spirit.

I do not say that this teaching *blasphemes* the Spirit.

Jesus warned against blaspheming the Spirit in Matthew 12:31-32:

All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto

tions he must fulfil, especially the condition of faith. Many fall away from the covenant, Christ, salvation and grace. The inability or refusal of the assemblies of the Reformed churches to condemn these false doctrines as forms of the heresy condemned by the *Canons of Dordt* is having the same effect in North America and Great Britain that the failure of the French synods to condemn Amyraldianism had in France: the churches virtually cease to be witnesses for the doctrines of grace. In North America and Great Britain today these churches attempt, by and large, alas, successfully, to cover their miserable failure to defend and proclaim the gospel of grace so soundly, nobly and eloquently confessed at Dordt by slandering those who do defend Dordt as "hyper-Calvinists."

¹¹ This is not to say that no further insight into the truth of the person of the Holy Spirit is possible or necessary. See my *Trinity and Covenant: God as Holy Family* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006), especially the chapter, "The Holy Family: God as Truly Three."

men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

The warning was occasioned by the Pharisees' blasphemy against the Spirit by attributing Jesus' casting out of devils to "Beelzebub the prince of the devils," rather than to the Holy Spirit (v. 24). Blasphemy of the Spirit is the same as the unpardonable sin referred to in Hebrews 6:4-8 and Hebrews 10:29 and the "sin unto death" mentioned in I John 5:16-17.

Blasphemy of the Spirit is the deliberate denial, rejection and contempt of the saving work of the Holy Spirit on the part of one who knows full well that the work *is* that of the Spirit, indeed, it may be, on the part of one who has himself "tasted of the heavenly gift, and [was] made partaker of the Holy Ghost" (Heb. 6:4). For blasphemy of the Spirit, there is no forgiveness.

For the sin of dishonouring the Spirit, by attributing the work of salvation to the sinner in whole or in the smallest part, there is forgiveness, when the teacher of this false doctrine repents. But it is a dishonouring of the Spirit, nothing less, to make salvation the work of the sinner himself, as also to make the Spirit dependent upon the sinner in the work of salvation.

"The spirit giveth life" (II Cor. 3:6).

A Condemning Work

Establishing the new covenant and bestowing its benefits are not the only work of the Spirit. He has also a work of condemning and hardening, according to the purpose of Christ, who sends the Spirit. Jesus spoke of this work of the Spirit in John 16:8-11: "And when he [i.e., the Comforter of the elect church] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (v. 8). This is the work of the Spirit upon the reprobate world of

ungodly men and women, who do not believe on Jesus Christ, are unrighteous and have Satan as their prince. This work is not only an outward reproof in the warnings of the word of God, but also an inner convicting of sin, righteousness and judgment by the secret operation of the Spirit upon their hearts. Whom He does not comfort, He convicts.

No more than Jesus is the saviour of all men without exception is the Holy Spirit the sanctifier and comforter of all men. Just as Jesus came to do the will of His Father, redeeming all those, but those only, whom the Father gave Him in the decree of election, so also the Spirit comes to do the will of Jesus, applying the redemption of the cross to all those, but those only, for whom Jesus gave His life.

The Spirit's Means

Both for His convicting work and for His comforting work, the Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ as means. With regard to the comforting work, that is, the establishment of the new covenant and the bestowal of its benefits, especially justification and sanctification, the apostle declares that the new covenant is "ministered by us" (II Cor. 3:3). By their preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:5), the apostles were "able ministers of the new testament [i.e., covenant]" (II Cor. 3:6).

It is this word of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ as preached by the church that is the "glass" or "mirror," in which all our life we see the glory of the Lord Jesus. This radiating glory of Christ then reflects into our souls, as the radiating glory of God once reflected on Moses' face, so that, more and more, we ourselves take on, and shine forth, the glory of God in Christ (II Cor. 3:18).

How necessary is the preaching of the Word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, revealed in the inspired Scripture! Only by this means does the Spirit give Himself to us, dwell in us, give us the blessings of salvation and glorify us, in the establishing of the new covenant. For the Spirit is the Spirit who proceeds eternally from

the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity; the Spirit breathed forth by Jesus Christ; and, as Jesus calls Him in John 14:17, the Spirit of truth.

The Spirit's Honouring of the Lord Jesus

In all His work of the covenant and salvation, the Holy Spirit honours Jesus Christ—not *Himself*, but *Jesus*. Jesus declares this of the coming Spirit in John 16:14: “He shall glorify me.”

In every possible way, the apostle points this out in II Corinthians 3. The Spirit justifies us with the righteousness of *Jesus Christ* (v. 9). The Spirit sanctifies us by changing us into *Christ's* image (v. 18).

In the mirror of the Word of God, the Spirit shows us, not His own glory, but the “glory of the *Lord*” (v. 18). Implied by the truth that the “glass” or mirror of the Word of God reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is that this is the content of the entire Bible: the glory of Jesus Christ as Lord. The glory of Jesus Christ as Lord is the content also of the Old Testament Scripture, for the Jews are blind to their own Scripture until the veil is taken away and they turn to the Lord Jesus (v. 16).

The Spirit honours Jesus also in this respect that in His work He is identical with the Lord Jesus: “the Lord is that Spirit” (v. 17) and, as is the literal translation of verse 18, “changed ... by Lord Spirit.”

In addition, the means of all the working of the Spirit is “the glorious gospel of Christ” (II Cor. 4:4). The Spirit gives life (II Cor. 3:6) by preachers who preach, not themselves, nor the Spirit but “Christ Jesus the Lord” (II Cor. 4:5).

Does the neo-Pentecostal spirit so honour Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ its message, its *main* message, its *one and only* message? Is the establishing of the new covenant as union with Christ its work, its *grand and central* work? Are the outstanding benefits it

bestows justification and sanctification? Is its gospel the good news of sovereign grace—not free will, not works-righteousness, not a conditional salvation and then a conditional “baptism with the Spirit,” but grace and grace alone?

The answer to all these questions is an emphatic no. The answer is an emphatic no *by the neo-Pentecostal movement itself*. The neo-Pentecostal spirit, therefore, is not the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor is its work genuine. This is the judgment upon the neo-Pentecostal spirit by Scripture, particularly John 14-17 and II Corinthians 3, and thus by the Spirit of truth Himself.

But the Spirit of Christ honours the Lord Jesus *in us*, the members of the new covenant. *We* see Jesus Christ in the mirror of the gospel. *We* believe on Jesus Christ for all of salvation. *We* confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. *We* are glorious as the holy image of God in Jesus Christ, thus radiating by our holy lives the glory of the all-glorious Christ.

Every Spirit-indwelt congregation is “*manifestly* declared to be the epistle of Christ” (II Cor. 3:3).

And these spiritual realities of the new covenant with us are evidences to us, instituted church and individual believer, that we have received the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4

The Spirit as the Spirit of Truth

Prof. Herman Hanko

Scripture: John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 13-14

Introduction

The church today has very little consciousness of and interest in the church of the past, especially the truth that the church of the past confessed. The proof of this is to be found all around us. Some churches may have a confessional basis, such as the *Westminster Standards* or the Reformed confessions, but these churches as a whole are ignorant of their contents and openly teach doctrines contrary to them. Other churches despise confessions and boast that they have “no creed but Christ.” Independent congregations, many of which are baptistic, pride themselves not only in being independent from each other, but also in being independent of the church of the past. Truths held sacred by saints of earlier ages are frequently unknown or, if known, ignored and denied.

The result is that the church world today, for the most part, has cut itself loose from its doctrinal moorings, and is drifting aimlessly on open and stormy seas driven about by “every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). The great sin of such doctrinal independence is the sin against the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. And a church that ignores the Spirit of truth is a church in which the Spirit no longer dwells. It is as serious as that.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

We affirm, without hesitation, that the work of the Spirit of truth is of crucial importance for the life and well-being of the church of Christ. Without Him and His work, the church ceases to exist as the church of Christ. The marks of the true church vanish without His presence.

The Lord considered the presence of the Spirit of truth in the church so important that He devoted a major part of His discourse on the eve of His passion to this subject. The disciples were disconsolate, for Christ had told them plainly that He was going away from them; and they could not imagine life without Him. But He explained that it was for their benefit that He would go away, for only if He went away would He come back to them. And His return to them would be far more blessed than His earthly presence with them as they had known it in the years of His earthly ministry. He would be present with them through the Spirit of truth whom He would send to them from the Father. So important was the coming of the Spirit of truth to the Lord that He mentioned it no less than five times in His discourse recorded in John 14-16.

The Spirit of truth would also be the Comforter who would come to them from Christ Himself and would abide with them forever. He would abide with the church forever, and His presence with the church would be the fulfilment of Christ's own words, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

The Spirit of truth is absolutely necessary for the existence of the church of Christ in the world. His presence with us is the only power by means of which we are able to hold firmly to the truth that has once for all been delivered to the saints. I must confess that at times the temptation to question the truth that we hold dear is strong. It is, after all, a truth that few believe. We are ridiculed and mocked for that truth for which we stand. We are reminded that almost the entire church world holds different ideas and that we are a small and insignificant minority. The question quite naturally arises: Can all the church of today be wrong and

we, a few scattered believers, be right? But when I look back on the history of the church since Pentecost and see that the church, though constantly battered by heresies of every kind, nevertheless firmly confessed the truth, which is identical to what we believe today, then I am comforted. I far prefer to stand in the company of the great men of God from former days—Athanasius, Augustine, Gottschalk, Luther, Calvin and Hoeksema—than to be in the company of the theological pygmies in today’s world of insipid theologians.

The truth into which the Spirit of truth has led the church of all ages is the bond that binds together the whole church from the beginning to the end of time in an unbreakable bond. Most have gone to join the company of just men made perfect, but the same Spirit that once dwelt in them and dwells in them now dwells in us as well. What a blessing that is.

Who the Spirit of Truth Is

The Spirit of truth is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity who, within the divine life of God, proceeds from the Father and the Son. This is the great doctrinal difference between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Originally, the *Nicene Creed*, adopted by the Council of Nicea in 325 and modified by the Council of Constantinople in 381, spoke of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father only. The Western Church adopted a modification to the *Nicene Creed* at the Synod of Toledo in 589. This modification was the addition of one Latin word, *filioque*, which addition made the creed read that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. Without entering into the question of the right of the Western Church, single-handedly and without consulting the Eastern Church, to modify a creed that belonged to both parts of the church, the addition was biblical and sound.

Now, while originally the *Nicene Creed* read, “And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth

from the Father,” it reads, “I [believe in] the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father *and the Son*.” The modification was entirely in keeping with the Scriptures. This is clear from Jesus’ own words in the texts cited at the beginning of the chapter. In John 14:26, Jesus speaks of the Spirit as the one “whom the Father will send *in my name*,” and, in John 16:7, Jesus emphatically states, “But if I depart, *I* will send him unto you.” The emphasis falls on the fact, therefore, that the Spirit whom the Father sends is the Spirit whom the Father sends at Christ’s request because He is the same Spirit given to Christ at the time of His ascension (Acts 2:33).

Because the insertion of the so-called “*filioque* clause” into the *Nicene Creed* was made during a period of struggle between Rome and Constantinople, that is, between the bishop of Rome and the patriarch of Constantinople, and because the Western Church simply demanded of the Eastern Church that they too adopt this change, it became the one, great, doctrinal difference between the two branches of the church at the time of the schism in 1054. While the Eastern Church undoubtedly rejected the “*filioque* clause” in large measure out of spite, it was a fatal doctrinal error, for the result was that the Spirit of truth departed from the Eastern Church, and that branch of Christendom has been caught in the eddies on the edge of the stream of the history of the church, and within it religion has been reduced to mysticism and image worship.

The Spirit of truth is the Spirit of Christ, given to Him at His ascension. On Pentecost, Peter speaks of the exaltation of Christ in these words: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). The giving of the Spirit is part of Christ’s exaltation, the reward for His perfect work and the means by which what He has accomplished for His church is graciously bestowed on the church.

The Spirit gives to the church that which Christ has merited for

it. In a sense, the Spirit is self-effacing; that is, He does not call attention to Himself. Jesus describes Him as one who does “not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak” (John 16:13). It is here that the Pentecostals do great harm to the Holy Spirit. They make the Holy Spirit the most important person of the Trinity, and they call attention to the Spirit when He refuses to call attention to Himself. He witnesses of Christ, calls attention to Christ and leads the sinner for whom Christ died to Christ.

When the Spirit is poured out on the church, Christ Himself comes to the church through the Spirit. We are made partakers of Christ and live as one with Him, because the Spirit dwells in Christ as the Head and in us as His members. This was the great truth that the disciples had to understand. Christ was indeed going away from them, but He was coming back to them in a far richer way than He had ever been with them before. He would not now be walking with them up and down the dusty roads of Palestine, but would be within them in a profoundly blessed way.

The Spirit whom Christ gives to the church is also the one through whom Christ gave us His Word through infallible inspiration. That same Spirit came upon Christ at the time of Christ’s baptism to ordain Him publicly as the appointed prophet, priest and king of God. The Spirit was the one through whom God raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 1:4; I Peter 3:18). When Christ ascended on high, He was given the promise of the Spirit (Acts 2:33) and the Spirit brings Christ to us now as the very truth of God who is the God of our salvation. He opens our eyes to understand the Scriptures, and He is the means whereby the mysteries of the kingdom are made clear to all Christ’s disciples (Matt. 13:16). He brings Christ Himself, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

The passages in John make this clear. “He [i.e., the Spirit] shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance,

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whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). And, “He will shew you things to come” (John 16:13).

Christ is our prophet who makes known to us the Word of God. But He does so by the Spirit, for the Word of God is not only spoken to us objectively in Scripture and the gospel, but it is put in our hearts. The Spirit thus becomes a teacher such as no earthly teacher can ever be. My teacher tried hard to teach me geometry, but failed for the most part and never succeeded in instilling in me a love for this esoteric subject. But when the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to teach us, He not only gives us the spiritual understanding we need to appropriate that Word of truth, but He makes us love it, yearn more fully to understand it and long to claim it as our own. He makes the Word a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our path (Ps. 119:105). The Spirit, in other words, in revealing to us Christ, gives us that personal acquaintance with Christ which only faith can give. He teaches us from the Word but His teaching has the power to bring us to Christ Himself, to hear Him speak, to come to know Him personally, to cling to Him as our only hope in life and to walk with Him as a friend walks with a friend.

As such He is our “Comforter.” Jesus tells the disciples: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16). “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father ...” (John 15:26). “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you” (John 16:7).

The word “to comfort” means basically “to call to the side of.” It has, therefore, a variety of meanings in Scripture, depending on the reason for which we are called to the side of someone. Christ is our Comforter through the Spirit because Christ efficaciously calls us to His side. He may call us to His side to rebuke us for

our sins and foolishness. He may call us to His side to tell us of all the wonderful things He has done for us and, as He says to His disciples, to “show us things to come.” But He always calls us to His side to comfort us. This call comes through the Spirit and the words Christ speaks to us are spoken by the Spirit. The result is that through the Spirit Christ is our strength, our life, our hope, our ability to do what He requires; our forgiver when we fall. We joyfully proclaim as Paul did, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

Christ’s truth is our comfort, for Christ gently, yet sometimes very sternly, tells us of His great love for us and His purpose to make us His brothers and sisters—and thus to live in obedience to Him. Thus we are not left “orphans.” In John 14:18, where the AV says, “I will not leave you comfortless,” the more literal translation is, “I will not leave you *orphans*.” Without Christ we would indeed be orphans in the world. But Christ is our elder brother who gives us His Spirit so that we are made, with Christ, members of the family of God our Father. We are God’s sons and daughters. We have a home in heaven, a house of many mansions into which Christ will take us when He comes again to take us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also (John 14:1-3).

How the Spirit Works

When we consider how the Spirit of truth works, it is crucial that we hold to the truth that the Spirit always binds Himself to the Scriptures. He never does any of the work of Christ in salvation apart from Scripture. Pentecostalism, revivalism and mysticism all reject this truth. They all open the door to extra-biblical revelations whether by visions, dreams, movements of the Spirit within their hearts or subjective guidance. Some speak of doing a certain thing “because the Spirit laid it on my heart” to do it; others follow their own ideas for Christian conduct because, so they claim, “the Spirit showed me the way.” All this is to be rejected as more likely the leading of the devil, for it is not the leading of the Spirit. I may never believe anything or do anything unless I can point

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out where in the Scriptures I am directed to do this or that. A denial of the work of the Spirit through the Word brings us into the quicksands of subjectivism.

The work of the Spirit is, therefore, to open to us the Scriptures. We are by nature opponents of God's truth. We hate God, hate His truth and hate the Scriptures within which that truth is made known. Total depravity results in an inability to know the truth, which is greater and stronger than mere ignorance of it. I will not know, nor understand nor study that which I hate passionately. Hatred is a spiritual block that makes any understanding of the Word impossible. That resistance must be broken down. It can be broken down only by an irresistible work of the Spirit.

That work of the Spirit takes away our hatred of God and His truth, enlightens our minds so that we can understand spiritual things, and softens our stubborn and recalcitrant wills so that we become willing and eager students of the Word, who delight in the knowledge He brings.

When a young lady is being courted by a young man in whom she is interested, she wants to know as much about him as she can. If he sends her a letter she reads and rereads it until it is worn and torn. She reads things between the lines, maybe learning things about her suitor that the letter itself does not state explicitly. If in time they marry and love continues to bind them together, their lives are a perpetual learning more and more of each other.

So it is with our knowledge of God revealed in Christ and given us by the Spirit.

We are, by the Spirit, all prophets who have the spiritual ability to know by ourselves what the Scriptures say. I do not mean to imply that we have no need of the preaching. We have a great need of the preaching as the God-ordained means of grace; indeed, our own learning has its spiritual fountainhead in the preaching. But we must, even where the Word is preached, be like the Be-

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reans, who studied the Scriptures to see whether the things Paul preached were so (Acts 17:11).

Commentaries, books, written sermons and all the Bible helps one can find in a good Christian book store can be and are helpful. But the fact remains that our own study of Scripture is possible because the Spirit of truth teaches us through the Word.

The Spirit of truth, however, operates not only in the individual believer but also in the church itself. He works in the whole church throughout the ages from Pentecost until today. He works in the individual believer as a part of the whole church of Christ. That is, if a believer separates himself from the church, lives in isolation from it and depends upon his ability to learn the truth apart from the church, he loses the work of the Spirit. Only in the communion of the saints does the Spirit work in the believer and in the church as a whole.

Somewhat strangely, the Spirit of truth works most strongly when heresies arise in the church. Sometimes God's people are not all that interested in the study of the truth, their interest in the truth being curtailed by their interest in worldly things. But heresy acts as a prod, a goad to stimulate their concern for the truth of God's Word. The Spirit uses heresy to drive them into a renewed study of Scripture. Believers come to see, under the fierce attacks of heretics, that their faith is being threatened, and that if heresy prevails, they will lose their faith. Such a dreadful prospect serves as incentive to rouse them to a renewed study of Scripture so that they can successfully ward off these attacks and preserve the church.¹

In defending herself against the attacks of heresies, the church studies the Scriptures and comes to a clearer knowledge of the truth of God's Word. This truth she summarizes in official state-

¹ For more on this, see my *Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010).

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ments or confessions with which she refutes and condemns heresy and proclaims the truth. These confessions are necessary and important: we need them; we desire them; we consider them to be gifts of God who leads His church through and by the work of the Spirit of truth. Those who do not want confessions slap the Spirit of truth in the face.

When God caused the Scriptures to be written, those Scriptures were the infallibly inspired record of God's revelation in history. But God's revelation, recorded in the Scriptures, is His revelation through Jesus Christ. At the same time, that revelation of God through Jesus Christ is a revelation in history. Revelation from the beginning is a part of history. The mother promise was given to Adam and Eve in paradise immediately after the fall. The revelation of God came through the historical flood, the call of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, the formation of Israel as a nation, the words of the prophets directed to circumstances in Israel's life as a nation and in all the types and shadows of the law. When Christ came, as the fulfilment of the old dispensation, He was born in Bethlehem in a cattle stall, He lived and died in Palestine. He suffered on the cross planted on Calvary. He rose from the grave of Joseph of Arimathea and ascended from Mount Olivet before the eyes of his disciples.

Because the truth is one, that is, because the whole of Scripture is the portrait of Jesus Christ as the revelation of Jehovah God, the God of our salvation, the church must put the portrait together by fitting every part of Scripture into its proper place. The same truth, therefore, is taught throughout the Scriptures. Every part of it speaks of Christ and every part contributes in its own unique way to the whole. There can be, therefore, no contradictory doctrines in Scripture. Never may anyone go to only one passage in Scripture, isolated from the rest of God's Word, to prove a point. To introduce man into the portrait as a contributor to his salvation is to try to fit into the perfect portrait a piece that belongs to some other man-made portrait but not to the portrait of Christ. It doesn't fit.

So the church systematizes the doctrines of Scripture. This is what the reformers called “the rule of faith.” Luther detested those who hopped from text to text like a bee flies from flower to flower. They try to prove something from an individual text apart from the rest of Scripture. For example, without any grounds, they appeal to John 3:16 as proof that God loves every man, woman and child in the whole world and they never consider how the word “world” is used in the rest of the Scriptures. Luther scathingly condemned this method and pointed out that every heresy under heaven could be proved with this method. As the Dutch used to put it, every heretic has his text.

The work of developing the truth is done by the Spirit of truth. And, because the Spirit of truth is present in the entire church of Christ in the new dispensation, the church at any given time in her history is dependent on what the Spirit has done in the church of the past. A church that severs herself from the church in the past commits ecclesiastical suicide. The church must, if it severs itself from the church of the past, start from scratch in its study of Scripture every time it is called to defend against heresy. It has no access to what the church in the past has officially declared to be the truth of Scripture. The adage is true: “He who will not learn from history’s mistakes is doomed to repeat them.” But it is also true that he who will not learn the truth confessed by the church in the past will have no part in the glorious work of developing the truth in the future.

The church is the living, throbbing with life, bride of Christ. It is one church throughout the ages and lives in unity of faith even though a large part of it is already in heaven. The result is that the confession of the church grows richer and increasingly beautiful. It starts as a small seed after Pentecost but grows throughout the ages. It grows, not like a house to which is constantly added new materials of different kinds, but like an oak from an acorn, ever bigger, ever more sturdy, ever more beautiful. The Council of Constantinople built on the *Creed of Nicea* (325); the Council of Chalcedon (451) built on the Council of Constantinople; the

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Council of Toledo (589) built on the *Nicene Creed* and its modifications by the Council of Constantinople; the *Belgic Confession* (1561) though a thousand years later, consciously reached back to all four earlier councils; the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) did the same. The *Canons of Dort* (1618-1619) adopted for the confession of the church till the end of time its powerful answer to the error of Arminianism; and the synod insisted that the creed it adopted was but a further explanation of some points found in the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

If I may cite one more recent, pertinent example of such development from our own history as Protestant Reformed Churches, I mention the fact that the fathers of our denomination were called to defend the truth of sovereign and particular grace over against the error of common grace. By defending the truths of sovereign and particular grace, our fathers reached back to Reformed writers beginning with Calvin and made abundant use of post-Reformation creeds. And, in their own work, applying the doctrines of grace as long taught in the church to the doctrine of the covenant, they made significant and fundamental contributions to the truth of the covenant that is the cornerstone of the Reformed faith till today.

Every church faithful to the truth knows its confessions and receives them as a precious heritage given by the Lord through the great work of the Spirit of truth. On those confessions, it builds its own development of the truth. It takes as its own all that the church in the past has said and it brings out the implications of all those great truths in new and richer ways—as it is forced to do in the face of heresies that attack the church.

Yet, what I have said also implies that the church of Christ at any given time in the new dispensation possesses the whole truth. The case is not that the immediate post-apostolic church had only a smattering of the whole body of the truth or a few disconnected pieces while most doctrines had yet to be discovered. If it is true that the truth grows organically as an oak tree grows from an

acorn, then the church immediately after the apostles had the whole tree of the truth, for, though the oak tree is but a sapling, that sapling lacks nothing which the mature oak possesses. The early New Testament church possessed all the truth—even if it was only in small measure. And this is true because the one tree of the truth, though it grows throughout the ages, is the one tree of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the God of the salvation of the elect church.

Some may object that this is to raise the authority of the confessions to a level equal with or superior to the authority of Scripture, but such is not the case. Throughout all the ages the church tests her confessions by the Word of God. Every generation does this. When an individual saint comes to maturity in the church of Christ, he is ready to take his place in the work of the church because he believes that the confessions of the church agree with sacred Scripture. He has tested them and found them true.

When hundreds of years go by and theologians greater than you or I have found the confessions to be in full agreement with the Scriptures, we have some very strong proof that these confessions are indeed the work of the Spirit of truth in the church and we joyfully set about our task of defending the faith in these perilous times.

The Blessedness of the Word of the Spirit of Truth

The blessings of the work of the Spirit of truth are many and great.

We have from the Spirit of truth the precious gift of our confessions. These are given us by the Spirit of truth as our heritage. It is a heritage handed down by our fathers and frequently written with the ink of their blood. They are a priceless heritage committed to our trust and keeping.

When we go to Scripture to learn what it means, we have these confessions to help us so that we need not start from scratch in

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our search for truth. The confessions are of immeasurable help in our search of the Word of God, for they tell us what countless saints in the past and stalwart soldiers in the battle of faith have confessed, what lies they have encountered and what they have discovered in Scripture as the necessary weapons to blunt the force of these lies and destroy them. Convinced that what they taught is the work of the Spirit of truth, we pause in humble thanksgiving for such a rich heritage.

These same confessions are the means by which we are united to the church of the past, for the true union the church has in Christ is the union of one faith that holds to one truth and thus holds to Christ. As I said, I will take my stand with the great heroes of faith in ages gone by rather than with the insipid theologians of modern times.

By the confessions, we have a priceless tool to instruct our children in the ways of God's covenant and give them some sense of the glory of belonging to a noble company of saints who loved not their lives unto death. We can show them what they believed, for what they died and what the truth meant to them.

The confessions are mighty and powerful weapons in the defence of the faith. I know that much of the church today mocks these weapons, claims not to care for them or has placed them on the dump-heap of history as being totally irrelevant to our modern scientific and technological age; but no one can gainsay the fact that these confessions possess the halo of antiquity and are the confessions that brought salvation to millions.

These confessions will be a safe defence against false ecumenism. Modern ecumenism brings churches into union on the basis of the principle that what the church needs is less and less of the truth. Christ's warriors in the battle of faith insist that what the church of today needs more than anything is more and more of the truth.

All this requires that we know, love and cherish our confessions

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and thank our gracious God who gives us Christ through the Spirit of truth. With that Spirit of truth, who is still present in the true church today, we can go onward and forward in the battle of faith, conquering heresy and enriching the confession of the saints. The study and knowledge of the truth, as it is our calling to develop it, is an exciting and thrilling adventure. It is an adventure that shall continue in heaven where we shall into all eternity see the riches of God's infinite perfections revealed in Christ more fully and more perfectly.

From a spiritual point of view, this glorious truth, given us by the Spirit of Christ, gives us Christ Himself who has promised to be with us to the end. And having Christ, we are set free, for "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). "And, this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

In the knowledge of the truth by the work of the Spirit of truth, we have all the blessings of salvation, fellowship with God in His covenant and fellowship with one another as we strive together to fight the battle of faith against its many enemies.

And so the Spirit of truth is our Comforter. He comforts us by bringing Christ to us. He comforts us by assuring us that our only comfort in life and in death, for body and soul, is that we belong to our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5

The Holy Spirit and Assurance

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Scripture: Romans 8:1-17

Introduction

The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ causes the believing child of God to know his own salvation with certainty. The Spirit gives assurance of salvation. This is an especially vital and precious work of the Spirit.

Assurance is an especially vital and important work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. When in John 14-17 He promised the Holy Spirit to His church, Jesus called this Spirit the “Comforter”: “The Father ... shall give you another Comforter” (John 14:16). As the other Comforter of the church and the individual member of the church, the Spirit comforts us with the assurance that our sins are forgiven; with the assurance that we have been given by the Father to Jesus Christ as His people; with the assurance that we are united to Christ in the covenant of grace; and with the assurance that one day we will be with Christ where He is in heaven. In short, the Spirit comforts us that we were saved from eternity past, are saved now and will be saved everlastingly.

Lacking this assurance, we are not comforted but are terribly uncomfortable, indeed, terrified. Failing to give this assurance, the Spirit is no Comforter at all.

Indicating how important the assurance of His people by the

other Comforter was to Jesus, when He said farewell Jesus declared, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Peace is the experience of being reconciled to God, of being in a relation of friendship with God on the basis of the forgiveness of sins. And this peace for each of us is *assurance* that God is my friend and Father for Jesus' sake. There is no peace for anyone, if he lacks assurance of his own salvation, but only terror. Of course, this peace is due to the work of the Comforter within us assuring us of God's love for us, Christ's death for us and our own personal salvation.

Assurance is especially vital and precious to us ourselves. Without assurance, our heart is very much troubled and afraid. Doubt of salvation is the worst fear of all the fears to which humans are liable.

Assurance of salvation is an aspect of salvation itself. God wills not only that we be saved but also that we *know* that we are saved. Then, and only then, do we enjoy salvation. Then, and only then, can we praise and thank Him, so that He is glorified by us, which is the ultimate purpose of salvation. One who lacks assurance cannot thank, praise and glorify God.

Salvation itself is experiential, involving our conscious certainty of salvation, for example, justification, the chief benefit of salvation. Justification is not simply the forgiveness of sins. Justification is the forgiveness *in the forum of the believer's consciousness*, as the Protestant Reformation has taught us.

What good is salvation to me, if I do not *know* it, if I live in *doubt* of it?

What good is the Comforter to me, if I cannot confess, truthfully, concerning myself personally, what the *Heidelberg Catechism* puts on the lips of every man, woman and child who believes the gospel of Jesus Christ from the heart in its first question and answer:

[My only comfort in life and death is] that I ... belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation.¹

Controversy Over Assurance

It is deplorable that the Spirit's work of assuring believers and the true, spiritual children of believers is controversial. I do not now refer to the open denial of the possibility of the assurance of salvation by the Roman Catholic Church, by all churches that proclaim the false gospel of Arminianism and by the proponents of the covenant theology of the Federal (Covenant) Vision in reputedly Reformed and Presbyterian churches. By virtue of their common teaching that salvation is conditional, that is, dependent upon the will and works of the saved sinner, Rome, churches embracing the lie of free will and the Federal (Covenant) Vision all openly proclaim that saints can fall away into eternal perdition. This is the denial of assurance of salvation with a vengeance.²

¹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 1. The explanation of this personal assurance of every believer is given by the *Catechism* when it adds, "Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he [i.e., Jesus Christ] also assures me of eternal life." Assurance is an aspect of Jesus' saving work, with redemption and preservation. The reason for the *Catechism's* confidence that every believer has assurance, so that he can honestly confess the first question and answer, is that Jesus assures of eternal life every one whom He has redeemed. For the *Catechism*, one might as well deprive some whom Christ redeemed of the work of preservation or of the work of making them willing and ready to live to Christ, as to deprive them of the Spirit's work of assurance.

² For Rome's denial of assurance, see the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session ("Decree of Justification"), chapters 12-13, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 103-104; for the Arminian denial of assurance, see the "Opinions of the Remonstrants [i.e., Arminians]" ("The Opinion of the Remonstrants with respect to the fifth article, which concerns Perseverance"), in Peter Y. De Jong (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), pp. 227-229;

But I refer to the controversy over assurance raised by the false teaching about the Holy Spirit and assurance of many, perhaps the majority, of the Puritans in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. These Puritans taught that the Spirit saves many whom He does not assure of salvation. From many of those whom He does finally assure of salvation, He withholds assurance for a long time—*years, many years*—after their conversion and coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Some regenerated believers never receive the gift of assurance. These miserable souls must live all their troubled life and then die without assurance, without ever being able to confess the first question and answer of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, even though God elected them, Christ died for them and the Spirit regenerated them and united them to Christ. Expressions by leading Puritans and the actual condition of churches held in bondage by this teaching leave the distinct impression that those believers who never receive assurance, but die in doubt, are the majority.

These Puritans taught that assurance is not so much the gift of the Holy Spirit as it is the work of the church member himself. Having convinced believers that they (the believers) had not received assurance with their faith, these Puritans then exhorted the believers to pray fervently, to work arduously and to struggle heroically, often for many years, in order at last, by dint of all this spiritual work, to obtain assurance.

These Puritans taught that assurance is, and should be, a real problem for many, if not most, believers and children of believers.

for the denial of assurance by the men of the Federal (Covenant) Vision, see my *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 135-232. A representative statement by a leading spokesman for the Federal (Covenant) Vision is in order: "Those who ultimately prove to be reprobate may be in covenant with God. They may enjoy for a season the blessings of the covenant, including the forgiveness of sins, adoption, possession of the kingdom, sanctification, etc., and yet apostatize and fall short of the grace of God ... *The apostate doesn't forfeit 'apparent blessings' that were never his in reality, but real blessings that were his in covenant with God*" (Steve Wilkins, quoted in *The Covenant of God*, p. 193; italics Wilkins').

The Work of the Holy Spirit

It is normal to lack assurance; normal to wonder whether one is really saved; normal to struggle with the question of assurance; normal that one's relation to assurance is that of a "quest," a long, even *lifelong*, "quest," with no assurance of a favourable outcome of the quest, namely, finding assurance in this life; and, therefore, also, normal to abstain from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Leading Puritans, men who are highly regarded by contemporary disciples of the Puritans, taught that the Spirit gives assurance to only a very few of God's children, leaving the rest of us, the vast majority of His children, to live and die in doubt.

Now though this full assurance is earnestly desired, and highly prized, and the want of it much lamented, and the enjoyment of it much endeavoured after by all saints, yet it is only obtained by a few. Assurance is a mercy too good for most men's hearts, it is a crown too weighty for most men's heads. Assurance is *optimum maximum*, the best and greatest mercy; and therefore God will only give it to his best and dearest friends. Augustus in his solemn feasts, gave trifles to some, but gold to others. Honour and riches, etc., are trifles that God gives to the worst of men; but assurance is that 'tried gold,' Rev. 3:18, that God only gives to tried friends. Among those few that have a share or portion in the special love and favour of God, there are but a very few that have an assurance of his love. It is one mercy for God to love the soul, and another mercy for God to assure the soul of his love.³

³ Thomas Brooks, "Heaven on Earth: A Serious Discourse, Touching a Well-Grounded Assurance," in *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1980), vol. 2, p. 335. The quotation is given in part in J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), p. 181. Of Thomas Brooks, Puritan scholar J. I. Packer says that he was "one of the greatest of the later Puritans" and one of the "finest Puritan minds." Packer states that Brooks' teaching on assurance "represent[s] the main current of Puritan thinking" and is the "particular" aspect of "the Puritans' most valuable contributions to the church's theological heritage" (pp. 179-180). In the name of the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church, confessional Reformed doctrine, the work of the Holy Spirit and the comfort of believers and their children, I

A Reformed student of Scripture and the Reformed creeds struggles for words with which to express opposition to, and indignation at, the Puritan doctrine of assurance. It is no doctrine of assurance at all, but a cruel doctrine of doubt, at least, for the great majority of those who “have a share or portion in the special love and favour of God.” Not only does it rob the great majority of God’s believing children of the precious, priceless assurance of the love of God for them and their salvation, shutting them up to the unspeakable misery of the fear, whether God hates them and will damn them at death, but it also casts the gravest aspersions on the fatherhood of God in Jesus Christ. What godly, earthly father, loving all his children, gives assurance of his love to a “very few” of his children, but withholds this assurance from the majority of them? Such a father would make himself subject to the discipline of the church on the ground of the grossest dereliction of parental duty. Indeed, what earthly father would demand of his children that they “endeavour,” that is, work, for years in order to obtain after many years, or even at the end of life, the assurance that he in fact loves them? What Christian would swallow the assertion that it is one parental mercy for the believing father to love his children, but another parental mercy for the father to assure the children of his love? What strange mercy is it to love one’s children, but have them live in the terror that their father hates them?

That God’s fatherhood does not suffer in comparison with the fatherhood of the godly man is evident from the fact that Jesus taught everyone who believes the gospel, and thus believes on Jesus Christ, from the heart, whether aged saint or new convert, grandparent or little covenant child, to call upon God in prayer and to call upon Him as “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9). To say “Our Father” to God is to express that the one who prays has assurance that God loves him, has redeemed him, saves him and will preserve him unto eternal glory.

say no to the Puritan doctrine of assurance. Saying no to the Puritan doctrine of assurance, I am saying no to a teaching that is not incidental, but fundamental to Puritanism.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Here, according to Puritan theology, is a grace of salvation about which it is not true, that the one who seeks shall find (Matt. 7:7-8). All believers seek assurance as a grace “earnestly desired and highly prized,” but only a “few,” indeed, a “very few,” ever find it. And the reason is that this grace of salvation, which rightly is “highly prized” as the “best and greatest mercy,” is obtained, not by the free gift of the Spirit of Christ, but by the working and works of the believer.

He that will have it [i.e., assurance] must work, and sweat, and weep, and wait to obtain it ... none can obtain it [i.e., assurance] but such as labour for it ... a man must win it [i.e., assurance] before he can wear it.⁴

The Puritan doctrine of assurance is a form of salvation by works. A doctrine of works is necessarily also a doctrine of doubt.

Despite the clear, powerful testimony of the *Three Forms of Unity* against it, the Puritan doctrine of assurance has infected certain churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition. This occurred largely through the influence of Puritanism upon some Reformed theologians and ministers in the Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The movement influenced by Puritanism, particularly the Puritan doctrine of assurance, called itself the *nadere reformatie*. This name should be translated and understood as “further reformation,” expressing the movement’s conviction that the sixteenth-century Reformation did not do justice to piety and experience and that it was the high calling of the *nadere reformatie* to complete the sixteenth-century Reformation. This, the men of the *nadere reformatie* set out to accomplish by a theology and ministry that emphasized personal piety and introspective experience.⁵

⁴ Brooks, *Works*, pp. 324-325.

⁵ See the brief introduction to the “further reformation” in English in Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*, trans. James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), pp. 15-24. De Reuver notes that the very name of the movement in the Netherlands was the importation of a distinctively English, Puritan term:

Puritanism's erroneous doctrine of assurance is being spread throughout Great Britain, North America and the world by influential organizations and theologians who promote Puritan and "further reformation" theology.

The effects of this false doctrine of assurance are dreadful. Entire Reformed and Presbyterian congregations languish in doubt of their salvation and, therefore, persist in open disobedience to Christ's command to His church and to all who believe on Him that they partake of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29). It is reliably reported that in the Netherlands today (2008) is a Reformed congregation of more than one thousand members of which only five or ten old members regularly partake of the Lord's Supper.

"Teellinck ... the father of the Further Reformation introduced the Puritan term 'further reformation' from England to the Netherlands" (p. 16). De Reuver indicates that the characteristic Puritan doctrine of assurance was central to the purpose and theology of the men of the *nadere reformatie*: "The Further Reformation developed a comprehensive pastoral psychology by which it intended to provide guidance on the manner in which the applied work of the Holy Spirit brought people to certainty of faith [i.e., assurance of salvation]" (p. 17). The significance of de Reuver's work is his frank acknowledgment that the experientialism and spirituality of the further reformation were (and *are!*) derived from the medieval (Roman Catholic) mystics. Almost all reliable analysis of the *nadere reformatie* is found in the Dutch language. De Reuver gives the sources. Completely unreliable, indeed misleading, is Joel R. Beeke's account of assurance in Calvin and the Reformed tradition. His book is ominously titled *The Quest for [not: "Gift of"] Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1999). As the subtitle indicates, Beeke contends that the Puritan and *nadere reformatie* doctrine of assurance was a faithful development of the doctrine of Calvin, when, in fact, it was a radical departure from the Reformer's and, indeed, the entire Reformation's doctrine, as the Puritans themselves acknowledged. Playing on the ambiguity of the adjective, "full" ("full assurance"), Beeke assures his Reformed readers that the Puritan and *nadere reformatie* doctrine of assurance can be harmonized with the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, that "true faith ... is ... a hearty trust which the Holy Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, *but to me also*, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God," etc. (Q. & A. 21). In fact, the Puritan and *nadere reformatie* doctrine flatly contradicts the *Catechism*. Regarding the fundamental issue, whether assurance is an aspect of the essence of faith (what faith *is*) or merely a possible "fruit" of faith (for a few favoured saints after years of agonizing, laborious "quest" for

The rest of the members, in the bondage of the Puritan doctrine of assurance, abstain, lacking assurance of salvation. All too believable is the rest of the report: The minister of the congregation recently issued a warning against too great liberty in the congregation in coming to the Lord's table.⁶

There are also Presbyterian churches in Scotland that suffer from the same dread malady.

Many persons, publicly professing faith in Christ and living regular lives of obedience to the law in love for God, live all their life doubting whether they are loved by God and saved, and die in the terror of the real possibility of being damned.

The Puritan doctrine of assurance was not that of the Reform-

assurance), Dr. Beeke hunts with the hounds and runs with the hares. Treating Calvin (and the Reformation), Beeke acknowledges that "it [i.e., faith] possesses assurance in its very nature. Assurance, certainty, trust—such is the essence of faith" (p. 38). Summing up, however, and expressing the Puritan and *nadere reformatie* thinking on assurance (which is his own thinking), Beeke tells us that "full assurance of personal salvation constitutes the well-being or fruit of faith rather than the essence of faith" (p. 276). Assurance now is a "goal, duty, and desire" (p. 275). The injurious thrust of *The Quest for Full Assurance* is a wholehearted defense and promotion of the Puritan and *nadere reformatie* doctrine of assurance (which robs many of the comfort of the gospel and drives them to doubt and despair) as though it were the teaching of Calvin, the Reformation and the confessions (which emphatically it is not). Stoeffler affirms and demonstrates the influence of Puritanism on the *nadere reformatie*: "Reformed Pietism on the Continent was heavily indebted to the Puritans" (F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965], p. 118).⁶ Ironically, it was a Puritan theologian who exposed the gross wickedness of the Reformed preachers who are responsible for keeping adult members of their congregation from the Lord's Supper: "[Satan] discourages them [i.e., church members] from duty by suggesting to them their unworthiness . . . By this temptation, the devil takes many off from coming to the Lord's table. Oh, says he [through ministers devoted to the discouraging of the saints], this is a solemn ordinance, and requires much holiness: how darest thou so unworthily come? you will eat and drink unworthily. Thus, as Saul kept the people from eating honey, so the devil by this temptation, scares many from this ordinance, which is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb" (Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979], p. 592).

ers. This is freely admitted by Reformed theologians who defend the Puritan doctrine of assurance. The Presbyterian theologian William Cunningham condemns the teaching of Calvin and all the other Reformers on assurance as “certainly exaggerated and erroneous.”⁷ Calvin’s doctrine of assurance and its radical difference from that of the Puritans are expressed in his definition of faith:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.⁸

For Calvin, all the Reformers and the Reformation of the church in the sixteenth century, faith *is* assurance of salvation, faith *essentially* is assurance: “Faith [is] a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us.” Assurance, therefore, is the gift of God by the Holy Spirit to everyone to whom God gives faith. The Spirit works assurance in everyone in whom He works faith, and He works assurance in and with the working of faith. Of vital im-

⁷ William Cunningham, “The Reformers and the Doctrine of Assurance,” in *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1967), p. 118.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.2.7. Contrary to the foolish dodge of Puritanism, the “further reformation,” Cunningham and others, that Calvin (and the entire Reformation) defined faith only as faith existed in Europe at the extraordinary time of the Reformation, this, namely, knowledgeable (full) assurance of one’s own personal salvation, is what faith is always and everywhere—at the time of the Reformation in Europe, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, in seventeenth-century England and the Netherlands, and in twenty-first century Scotland and North America. Of Calvin’s definition of faith, Herman Bavinck judges that it is “correct as well as complete.” Indeed, “no more beautiful definition is conceivable than that faith is a firm and certain knowledge of the mercy that God has shown us in Christ. Essentially, what else is Christian faith but the assurance ... that ‘the eternal Faith [sic; should be “Father”] of our Lord Jesus Christ ... is our God and Father because of Christ His Son’” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008], p. 128).

portance in Calvin's definition, in view of the separation of faith and assurance by the Puritans and the promoters of the *nadere reformatie*, past and present, is Calvin's deliberate identification of the sealing by the Spirit, which refers to the Spirit's assuring the child of God of his salvation, as the giving of faith itself. The Holy Spirit seals the believer, not years after giving him faith, if at all in this life, as was the doctrine of the Puritans, but *when He gives him faith*.

With the entire Reformation, Calvin taught that the fatherly love of God for all His children dear expresses itself by giving all of them, young and old, hoary-headed saints and new converts, the assurance of His love for them.

Not only did Calvin and the entire Reformation affirm that the gospel of grace assures all believers of God's love and their salvation, this assurance of God's people was one of the main purposes of the Reformation. The necessity of the Reformation was Rome's holding the people in the bondage of doubt concerning their salvation. Calvin stated this in his great treatise, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church" (1544):

Lastly, there was another most pestilential error, which not only occupied the minds of men, but was regarded as one of the principal articles of faith, of which it was impious to doubt, viz., that believers ought to be perpetually in suspense and uncertainty as to their interest in the divine favour. By this suggestion of the devil, the power of faith was completely extinguished, the benefits of Christ's purchase destroyed, and the salvation of men overthrown. For, as Paul declares, that faith only is Christian faith which inspires our hearts with confidence, and emboldens us to appear in the presence of God (Rom. 5:2). On no other view could his doctrine in another passage be maintained, viz., that "we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).⁹

⁹ John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church, Presented to the Impe-

Those churches in which the majority of the members, often the large majority of members, *professing faith*, languish year after year in doubt of their salvation, under the influence of the theology of Puritanism and the *nadere reformatie*, are not furthering the Reformation. They are not even *continuing* the Reformation. On the contrary, their gospel, which does not work assurance but doubt, is a radical deviation from the gospel of the Reformation. In the vitally important matter of the experience of salvation, about which the disciples of the Puritans are always boasting, their miserable people do not differ from the doubting hordes of Rome. Those churches *need* the Reformation and its gospel of assurance.

As for the testimony of the Reformed confessions concerning assurance, God's gift of it to all His children and the enjoyment of it by every believer, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is representative. Question and Answer 1 has every believer confess that he possesses and enjoys the only comfort in life and death, knowing with certainty that he belongs to Jesus Christ, his faithful Savior. The believer concludes, "Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life."

Question and Answer 53 make assurance the normal work of the Spirit in His saving of every elect child of God:

What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

... that he is also given unto me, makes me by a true faith partaker of Christ and all his benefits, comforts me, and shall abide with me forever.

In flat contradiction of Brooks, the Puritans and the *nadere reformatie*, that "it is one thing for me to have faith, and another thing for me to know that I have faith,"¹⁰ the Reformed catechism

rial Diet of Spire, A.D. 1544, in the Name of All Who Wish Christ to Reign," in *Calvin's Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), p. 136.

¹⁰ Brooks, *Works*, p. 316.

teaches that the gift of true faith includes sure knowledge that one has faith, certainty that one is partaker of Christ and all His benefits, the comfort that one belongs to Christ, the confidence of preservation and the hope of everlasting life.

This is assurance! This is assurance of one's own personal salvation, now and everlastingly!

Assurance, an Indispensable Work of the Spirit

It is an important aspect of the gospel that God not only wills to save all His chosen people but also wills that all of them be assured of their salvation. Contrary to the Puritan Thomas Brooks, it is one and the same mercy for God to love the soul and to assure the beloved soul of His love. To say it differently, the same mercy that loves His children moves God to cause them to know His love for them and to know it with certainty.

Willing our assurance, God gives us assurance. He gives this precious grace as a free gift. Assurance is not our own work, our own achievement by our own hard efforts. Neither is assurance bestowed in recognition of the superior spirituality by which a few children distinguish themselves from the rest of the congregation.

God gives us assurance of salvation *with the gift of salvation itself*. Assurance of salvation is simply an aspect of salvation and not the least aspect. Assurance is the "experience" of salvation, just as certainty that I am physically alive is the experience of physical life, or certainty that I am the son of my parents is the experience of my sonship, or confidence that I am the husband of this woman is the experience of marriage.

Assurance of salvation, therefore, is the expected, normal spiritual condition and state of mind and heart of every regenerated, believing child of God. Assurance is not unusual, extraordinary or remarkable in the congregation of believers and their children.

To be sure, assurance is wonderful and dear. That I should be assured of eternal life? That I should be able to cry, "Abba, Father,"

as Romans 8:15 expresses our assurance? That I should be as certain that I belong to Christ as I am certain that I belong to my wife? This certainty is cause for daily amazement and gratitude.

But this grace is not restricted to a few, specially-favoured Christians, mostly old. In the church of God, where the sound doctrine of the gospel is purely preached and discipline is administered, there is not a small group of elite members, set apart from the rest of the congregation and exalted on the spiritual pedestal of sitting at the Lord's Table, by virtue of their distinguishing themselves by obtaining assurance through their hard labours. It is normal that a believer have assurance. Every believer can have, may have and ought to have assurance. When his spiritual condition is healthy, every believer does have assurance. It is possible that a believer lacks assurance for awhile but this is the exception. Lack of assurance by a believer is an abnormality, a spiritual disease—a *culpable* disease—for which there is a remedy.

God gives assurance as the peculiar work of the Spirit of Christ. The Father elected; the Son redeemed; the Spirit assures. To assure us sinners, the other Comforter is necessary (John 14:16).

Biblical Doctrine: Sealing

We learn the truth about assurance especially from three passages, or kinds of passages, of Scripture. The first is those texts that teach the sealing work of the Spirit. Several texts teach that the Spirit seals the believer, including II Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:13-14 and Ephesians 4:30. Ephesians 1:13-14 is the most complete teaching, as it is the most important in the controversy over assurance.

In whom [i.e., Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The passage teaches that those who believe in Christ, according to God's eternal predestination, are sealed. Sealing is a work of grace within those who trust in Christ that makes them sure and certain.

The question is, In what sense? Are they sealed *objectively*, as though God does something in them that guarantees that they will persevere in faith and holiness unto everlasting life? Or, are they sealed *subjectively*, as though God works in them a conscious certainty that they are saved and shall forever be saved, that is, as though God gives them personal assurance of salvation?

The latter is the meaning: sealing is God's work in those who trust in Christ of assuring them; sealing is a work of God in their consciousness. That this is the meaning of the sealing is evident from the fact that sealing in the text follows hearing the Word and believing in Christ, which are conscious spiritual activities.

Besides, Scripture knows of no special work of God following our believing that uniquely establishes that we will persevere in faith and holiness unto eternal life. Our salvation is objectively sure in God's eternal purpose of election: "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (II Tim. 2:19). With regard to the permanency of the work of grace in us, this is certain already in regeneration, which precedes our hearing the Word and believing. If God begins the work of salvation in one, He will finish and perfect it. There simply is no need or place for a work of grace following our believing that guarantees that God will not abandon the work of salvation He has begun. What follows hearing and believing is assurance of salvation in the soul of the one who hears and believes.

Not only is the Spirit the one who accomplishes the sealing but He Himself is the seal in one who hears and believes. The Authorized Version's translation of Ephesians 1:13 correctly gives the sense of the text: "*with* that holy Spirit of promise." That the Spirit Himself is the seal is indicated by the related statement that immediately follows: "which [i.e., the Holy Spirit] is the ear-

ness of our inheritance” (v. 14). This is confirmed by Ephesians 4:30, the literal translation of which text is, “in whom [i.e., the Holy Spirit of God] ye were sealed.” The sphere in which the sealing took place was the Holy Spirit Himself.¹¹

The Spirit Himself in the one who hears the Word of God and believes in Christ *is* the assurance of salvation to the believer, just as the presence of the loving mother holding her child in her arms *is* the assurance to the child that she is the beloved child of that mother.

How mistaken, how impossible, the doctrine that the Spirit dwells in many, if not most, of the children of God, while they go on, year after year, lacking the sealing, that is, assurance of salvation! As though it is possible, indeed normal, that people have the Comforter, but no comfort!

Sealed, When and How?

When and how the believer is sealed with the Spirit is the question.

Many of the Puritans and certain of their contemporary disciples, agreeing that sealing is the assuring of the sealed of their salvation, contend that the sealing is a work of the Spirit that follows faith in Christ in time, often after many years. Therefore, it is common, if not the norm, they insist, that believers lack assurance of salvation.

With reference to sealing, or witnessing, as the Spirit’s work of assuring the believer of his salvation, Thomas Brooks wrote:

Though the Spirit be a witnessing [i.e., sealing] Spirit, *yet he doth not always witness [i.e., seal] to believers their adoption, their interest in Christ, etc.* There is a mighty difference between the working of the Spirit and the wit-

¹¹ The Authorized Version translates Ephesians 4:30, “*whereby* ye are sealed,” expressing that the Spirit is the divine means of sealing, which is true but not the precise thought of the text. The original Greek is *en hoo*.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

ness of the Spirit. There are oftentimes many glorious and efficacious works of the Spirit, as faith, love, repentance, holiness, etc., where there is not the witness of the Spirit (Isaiah 50:10) ... Though the Spirit of the Lord be a witnessing and a sealing Spirit, yet he doth not always witness and seal up the love and favour of the Father to believers' souls ...¹²

Thomas Goodwin, whom J. I. Packer praises highly as the best of the Puritan exegetes of Paul and whose doctrine of assurance, according to Packer, “represent[s] the main current of Puritan thinking,”¹³ is clear and emphatic that the sealing with the Spirit taught in Ephesians 1:13-14 is a work of the Spirit distinct from faith and a work following the gift of faith in time. The necessary implication of Goodwin’s doctrine of sealing is that it is reserved only for a very few believers: “*The work of faith is a distinct thing, a different thing, from the work of assurance.*”¹⁴ Basic to Goodwin’s insistence on this difference between faith and assurance, or the sealing with the Spirit, is Goodwin’s denial that faith in Jesus Christ is assurance of salvation. Faith in Christ is merely a confidence that the promises of the gospel are true. It is not a confidence that the promises of the gospel are true *for oneself*. Faith in Jesus Christ, faith in Jesus Christ from the heart, leaves the believer doubting whether he himself is the beloved object of the promises of the gospel. Writes Goodwin,

It must be granted, that in all faith there is an assurance; but of what? Of the truth of the promise ... But the question here [i.e., concerning being sealed with the Spirit] is about the assurance of a man’s interest; that is not always in faith.¹⁵

¹² Brooks, *Works*, p. 520; italics Brooks’.

¹³ Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, pp. 179-180.

¹⁴ Thomas Goodwin, “An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians,” in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861), p. 235; italics Goodwin’s.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The sealing with the Spirit follows the Spirit's work of giving faith to the elect child of God in time. Goodwin suggests that this is usually a long time, for the believer must wait and work for the sealing that gives assurance:

You that believe are to wait for this promise [of being sealed] ... Serve your God day and night faithfully, walk humbly; there is a promise of the Holy Ghost to come and fill your hearts with joy unspeakable and glorious, to seal you up to the day of redemption. Sue this promise out, wait for it, rest not in believing only, rest not in assurance by graces only; there is a further assurance to be had.¹⁶

The line, "Rest not in believing only," incredible in one who claimed to be furthering the Reformation, is fatal to the Puritan doctrine of assurance and damning.

Although Goodwin does not expressly say so, he puts assurance—personal assurance that one (a believer in Jesus Christ!) is saved—forever out of the reach of most believing children of God. For the sealing with the Spirit, that gives assurance, is an immediate, extraordinary, mystical experience:

There is an immediate assurance of the Holy Ghost [i.e., the sealing with the Spirit], by a heavenly and divine light, of a divine authority, which the Holy Ghost sheddeth in a man's heart, (not having relation to grace wrought, or anything in a man's self,) whereby he sealet him up to the day of redemption ... one way [of assurance] is *discursive*; a man gathereth that God loveth him from the effects ...

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 248. Elsewhere, Goodwin acknowledges that many who finally obtain assurance do so only after many years. To the statement "that though assurance may be vouchsafed to some of lower rank than apostles, yet it is to such as are of long standing Christianity, who after long experience have hope and assurance begotten in them," Goodwin responds, "I grant it, that many not till then have had it" (*The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith* [Marshallton, DL: National Foundation for Christian Education, n.d.], p. 357).

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But the other [i.e., the sealing with the Spirit] is *intuitive*, as the angels are said to know things ... There is light that cometh and overpowereth a man's soul, and assureth him that God is his, and he is God's, and that God loveth him from everlasting.¹⁷

This is the unbiblical, “sickly” mysticism of the Puritan doctrine of assurance. This mysticism is fundamental to the Puritan doctrine. The dependency for assurance upon strange experiences by the people in churches committed to the Puritan doctrine of assurance is not an unfortunate aberration. It is the inevitable, necessary effect and fruit of the Puritan doctrine. The result is two-fold. First, assurance or the sealing with the Spirit is forever beyond the reach of most of the people. They never experience the “light that cometh and overpowereth a man's soul.” They live and die in the dreadful misery of doubt—doubt that God loves them, doubt that Christ died for them, doubt that their sins are forgiven, doubt that they will go to heaven. The Puritan divines, past and present, will answer to God for the souls of these people.

The second result is that those elite few who suppose they have received the light that overpowers a man's soul and therefore are certain that they are saved lean on a broken reed. Their state is worse than that of those who, true to the Puritan doctrine, honestly doubt. For they deliberately “rest not in believing only.” God does not assure His children of His love by immediate, mystical experiences. He assures His children by “believing only.”

With an honesty that shames those who like to leave the impres-

¹⁷ Goodwin, *Works*, p. 233. The Puritan Richard Sibbes' doctrine of sealing is the same as that of Brooks and Goodwin. “Sealing is not the work of faith, but it is a work of the Spirit upon faith, assuring the soul of its estate in grace.” Sealing is an experience of “spiritual ravishings,” “the extraordinary feeling of the Spirit,” “superadded” to justification by faith and to sanctification. Many of God's believing children lack assurance, not having been sealed with the Spirit. Therefore, Sibbes exhorts them to “labour ... for this seal, to have our souls stamped with the Spirit of God” (“An Exposition of 2nd Corinthians Chapter One,” in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 3 [Edinburgh: Banner, 1981], pp. 442-484).

sion that the Puritan doctrine of assurance is faithful to Calvin, Goodwin frankly admits that his and the Puritans' doctrine of assurance differs radically from that of Calvin. "Calvin," says Goodwin correctly, taught that the sealing with the Spirit is "the work of faith itself ... in believing, in the work of faith, the Holy Ghost did seal up the truth of the promise unto their hearts." That is, Calvin taught that when a man believes the gospel, the Spirit seals him in such a way that "there is an assurance of a man's interest in those promises [of the gospel]." Goodwin rejects this doctrine of assurance. Calvin's teaching is "What it [i.e., the doctrine of assurance] is not."¹⁸

The influential Welsh preacher D. M. Lloyd-Jones promotes the Puritan doctrine of sealing and thus the Puritan doctrine of assurance. Lloyd-Jones rightly understands the sealing with the Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14 as a work of the Spirit that "authenticates to us the fact that we are the sons of God, truly His people, and heirs, joint-heirs with Christ, of a glorious inheritance," that is, the work of the Spirit assuring the believer of his salvation.¹⁹ But he makes a "sharp distinction between believing (the act of faith) and the sealing of the Spirit ... Sealing with the Spirit does not always happen immediately when a man believes ... There may be a great interval ... it is possible for a person to be a be-

¹⁸ Goodwin, *Works*, p. 228. With this candid and accurate admission by a leading Puritan of the radical difference between Calvin's and the Puritans' doctrines of assurance, compare Joel R. Beeke's assessment: "The Dutch divines [of the *nadere reformatie*] ... did not misread Calvin and the Reformers [on assurance of salvation] but simply applied the teaching of the early Reformers to their own day" (*Quest*, p. 308). Hear Calvin himself commenting on Ephesians 1:13, particularly the sealing with the Spirit: "There are two operations of the Spirit in faith, corresponding to the two parts of which faith consists, as it enlightens, and as it establishes the mind. The commencement of faith is knowledge: the completion of it is a firm and steady conviction, which admits of no opposing doubt ... No wonder, then, if Paul should declare that the Ephesians, who received by faith the truth of the gospel, were confirmed in that faith by the seal of the Holy Spirit" (*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957], p. 208).

¹⁹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 266.

liever and ... still not know the sealing of the Spirit.”²⁰ “Sealing with the Spirit’ is something subsequent to believing, something additional to believing.”²¹

This something “is an experience; it is something experimental,” indeed, “the highest, the greatest experience which a Christian can have in this world ... an overwhelming experience.”²² According to Lloyd-Jones, this “experience” is the most desirable feeling that a Christian can have, short of heaven. The truth of sealing in Ephesians 1:13-14, in Lloyd-Jones’ judgment, is “one of the most vital statements for us as Christian people at the present time.” The failure to understand sealing (as Lloyd-Jones explains it) has been the “chief trouble [with the Christian church] for a number of years.”²³

Since the experience is the Spirit’s assurance of the believer that he is saved, it is extremely precious. But Lloyd-Jones does not tell us what this experience consists of. He admits that he cannot. The best he can do is describe the experience in the words of Goodwin, Wesley, Flavel, Edwards, Moody, Evans and Whitefield: overpowering light; overwhelming experience; ravishing tastes of heavenly joys; “ecstasy”; an extraordinary view of the glory of Christ; a flood of tears and weeping aloud; such an experience of God’s love as caused Moody to ask God “to stay His hand”²⁴; relief of mind; rejoicing in God.²⁵

Because the all-important sealing follows faith in time, Lloyd-Jones too sets all believers seeking for sealing, that is, assurance

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 267, 270, 275.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁴ It is ominous for Lloyd-Jones’ sealing that God gives it to Pelagians such as D. L. Moody. If the Spirit of truth had anything at all to give to a Pelagian like D. L. Moody by direct revelation, it would have been this warning, “Moody, repent of your sin of teaching the false gospel of salvation by the will of man, which false gospel makes assurance of salvation utterly impossible.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-278, 286.

of salvation consisting of an indescribable experience: “Are we to seek this sealing? My answer, without any hesitation, is that we should most certainly do so.”²⁶

The people must seek the sealing by working, and working hard: “Prepare the way ... mortify ... cleanse yourselves ... put into practice the virtues ... labour at it ... pray for this blessing ... be desperate for it.”²⁷

Alas, however, “many Christian people have only known this just before their death.”²⁸ Thus, like a good Puritan (but a very bad pastor and theologian), Lloyd-Jones shuts up many Christians to an entire lifetime of doubt whether they are saved. And since the sealing is an undefined and indescribable “experience,” Lloyd-Jones sends all believers out on an uncertain, perilous quest—the quest for the will-o’-the-wisp of a feeling that they are loved by God.²⁹

The translation of Ephesians 1:13 in the Authorized Version might lend credence to the erroneous and injurious doctrine that the sealing of the Spirit and, therefore, assurance of salvation follows the gift of faith in time, often after many years of working for assurance. The Authorized Version unfortunately inserts into the text the word “after”: “in whom also *after* that ye believed, ye were sealed.” In the original Greek is neither the word nor the notion, “after.” Literally, the text reads this way: “in whom [i.e., Christ] ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation—in whom [i.e., Christ] also having believed, ye were sealed,” etc.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 294-300.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

²⁹ The pathetic spiritual and emotional “desperation” of disciples of Lloyd-Jones and the Puritans to get the “overwhelming experience” that will signify their assurance of salvation, which they “desperately” lack, especially on their death-bed, is the direct result of Lloyd-Jones’ teaching: “Be desperate for it.” Lloyd-Jones will answer for this “desperation.” Desperation is a “loss of hope and surrender to despair” or “a state of hopelessness leading to rashness.”

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The thought of the text is this: In the past (and for the Ephesian believers the not too distant past³⁰) the elect saints at Ephesus heard the word of the truth, believed in Christ, and were sealed. These three things happened in this order but all at the same time. The doctrine of the text is that when one believes in Christ, having heard the gospel, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit *at this time and under these circumstances*. Sealing, that is, the assurance of salvation, *accompanies* believing in Christ, as an integral element of the believing. Sealing follows believing in the order of the text as the effect of believing, just as believing is the effect of the hearing of the gospel, but as the effect that is simultaneous with the believing.³¹

What the apostle adds in Ephesians 1:14 about the “earnest” is related. An “earnest” is both the foretaste of something and the

³⁰ I mention this in order to call attention to the fact that within a few years of the conversion of the Ephesians the apostle could say to them that all who believed the gospel had been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Altogether apart from the fact that the sealing was contemporaneous with the hearing and believing, the apostle, writing a very short time after the Ephesians’ hearing and believing the gospel, was confident, indeed affirmed, that all the believers had been sealed, that is, received the assurance of their salvation. He did not labour under the misapprehension that for many of the Ephesian believers many years must pass before they obtained sealing. Had a Puritan written the Ephesian church he would have said, “In whom ye also, having heard the Word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom, having believed, you should now strive and work for many years to be sealed with the Holy Spirit, and here are the fifteen steps of striving by which perhaps you may obtain the sealing before you die. But then again you may not.”

³¹ “The relation between [‘having believed’ and ‘ye were sealed’ in Ephesians 1:13] is not to be conceived as following in temporal order. There may be a logical order here; but as far as time is concerned, the [‘having believed’] and the [‘ye were sealed’] must undoubtedly be conceived as contemporaneous ... As soon as they believed in Christ, it stands to reason that they also have the Holy Spirit; and as soon as they have the Holy Spirit, they are sealed” (Herman Hoeksema, unpublished exegesis of Ephesians 1 and 2, privately bound by the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan as “Chapel Talks on Ephesians 1 and 2,” p. 28). Also Herman Bavinck taught that the sealing work of the Spirit mentioned in Ephesians 1:13 occurs at the “moment” of believing: “When those who are preordained by God are called in time ... then at that very moment

guarantee of the future, complete possession of that thing. An example of an earnest from earthly life might be the down-payment one receives on a certain property. The down-payment is both the first part of the full payment and the guarantee that the full payment will be made. A better example, doing justice both to the notion of foretaste and to the spiritual reality, might be the kiss of a woman who engages to become a man's wife. The kiss is both the foretaste of the coming delights of marriage and the woman's guarantee that she will marry the man.

In Ephesians 1:14, the earnest is foretaste and pledge of the inheritance of all those who believe in Christ. It is perfect salvation, body and soul, in the new world. As foretaste and pledge, the earnest is assurance of salvation. The earnest is the Spirit Himself. And we have the Spirit as earnest in our consciousness, that is, we have assurance (such is the relation of v. 14 to v. 13), *when we believe in Christ*, not years or even months later. We have the Spirit as earnest *by believing in Christ*, not some other way, for example, by working, striving, labouring, weeping and what not more spiritual acts.

Witnessing With Our Spirit

The second passage that teaches the truth about assurance is the most profound text on assurance in all of Scripture, Romans 8:15-16:

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

The entire eighth chapter of Romans is one glorious confession of, and exultation in, assurance. It is put in the mouth of every

they obtain faith and by that faith they receive justification and the adoption as children (Rom. 3:22, 24; 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:26; 4:5; etc.), with the assurance of sonship by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6; II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30)" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 50).

believing child of God. Romans 8 utterly demolishes the Puritan notion that many believers, probably most believers, live for years in doubt of their salvation and that this is the will of God for many of His dear children. Written to Roman believers and their children, only recently converted from heathendom, the eighth chapter of Romans teaches the truth that all believers not only have salvation but also have the assurance of salvation.

We all groan, not in doubt of our salvation, but in ardent longing for the resurrection of our body (v. 23). This is assurance.

We all know that all things are working together for our good (v. 28). This is assurance.

We all are certain that God is for us and that nothing can be against us (v. 31). This is assurance.

We all are sure that God delivered His Son up for us (v. 32). "Us" includes me. This is assurance.

In that marvellous exclamation of assurance consisting of verses 35-39, every believer declares his or her certainty not only that he or she is loved by Christ and God but also, and especially, that nothing can separate him or her from the love of God. Indeed, every believer exclaims that in all the troubles of life, which are many and severe, he or she is "more than conquerors." This is assurance.

The entire wretched Puritan doctrine of assurance is smashed to pieces on Romans 8:35-39. Would to God the contemporary disciples of the Puritans would demolish this doctrine, forthrightly, clearly, unambiguously and boldly, in their preaching, teaching and writing, thus delivering thousands of doubting, despairing members of their churches from their bondage, in the mercy of God.

The sinful doubt of everyone who believes the gospel of grace from the heart must and will be destroyed by the sound preaching of Romans 8.

Romans 8:15-16 is the profound explanation of the assurance of the elect believer. Verse 15 affirms the assurance of the believer: he cries, "Abba, Father." "Abba" is the Hebrew or Aramaic word meaning "father." "Father," in the passage, translates the Greek word for father.

"Abba, Father" expresses certainty of salvation. One who knows God as his father is sure of the love of God for him in Jesus Christ. Of course, one who calls God his father is sure of his own sonship by the adoption of the cross.

"Abba, Father" is expressive of universal certainty. All believers, whether Jew or Gentile, know God as their father. Besides, Romans 8 attributes this calling upon God as father not merely to a few super-saints like the apostle himself (although he would never distinguish himself from the rest of the church as a super-saint) but to all who believe the gospel of grace from the heart: "*We cry.*"

"Abba, Father" is a strong affirmation of certainty. The believer is doubly sure that God is his father: "Father, Father." The believer exclaims God's fatherhood of him and, therefore, also his own sonship, loudly, as one does when he is sure of something: "*We cry.*"

One thing explains this assurance of believers. Rather, one *person*, one person *within them*, explains this assurance. The explanation of the believers' assurance is that "ye have received the Spirit of adoption." By Him, we cry, "Abba, Father," for this Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Verse 16 is not teaching that the Spirit's witness is *to* our spirit, as though there is one witness—the witness of the believer's spirit as prompted by the Holy Spirit. Rather, within the believer there are two distinct witnesses, testifying to the believer that he is a son, or she, a daughter, of God. One witness to the believer is his own human spirit. As the believer hears the gospel of God's grace in Christ and believes on Christ as presented by that gospel, his

own spirit witnesses powerfully to him that he is a child of God, adopted by God's grace in the cross of God's own eternal Son in human flesh. This witness by his own spirit is worked by the Holy Spirit.

But this witness, powerful as it is, and prompted by the Holy Spirit, is not enough for assurance. One's own spirit may be doubted. It is, after all, a very human spirit. Assurance of salvation on the part of a sinful, weak human does not come easy. Because of the importance of assurance, it may not rest on flimsy or assailable grounds.

There must be two witnesses and one of them must be God Himself.

"With" the witness of the spirit of the believer is another witness, testifying the same thing. The second witness to the sonship of the believer is the Spirit. Not only does the Spirit move the spirit of the believer to witness to the believer. He Himself also, within the believer, speaks to the believer, in a wonderful, mysterious (though not immediate) and convincing way, "You are a child of God!"

This is the end of doubt. In the mouth of two witnesses, the word of the gospel of sonship is established in the soul of the believer. This is assurance of salvation. God the Spirit has spoken in the consciousness of the adopted child. The living word of God banishes doubt. The witness of God Himself is conclusive.

Justified by Faith

The third group of passages establishing the truth of assurance are all those texts that teach justification by faith. One's first reaction to this assertion might be that appeal to the biblical teaching of justification by faith has nothing to do with assurance of salvation. But this reaction would be mistaken. Justification implies the assurance of salvation on the part of the one who is justified by his faith. Inasmuch as justification is the certain fruit and ben-

efit of the activity of believing in Jesus Christ, assurance is of the essence of faith.

Justification by faith is the forgiveness of the believing sinner's sins by means of the sinner's trusting in Jesus Christ with the faith worked in him by the Holy Spirit. Justification is the forgiveness of sins *in the sinner's consciousness*, as the Reformation expressed with the phrase, "in the forum of the consciousness." In the act of justification, God the judge declares in the consciousness of the sinner, "I cancel the debt of the guilt of your sins! I reckon to your account the obedience of My Son Jesus Christ!"

In this verdict, God announces the judicial ground: "My Son, your redeemer, obeyed in your stead all His life and died as your substitute on the cross." There is no forgiveness except on the basis of the obedience of Christ in the forgiven sinner's stead. The *Belgic Confession* defines justification as "the remission of our sins *for Jesus Christ's sake*."³² Every believer seeks justification on the basis of the death of Christ, as the *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches in its explanation of the fifth petition of the model prayer, "Forgive us our debts": "Be pleased, *for the sake of Christ's blood*, not to impute to us, miserable sinners, our manifold transgressions, nor the evil which still always cleaves to us."³³

The verdict of justification, *in the sinner's consciousness*, therefore, includes, as part of the verdict, indeed, as the very foundation of the verdict, that Christ died for the sinner whose sins are pardoned.

This means that in the verdict of justification itself is the assurance that God loves the sinner whose sins He forgives, the assurance of such love as gave God's only begotten Son for this sinner.

Still more, because all Scripture proclaims that Christ, His cross and the blessing of forgiveness flow from God's eternal love for certain sinners in the decree of election, the verdict of justification

³² *Belgic Confession* 23.

³³ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 126.

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assures the sinner whose sins are forgiven that God has loved him with an eternal love.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him (Rom. 5:8-9).

Assurance of the love of God for the justified sinner, on the part of every justified sinner, is the meaning of Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” Having peace with God is assurance, that is, conscious certainty, that the sinner is reconciled to God, because God has redeemed him in love for him.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Jesus teaches that the publican “went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:14). The meaning is that the publican returned home leaping and dancing, with gladness on his face and peace and joy in his soul, conscious and assured that God pardoned his sins in mercy for the sake of the sacrifice of the Lamb on his behalf. This was assurance of salvation. This was assurance of the love of God for him. This was assurance of salvation and the love of God as an essential element of justification by faith.

It is no more possible for a sinner to be justified by faith without assurance of justification, salvation and the love of God than it would be possible for a condemned criminal to depart the courtroom in which he had just heard a favourably disposed judge acquit him without knowing that he was acquitted and that the judge was gracious.

Since every true believer is justified and since assurance of forgiveness, salvation and the love of God is an essential aspect of justification by faith, denial that assurance of salvation belongs to justifying faith is, in fact, the denial of justification by faith—the heart of the gospel of grace.

Nevertheless, the Puritans deny that assurance of salvation is an

element of justification by faith. They deny this simply by denying, as they do, that assurance or certainty of one's own salvation is of the essence of (justifying) faith. They deny this by denying, as they also do, that the Spirit gives assurance in and with the gift of (justifying) faith. They also deny that assurance is part of justifying faith, *explicitly*.

The first conclusion we will begin with and premise as a foundation to what follows, is, that that act of faith which justifies a sinner, is distinct from knowing he hath eternal life, and may therefore be without it, because it doth not necessarily contain prevailing assurance in it. By prevailing assurance, I mean such an assurance as overpowereth doubts and sense to the contrary, so as, in the believer's knowledge, he is able to say, Christ is mine, and my sins are forgiven; such an assurance whereby a man is a conqueror, as Paul speaks, Rom. 8:37, when he expresseth such strong assurance.³⁴

According to Goodwin and the Puritans, the justified sinner is not able to know that his sins are forgiven or to say that Christ is his.

In asserting that justification by faith leaves the justified sinner unable to say, "My sins are forgiven," the Puritans press their determination to deny assurance to believers to the point of absurdity. Justification by faith *is* God's declaration to the sinner, in his consciousness, "Your sins are forgiven." To acknowledge justification by faith ("that act of faith which justifies a sinner") but deny that the justified sinner knows he is justified is not only false doctrine. It is absurd.

One thing is sure: This doctrine is no "furthering" of the Reformation. On the contrary, it is, in fact, a denial of justification by faith as much as is the heresy of Rome and leaves the penitent sinner in exactly the same miserable condition: Doubt!

³⁴ Goodwin, *Object and Acts*, p. 338.

That the Puritan and “further reformation” doctrine of justification is the same as Rome’s in leaving believers in doubt of their forgiveness and salvation and that the Puritan and “further reformation” doctrine is diametrically opposed to Calvin’s (and the entire Reformation’s) teaching are proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, by Calvin’s refutation of the decisions of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent regarding justification.

Trent “inveigh[ed] against what they call The Vain Confidence of Heretics. This consists, according to their definition, in our holding it as certain that our sins are forgiven, and resting in this certainty.”³⁵

Trent condemned the certainty of forgiveness, that is, justification, as the vain confidence of heretics. Puritanism and the “further reformation” do the same. Indeed, their error is worse. Puritanism and the “further reformation” condemn as vain confidence the certainty of forgiveness of *elect believers who are believing the gospel*.

With appeal to Psalm 32, Romans 5:1-5, Ephesians 3:12, Romans 8:37 and James 1:6, Calvin declares that certainty, indeed a *bold* certainty, of forgiveness is the gift of God to all believers and that it is the gift of God with forgiveness as an element of the forgiveness itself. Charging the Roman Catholic theologians with “rob[bing] all consciences of calm placid confidence” by their “leaving it in suspense to whom and when they are forgiven,” Calvin asks, rhetorically,

Where, then, is that boldness of which Paul elsewhere speaks (Eph. 3:12), that access with confidence to the Father through faith in Christ? Not contented with the term confidence, he furnishes us with boldness, which is certainly something more than certainty.³⁶

³⁵ John Calvin, “Acts of the Council of Trent with Antidote,” in *Calvin’s Tracts*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), p. 125. Calvin wrote this “Antidote” in 1547.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

He exposes a fundamental error of Rome, as of Puritanism and the “further reformation,” concerning faith when he adds, “faith is destroyed as soon as certainty is taken away.”³⁷

Rome, Puritanism and the “further reformation” contend that Paul’s claims of assurance of salvation apply only to himself and a few other specially favoured saints and that they had their assurance by “special revelation” or a mystical experience. Calvin denies this contention as a “frivolous quibble”:

[Paul] claims nothing so special for himself as not to share it with all believers, when in their name as much as his own, he boldly exults over death and life, the present and the future [in Romans 8:35-39].³⁸

At Trent, Rome declared, “Neither is it to be asserted that it becomes those who are truly justified to determine with themselves, without any kind of doubt, that they are truly justified.”³⁹ Puritanism agrees, as the quotation of Thomas Goodwin above indicates. Calvin responds, “Paul makes it [i.e., full assurance] the perpetual attendant of faith.”⁴⁰

Calvin recognizes Rome’s “ingenious” ploy of seeming to do justice to the Bible’s teaching of faith’s certainty, all the while maintaining its false doctrine that individual believers are in doubt of their own forgiveness and salvation:

They think ... that they ingeniously obviate all objections when they recommend a general persuasion of the grace of Christ ... [while] they allow none to apply grace to themselves with the firm assurance of faith.⁴¹

Puritanism and the “further reformation” employ the same sub-

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

terfuge when they maintain that believers are certain that Christ forgives sins but uncertain whether Christ forgives their sins.

Calvin scoffs at this worthless certainty. Those who teach it put both certainty and the efficacy of the death of Christ “in the air, so as to be only in confused imagination.” Calvin continues, “Christ is not set before me and others, merely that we may believe him to have been the Redeemer of Abraham, but that every one may appropriate the salvation which he procured.”⁴²

The gravity of the false doctrine concerning assurance of salvation is indicated by Calvin’s blunt statement: “Paul and John recognize none as the children of God but those who know it.”⁴³

One may say that Calvin was wrong about faith, justification and certainty of forgiveness and eternal life. He may not say that Puritanism and the “further reformation” are faithful to Calvin (and the entire Reformation) on these great issues.

And if he says that Calvin was wrong and that Puritanism and the “further reformation” are right, he aligns himself with Rome on some of the most fundamental issues of the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church.

The Assurer

The three outstanding passages on assurance—the sealing passages, Romans 8:15-16 and the passages teaching justification by faith alone—all reveal that it is the Holy Spirit who performs the indispensable work of assurance. Only the Spirit can assure the elect sinner that he is forgiven, saved and a child of God. The Spirit is God and only God can and may assure anyone of salvation. Only God knows who are His. Only God’s testimony is conclusive for the elect sinner. Mere human testimony can and will be doubted. It is the same with personal assurance of salva-

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

tion as it is with the church's assurance that the Bible is the Word of God: assurance is due to, and rests upon, the witness of God the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit itself beareth witness . . . that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

The Spirit is the one who assures of salvation as the Spirit of Christ. Assurance of salvation is possible only in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:13 teaches that the believer is sealed *in Christ* with the Spirit: "*In whom* [i.e., Christ], also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." There is no assurance for the sinner apart from Christ. Working on behalf of Christ and in union with Christ, the Spirit assures as the Spirit of Christ.

But He is the Spirit of Christ *in* the elect sinner. Only one who is *in us*, in our inmost being, can remove our deeply-seated doubt, assure us in the depths of our being and comfort us from within ourselves. No man can reach us where we must hear and be convinced that our sins are forgiven, that Christ died for us, even for us, and that we have God as our Father. But even Jesus Christ Himself outside of ourselves, alongside us, on the pulpit before us or on the couch next to us, cannot assure us. Therefore, He comes to us in the other Comforter, the Breath of God, who penetrates our inmost being, speaking convincingly to our spirit and to us ourselves with our spirit that our sins are forgiven and that we are the children of God. It is the Spirit, within us, by whom "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" by the word of justification, that is, the assurance that God loves us (Rom. 5:5). It is the Spirit, within us, who, by means of the declaration that our sins are forgiven, moves us to cry, "Abba, Father."

How does the Spirit assure the believing child of God?

By the Gospel of Grace

Thus is exposed and condemned the grievous error that is fundamental to the Puritan doctrine of assurance. The Spirit does not assure by Goodwin's overpowering light; Sibbes' "spiritual ravishings" and "extraordinary feeling of the Spirit," "superadded"

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to justification by faith; or Lloyd-Jones' undefined, but suggestive, "greatest experience."

The "mystical syllogism" of the leading Puritan theologians, Brooks, Goodwin and Sibbes, who, according to J. I. Packer "represent the main current of Puritan thinking,"⁴⁴ must be rejected, root and branch, as heretical mysticism and spiritual rubbish.

The "mystical syllogism" is an argument for assurance. For "the main current" of Puritanism it is the decisive argument for assurance. It is the subjective argument of the believer himself who ardently desires assurance of forgiveness and salvation but, under the influence of his Puritan teachers, lacks assurance. The argument goes like this.

Major premise: Assurance of salvation consists of a special, extraordinary spiritual experience, a highly charged, mystical feeling.

Minor premise: I have had such an extraordinary (and rare) experience (by the Spirit).

Conclusion: Therefore, I am assured of salvation.

The argument is false in its entirety.

The major premise is false: assurance of salvation consists of faith in Jesus Christ, which every believer has.

The minor premise is false: the only experience worked by the Spirit in all of God's children is the "ordinary" experience of peace and joy through believing in Jesus Christ.

The conclusion is false: assurance of salvation is solidly based only on the promise of the gospel embraced by a true faith and thus bound by the Spirit upon the believing heart and consciousness.

As false as the premises and conclusion is the whole syllogistic enterprise: The sinner is looking mainly, if not exclusively, with-

⁴⁴ Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, pp. 179-180.

in himself for assurance of salvation, rather than away from his sinful, uncertain self, with its fickle feelings, to Jesus Christ “out there” in the promise of the gospel.

Mysticism’s way to assurance is illusory, deceiving and perilous. Those who desperately seek and work for assurance along the way of mysticism either doom themselves to a life of doubt (because they never can obtain the “overpowering light” or achieve the “greatest experience”), or, if they do finally find the feeling they think they are seeking, consign themselves to perpetual questioning, whether the feeling was genuine (so much depends on the feeling, after all),⁴⁵ or, if they do firmly base their assurance on an experience, subject themselves to God’s condemnation (for He will have assurance of salvation, like salvation itself, come through faith that rests on Jesus Christ as evidently set forth in the Scriptures, and through faith only).

One dreadful effect of the “mystical syllogism” has always been the encouragement of the people who sit under such teaching to seek bizarre, direct revelations from God as evidence that they are saved and to suppose that they have received such revelations. Fred van Lieburg relates a number of these incidents in the lives of eighteenth-century Dutch pietists. One Egbert de Goede languished in doubt of his salvation for years, even though, according to his own confession, he believed in Christ and “was justified.” Only when he heard a voice, “I remember your sins no more,” and the preacher spoke on this very text the following Sunday did Egbert (by this coincidence) have “confirmation of his reconciliation to God.”⁴⁶ Hermanus Hermsen “received a vision in which

⁴⁵ It is a wonder to me that all mystics and “experientialists” do not go stark, raving mad, always seeking a feeling, always trying to maintain a feeling, always basing salvation or assurance on a feeling, and, if they have such a feeling, always secretly fearing that the feeling might not be all it could be or even that the feeling is no genuine operation of the Spirit at all. It is a great mercy of God to our physical and emotional life, as well as to the spiritual state of our soul, that salvation is by faith, not by feeling.

⁴⁶ Fred van Lieburg, *Living for God: Eighteenth-Century Dutch Pietist Autobi-*

I clearly saw our dear Lord Jesus ... It was as if heaven opened,” etc.⁴⁷

Salvation is not by mysticism. Assurance is not a matter of feelings. The Spirit does not work assurance by extraordinary experience.

Rather, the Spirit assures elect believers of their salvation in the same way in which the Spirit saves them, namely, by faith in Jesus Christ, as He is preached in the gospel of the Scripture.

Assurance is a gift of God in Christ to the elect child of God. It is a purely gracious gift. It is as much a gracious gift as is faith or regeneration or the future resurrection of the body. Assurance is not earned or obtained by works. It is not something that believers must strive after for years by heroic spiritual efforts and that only a few make themselves worthy of.

In that grand passage on assurance, Romans 8:15-16, the apostle declares, about all the believers in the congregation in Rome and about their true children, the children of the promise, that “Ye have *received* the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The Spirit is the seal and earnest, that is, the assurer and assurance of salvation, by His witness with the spirits of the believers. Believers do not get or obtain or make themselves worthy of the Spirit by their hard working. Rather, they *receive* Him. They receive Him as God’s free, gracious gift to them for Christ’s sake.

“You do not have assurance of salvation,” Puritanism tells the believer, “at least not by virtue of possessing true, justifying faith.

ography, trans. Annemie Godbehere (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87. The autobiographies of the people influenced by the Puritan doctrine of the “mystical syllogism” are full of such visions, voices, dreams, indescribable experiences of God and providential occurrences supposedly signifying salvation or the certainty of salvation. They are also replete with horrifying visions and dreams of Satan, death and hell, which were thought to have spiritual significance. The people are mostly to be pitied. Their teachers are altogether to be blamed.

You must work hard and long to obtain it and you cannot be sure you will ever get it.”

“You *have* the Spirit of adoption bearing witness with your spirit that you are the child of God, and, therefore, you have assurance of your own salvation,” the gospel of grace assures every believer. “You have *received* it. Therefore, be grateful for it, and live in the comfort of it.”

Puritan theologians and their followers speak anxiously of the “*quest*” for assurance. Reformed orthodoxy thankfully rejoices in the “*gift*” of assurance.

The *Spirit* works assurance, not the believer himself.

The Spirit works assurance by means of faith, as faith hears the gospel, believes on Christ presented in the gospel, and is the instrument of justification. As Ephesians 1:13 teaches, having *heard* the Word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, and having *believed* the gospel and in Jesus Christ presented in the gospel, we were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit binds the Word of God on the regenerated heart of the elect child of God, so that he believes the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ and believes on Christ for forgiveness and eternal life. Precisely in this way—the way of hearing and believing—and at this moment—the moment of hearing and believing—the Spirit witnesses *to* the spirit of the believer that the believer is forgiven and saved, as Romans 8:16 teaches.

Precisely in this same way and at the same moment—the way and moment of hearing and believing the gospel—the Spirit Himself witnesses *with* the believer’s spirit to the believer himself that he is a child of God.

This witness of the Spirit to the believer with the witness of the believer’s own spirit is mysterious. But it is not *mystical*. It is not “immediate” and “direct,” that is, a witness, a voice, a “whisper,” different from, apart from and alongside the Word that the be-

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liever hears from the mouth of the preacher or reads on the pages of Scripture. Rather, the believer hears the witness of the Spirit to him that he is a child of God, as an overwhelming, convincing, not-to-be-doubted, assuring personal certainty of forgiveness and salvation, in and by the gospel that is read and preached.

The Spirit witnesses through the Word of truth, not otherwise (Rom. 1:15-17). Thus, and thus only, does Jehovah God “say unto my soul, I am thy salvation” (Ps. 35:3).

Believers receive the Spirit, also with regard to His sealing work, “by the hearing of faith,” not otherwise (Gal. 3:2).⁴⁸

To seek the witness of the Spirit for assurance elsewhere than in the reading and preaching of the Scriptures is foolish, wicked unbelief.

To suppose that one has heard the Spirit’s “whisper” assuring of salvation in dreams, visions, strange happenings or a voice in the night is delusion or the experience of other spirits.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ What the *Canons of Dordt* confess as Reformed orthodoxy concerning the assurance of preservation to final salvation holds as well for assurance of present salvation: “This assurance, however [which, according to *Canons* V:9, all ‘true believers ... may and do obtain’], is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or *independent of the Word of God*, but springs from faith in God’s promises, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit, that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16); and, lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience, and to perform good works” (*Canons of Dordt* V:10).

⁴⁹ The evil of Puritanism’s “mystical syllogism” with regard to assurance of present salvation is that condemned by the *Canons of Dordt* regarding assurance of future perseverance in salvation: “The Synod rejects the errors of those ... who teach that without a special revelation we can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life. For by this doctrine the sure comfort of the true believers is taken away in this life, and *the doubts of the papist are again introduced into the church*, while the Holy Scriptures constantly deduce this assurance, *not from a special and extraordinary revelation*, but from the marks proper to the children of God and from the constant promises of God” (*Canons of Dordt* V:R:5, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* [Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005], p. 177).

Beyond “Mere Faith”

It was basic to the Puritan error concerning assurance that the leading Puritan theologians taught the Spirit gives assurance by a “direct” and “immediate” work and witness. In his explanation of the sealing with the Spirit, which gives assurance, Thomas Goodwin maintained that this is “an immediate assurance of the Holy Ghost, by a heavenly and divine light.” Goodwin contrasted this work of the Spirit with the Spirit’s work “by ... [the] promises [of the gospel].”⁵⁰ Goodwin went on to describe sealing as “the impress of the immediate seal of the Spirit” and “an immediate witness of the Spirit.”⁵¹

Richard Sibbes wrote that the Spirit gives assurance “immediately.” It is a work of the Spirit “by way of [the Spirit’s] presence ... without ... discourse.”⁵² In sealing some believers, “the Spirit speaks to us by a kind of secret whispering and intimation.”⁵³

It is true that Goodwin thought to safeguard his “immediate witness of the Spirit” against “enthusiasms” by insisting that the “immediate witness” of the Spirit “is not that it is without the Word.” When the Spirit witnesses to some believers that they are the children of God, “it is the Spirit applying the Word to the heart that we speak of.”⁵⁴ Sibbes, likewise, had the Spirit immediately whispering Bible texts to some believers.⁵⁵

But these provisos and caveats did not, in fact, rescue the Puritan doctrine of assurance from mysticism’s teaching of salvation as the soul’s experience of immediate contact with God. For, first, the repeated, emphatic affirmation of assurance as “immediate” and “direct” in the context of an experience of “overpowering

⁵⁰ Goodwin, *Works*, p. 233.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 241.

⁵² Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 5, *Expositions and Treatises from Portions of Several of the Epistles of St. Paul* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1977), p. 440.

⁵³ Sibbes, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 456.

⁵⁴ Goodwin, *Works*, p. 250.

⁵⁵ Sibbes, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 456.

light” and of “secret whisperings of the Spirit” inevitably opened the way both in the teaching of ministers and in the thinking and practice of the people to views and experiences of assurance that quite ignored the preaching of the Word, the promises of the gospel and Bible texts.

More importantly, once Goodwin had distinguished the “immediate testimony” of the Spirit that gives assurance from the testimony of the gospel of the blood of Jesus Christ and the corroborating testimony of the believer’s life of sanctification as a testimony “beyond all these”⁵⁶ and once he had described “immediate assurance” as a “light beyond the light of ordinary faith,”⁵⁷ he had committed himself and his followers to mysticism’s way of salvation, namely, sheer experience, apart from and “beyond” faith in Jesus Christ as presented in the preaching of the promise of the gospel.

In his enthusiasm for the extraordinary work of the Spirit of assuring some believers by an “overpowering light” and an “immediate witness,” Goodwin dared to disparage the faith that believes on the crucified Jesus Christ and trusts His atoning blood as “mere faith.”

When a man that is a believer looks upon Christ, there is a fresh flowing of the blood, and that strengtheneth faith; no man looks upon Christ but cometh off more cheerly; but this is a weak witness. Then cometh in water, that witnesseth too; but yet, I say, if you mark it, here is the Spirit, that differeth from both these, therefore there is a further testimony than either from a man’s sanctification or from mere faith.⁵⁸

“Mere faith!”

This phrase, all by itself, exposes the Puritan doctrine of assurance.

⁵⁶ Goodwin, *Works*, pp. 233-234.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

It betrays as well the fundamental error of the Puritan doctrine: denial that true, justifying, saving faith is assurance of salvation. True, justifying, saving faith is “mere” faith, in Puritan thinking, because the best and greatest aspect of salvation—assurance—comes to a few in some other way.

The actual application and practical fruit of the Puritan doctrine of assurance are indicated, not only in the autobiographical account of the lives of simple Dutch farmers in the eighteenth century, but also in D. M. Lloyd-Jones’ glowing description of the supposed obtaining of assurance by a number of illustrious persons whose experiences are proposed as examples for all believers. Flavel had “ravishing tastes of heavenly joys” as he was out walking. Edwards had a “view . . . of the glory of the Son of God” as he was riding his horse in the woods. Moody was filled with the Spirit “one day in the city of New York.” Christmas Evans had the “experience” as he was “traveling over a mountain-pass.” Where Whitefield was when the “Spirit of God took possession” of his soul, Lloyd-Jones does not inform the reader, but evidently Whitefield was not in church hearing the preaching of the gospel with the congregation. Wesley’s heart was “strangely warmed” at a meeting of a Moravian society.⁵⁹

Not one of these examples for all Christians was assured of his salvation at church on the Lord’s Day under the preaching of the gospel and while using the sacraments. Not one was sealed by the Spirit by means of faith that heard the promise of the gospel and trusted in Christ for forgiveness. Not one was even reading the Bible. Of none of these notable examples of assurance does Lloyd-Jones record that the content of their “experience” was the truth—the doctrinal truth—of Holy Scripture. Rather, their assurance consisted of a vague feeling.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose*, pp. 275-278.

⁶⁰ The Puritan doctrine of assurance is classic mysticism. “The hallmark of mysticism is *subjectivism*, since the center of gravity is shifted from the objective work of God outside us, the acquiring of salvation, to the subjective; not the sure Christ but the sure Christian is the ground upon which one depends. Along

By the Truth

The Spirit *assures* of salvation in the same way that He *saves*: by means of faith that hears and believes the Word of God. For the believer's assurance of salvation, this Word is, and must be, the truth, that is, the gospel of sovereign grace, at the heart of which is the gracious, unconditional promise. According to Ephesians 1:13, the sealing accompanies one's hearing "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." II Corinthians 1:22 affirms that God has sealed us, in the context of the declaration that the promises of God in Christ are "yea, and in him [i.e., Jesus Christ] Amen" (v. 20).

Romans 8:16 intends to teach that the Spirit bears witness with the spirit of the believer, not by means of any religious teaching whatever, not by means of a false gospel of a universal love of God dependent for its saving efficacy upon the will or good works of sinners, but *by the gospel taught in the book of Romans*. This is the gospel of sovereign grace: grace rooted in eternal election; grace merited for elect sinners by a limited, efficacious cross; grace directed to the elect sinner by the unconditional promise; grace irresistibly worked in the elect sinner by the Holy Spirit; and grace that infallibly brings every elect saint to glory. This is the one true gospel of salvation by "God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

In the false gospel of salvation by the willing or running of sinners (Rom. 9:16), there is not, and cannot be, assurance. Every form of the false gospel of conditional salvation, that is, salvation

this line, the Word of God is made to play second fiddle to the inner witness of the Spirit; experience is cut loose from Scripture; many are enthusiasts for the 'inner light'; and in the end it is not the revelation of God that is decisive, but what we experience [Dutch: *bevinden*] in our hearts. From this results also the mistaken conception of faith and of the assurance of faith. With regard to faith, it is dissolved in the activity of trusting, and little remains of the certainty of faith, because everything regarding assurance must take place along a prescribed, long way of many 'spiritual conditions' and many 'experiences'" ("Mysticisme," in F. W. Grosheide, H. H. Landwehr, C. Lindeboom and J. C. Rullmann (eds.) *Christelijke Encyclopaedie*, vol. 4 [Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925], pp. 290-291; the translation of the Dutch is mine).

dependent upon the sinner himself, leaves men fearful, doubting, terrified. The Spirit does not seal or witness by such a message.

The Spirit assures by the Word of God, because He is the Spirit proceeding eternally from the Second Person of the Trinity, the personal Word of God.

The Spirit assures by the gospel of Jesus Christ, because on Pentecost the Spirit became the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit assures by the truth, because, as the Spirit of Christ, He is the Spirit of truth, that is, the Spirit of Scripture, of creeds and catechisms, of sound doctrine, of preaching, of faith that hears and trusts the Word of God.

He is not the Spirit of immediate contact with God, of extraordinary experiences, of saving acts above and beyond “mere faith.”

Because He is the *Holy* Spirit, His assurance of the believer by means of faith is always a work that is accompanied and confirmed by His sanctifying of the believer. “For as many as are led by the Spirit, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Only in the way of a holy life can, and do, believers enjoy the assurance that they are the children of God. The Spirit witnesses with the spirit of the believer as the believer obeys God’s commandments, and *only* as he obeys God’s commandments. The believer has assurance as he walks in holiness of life, and *only* as he walks in holiness of life.

This is the truth of the “practical syllogism.” Holiness is a confirming evidence of salvation to the believer, as good works are an evidence of justification.⁶¹

Whom the Spirit Assures

⁶¹ “The elect, in due time ... attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election ... by observing in themselves ... the infallible fruits of election ... such as a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc.” (*Canons of Dordt* I:12).

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So much is assurance an aspect of salvation itself, that the question really is, "Whom does the Spirit *save*?"

The Spirit assures all of God's elect, believing, sanctified people. He is the seal and earnest to all. He bears witness with their spirit to all the saints. *All* in Ephesus who heard and believed were sealed (Eph. 1:13). *All* in the congregation at Rome who received the Spirit of adoption by believing the gospel of grace were led by the Spirit and had the Spirit's witness with their spirit that they were the children of God (Rom. 8:14-16). *Every* publican who cried out in repentance and faith, "God, be merciful to me [the] sinner," went home justified in his (assured) consciousness (Luke 18:14). Christ taught, indeed, commanded, *all* who pray in faith to address God as "Our Father" (Matt. 6:9).

There may be times of doubt. Some believers struggle with doubt more than do other believers. Some may doubt for some time. One who doubts must not conclude that he or she is an unbeliever, unforgiven, unsaved or even a reprobate, so long as he is troubled by his doubt, struggles with it and seeks deliverance from it in the gospel.

There are spiritual causes of doubt in a believer. He may, for a time, not be hearing the Word and believing, because of indifference or minding earthly things or bitterness toward God. He may, for a time, not be living a holy life, because of worldliness or yielding to some temptation to sin or entrapment by the devil. He may be grieving the Holy Spirit, by hating a brother or sister or discontentment with God's ways with him or fighting the Spirit's assuring work by a determined doubting of his salvation. He may, for a time, be the especial target of the fieriest dart that Satan throws at the soul of one who believes and confesses the truth.

But this spiritual condition of the believer is unusual, abnormal, a weakness, a disease and a severe temptation. From the disease, he must seek to be healed; against the temptation he must fight. Where the gospel of grace is purely, soundly and rightly preached

and where Reformed pastors carry out their pastoral work diligently and wisely, using the gospel of grace as the balm in Gilead, there will not be many who doubt their salvation, nor will the doubt of a few last for many years.⁶²

It is false and pernicious teaching, that assurance is intended by God only for a favoured few of His believing children and that many ought to accept doubt as their portion for many years, perhaps all their life, in the will of God.

O believer, gratefully receive and enjoy assurance as the free gift

⁶² Regarding the possibility of a lack of the experience of “an assured confidence of soul” concerning their own election and salvation in some believers, see the *Canons of Dordt* I:16. The *Canons* do not regard this doubt as common among believers, much less as the norm. The usual and normal experience of the saints is certainty of their own election and salvation: “[Certainty of their own election to glory is] the experience of the saints, who by virtue of the consciousness of their election rejoice with the apostle and praise this favour of God (Eph. 1); who according to Christ’s admonition rejoice with His disciples that their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20); who also place the consciousness of their election over against the fiery darts of the devil, asking: ‘Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?’ (Rom. 8:33)” (*Canons of Dordt* I:R:7, in *The Confessions and the Church Order*, pp. 161-162). Certainty of their own election and salvation is the usual and normal experience of *all* saints, of saints as saints, not of a specially favoured, or especially industrious, severely limited caste of saints. Certainty of their own salvation is the usual and normal experience of young saints as well as old saints; of new converts as well as church members of long standing; of those who are the least holy as well as the holiest in the congregation. The *Canons* affirm this “consciousness” and “certainty” of the saints of their own personal election and salvation as the “fruit” of election itself, against the “error” that denies certainty of one’s own election and salvation “*in this life*,” except for a certainty “which depends on a changeable and uncertain condition.” To deny the certainty of their own election and salvation, “*in this life*,” of many, if not most, believers as long as they live and to teach that those few believers who do obtain certainty do so only after many years of doubt, and then only on the basis of an ineffable “experience” (a highly “changeable and uncertain condition”), are not only to strip faith of half its essence (“a hearty trust”), despoil Jesus Christ of part of His saving work—the *experiential* part (“he also assures me of eternal life”), denigrate the work of the Holy Spirit (He is the Comforter, who “comforts me”), and rob believers of peace (“peace I leave with you”), but also to make election itself ineffective and fruitless: the certainty of election and salvation is the “fruit” of election.

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of the Holy Spirit to you with and by His gift to you of faith in Jesus Christ as preached in the gospel.

Do not doubt that you have a right to assurance. God wills it. Christ earned it for you.

Do not quench the Spirit of assurance in you, by giving yourself over to doubt, as though doubt is the expected, even required, and therefore normal condition of believers.

Do not quench the Spirit of assurance either by listening to Puritan preaching that is forever questioning your assurance, forever challenging your right to assurance, forever sending you on a quest for assurance and forever instilling doubt. The Spirit does not work assurance by means of a gospel of doubt.

Listen to the Spirit's witness in you by the gospel of grace, and to the witness of your own spirit as the Spirit testifies to your spirit, and be certain—*absolutely* certain (which is the only certainty there is).

And cry out, with all believers, young and old, aged saints who have been members of the church all their lives and recent converts, godly parents and covenant children, "Abba, Father!"

Chapter 6

The Holy Spirit and the Church

Prof. Herman Hanko

Scripture: Ephesians 1

Introduction

The doctrine of the relation between the work of the Holy Spirit and the church has been sorely and miserably corrupted. Almost all of it is due to the inroads of Arminianism, which heresy makes the gathering, preservation and defence of the church a matter of man's own doing. The Holy Spirit is, more or less, set aside in the interests of maintaining man's supposed role in this work.

Many indications of this are evident in modern preaching. It is claimed, even by those who call themselves Calvinists, that Christ died for all men, head for head, and the final determination of his membership in the church is left to man's decision. It is said that God, on His part, has done all He is able to do to bring man into the church but God can do only so much. He loves all men, earnestly seeks their salvation, even gives them the grace to make a favourable decision, but does not guarantee that these people will become a part of the church; the decision remains man's choice.

Expressions commonly in use, especially among evangelicals are of this sort: We must go out to win souls to Christ. We must be busy ministering to the lost so that we can persuade men to join with us who labour in the church. And frequently one hears ex-

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pressions like this: “I have accepted Christ as my personal Saviour because I have opened my heart to Jesus.”

A frequent way of speaking of the gathering of the church is the appeal to revivals. God sends revivals and through special outpourings of the Spirit, hundreds or even thousands undergo radical experiences with strange and bizarre conduct, and so come to know Christ. The doctrine of revivalism has no conception of the true work of the Spirit, nor of conversion which the Spirit works.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* sets it all straight for us. In Lord’s Day 21, Question and Answer 54, the *Catechism* asks the question and answers:

What believest thou concerning the “holy catholic church” of Christ?

That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.

We shall follow closely this succinct and beautiful statement of the *Catechism*.

The Holy Spirit in Gathering the Church

The church is not a mass of individuals, a mob, a group of people; it is an organism in which every member has his or her own place so that together the church constitutes what Scripture calls the body of Christ (e.g., I Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16).

The church is such because of eternal election. Before the foundations of the world, God chose for Himself a church in Christ. He determined who would belong to that church and who would not. Scripture speaks of the fact that God has a “book of life” in which are written the names of all the elect (Rev. 13:8; 20:15; 22:19). Scripture also speaks of the names of God’s elect written

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on the palms of God's hands, so that they are ever before His face (Isa. 49:16). God's love for His people is an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), and Ephesians 1:4 makes this truth explicit with the words: "According as he has chosen us in him [i.e., Christ] before the foundation of the world."

That church is chosen *in Christ*. The church does not exist either in eternity or in time apart from Christ. Christ and the church are one, so much so that to say "Christ" is to say "church;" and to say "church" is to say "Christ." The church is elect in Christ, one in Christ, a body in Christ its Head, possessing the life of Christ who lives in her and receiving all things from Christ.

Christ suffered and died for His church when He came into our flesh and lived among us. His purpose was to save His church and unite it to His own blessed body as His own possession. He died for none else in any sense of the word. He loved His own and loved them throughout all His life, death, resurrection, ascension and return in judgment (John 13:1). He Himself said, "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15; cf. vv. 11, 17-18).

I stress this work of Christ, because Scripture informs us that Christ's work was, throughout, the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary because the Holy Spirit came upon her (Luke 1:35). He was publicly ordained to His office of prophet, priest and king when the Spirit descended on Him as a dove at the time of His baptism in the river Jordan (John 1:32). He was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan (Mark 1:12-13). He performed His mighty miracles, including His triumphant casting out of demons, by the Spirit (Isa. 61:1-2; Matt. 12:28). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Christ's sacrifice was through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). And His resurrection from the dead took place by the Spirit of holiness (Rom. 1:4).

The relation of the Holy Spirit to Christ is the basis for the relation of Christ to us by means of the Holy Spirit. The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, chose the church from eternity. The

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Spirit was in Christ from His conception and qualified Him to do His great work of redemption. The Spirit united the human nature with the divine, which divine nature belonged to Christ as well as to the Holy Spirit. The union between the human and the divine natures in Christ was brought about by the Spirit; as the Spirit is the living connection between the First and Second Persons of the Holy Trinity. As such, the Spirit strengthened and upheld Christ in all His work, especially in bearing the wrath of God against our sins.

That same Spirit was given to Christ at His exaltation, as the Spirit of the victorious Christ, and Christ pours Him out upon the church. By the work of the Spirit, therefore, the church is united to Christ and becomes one flesh with Christ. The church lives out of Christ and Christ lives in the church. The *Heidelberg Catechism* expresses it beautifully when it says that eating Christ's body and drinking His blood in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper means that we

become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.¹

Through union with Christ, who possesses human and divine natures, we are, through the work of the Spirit, united to God.

Now in heaven, and having poured out the Spirit, Christ, by that Spirit, gathers the church. He knows who they are, for He knew them from eternity. He died for them and thus they have the right to be saved. He finds them in all places in the world; in dark alleys, in palaces, in government buildings, in offices, in schools, in houses of prostitution, in third-world countries—everywhere. By His Spirit, who searches them out, He brings them into the

¹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 76.

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company of the church of all ages. Three things are implied in this.

First, that church is gathered from every nation, tribe and tongue so that it is truly a catholic church and is the true and only real human race of sovereign and eternal election. It is the church, elect from eternity, the human race of God's purpose, and for which the reprobate are as chaff is to the wheat. It is the church that is God's possession made such by Christ's work. At Christ's direction, the Spirit goes everywhere in this world to search out God's elect, frequently in unexpected places, to bring them into union with Christ and thus into the fellowship of the church.

Second, that church is gathered through the preaching of the gospel. As I have mentioned more than once, the Spirit never works apart from the Word. He directs the church to send men to go to various places of the earth where these elect are to be found. He knows where to send His servants to preach, for He knows where Christ's people are (Acts 16:6-9). Through preaching, the Spirit brings to conversion and faith in Christ. He, as it were, snatches the elect out of the rushing sewer that flows into hell and sets them on the dry and safe bank of heaven. He turns them from their evil way so that they see the horror of their former state and are entranced with the blessedness of their salvation. Thus the Spirit does all that is necessary for the gathering of the church: He forms the church institute itself to begin with. He calls men through the instrumentality of the church to preach the gospel. He makes the gospel powerful and effective to save believers. He works all the blessings of salvation and preserves the saints to the end.

Third, in the church itself, the Spirit gathers in the line of the generations of believers. He works in believers and their seed. He regenerates elect children of believers in their mothers' wombs and sanctifies them. They are before birth those in whom the Spirit works. On the mission field, however, the Spirit brings into the church new people, who never, in their past generations, have

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been members of the church. But even on the mission field, He brings new converts *and their children* into the church and continues His salvation in the line of their generations.

All is the work of the Spirit. Man has no part in it. It is true that the Spirit uses men. He uses the church, ministers and missionaries. But the church and ministers are impotent without the work of the Spirit. No one knows who the elect are except the Spirit. No one has the right to take from the Spirit His great work by making salvation a result of the skill of the preacher and the begging and pleading of missionaries, assuring men that God loves them, that they must accept Christ as their personal Saviour. All a minister has to do, as Paul says to the elders at Ephesus, is preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Just preach. The Spirit will do His work.

Regeneration is the work of the Spirit by which sinners are brought into the church. Jesus is emphatic about it that without regeneration one is unable even to see the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3). A man must be born again. Can man do that? Jesus explains to Nicodemus that this is humanly impossible, but is the work of the Spirit. One must be born by the Spirit. Then he is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13).

Every part of the work of salvation is the work of the Spirit. Although the outward call of the gospel comes to many, the inward call that saves is the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, through the inward call, works faith and conversion. Faith is the bond that unites the believer to Christ, and the Spirit works that faith in the heart of every elect child of God and, through the preaching of the Word, brings faith to conscious activity. Conversion is the Spirit's work: not the altogether peculiar conversion of which revivalists speak, but the daily conversion that leads a man to confess his sin and flee for refuge to the cross of Christ. The Spirit works in the quiet, unnoticed, unseen way of the still, small voice that Elijah recognized as coming from God Himself when Elijah

sat alone in the cave on Mt. Sinai (I Kings 19:11-13). The Spirit sanctifies through His cleansing power and the Spirit works that faith by which the believer is justified.

It might not be amiss to point out that the doctrine of revivalism, while claiming to exalt the work of the Spirit, in fact denies it. Apart from the bizarre behaviour of those who are supposed to be suddenly under the influence of the Spirit, revivalism denies many fundamental truths of Scripture.

Revivalism is wrongly ecumenical in that it has no regard for doctrine and is willing, in the interests of continuing the supposed revival, to cooperate with many churches who deny the truth. The Spirit, however, unites the believer to Christ, and the deepest principle of union with Christ is agreement in the truth, for Christ is the truth.

Revivalism is a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit in the establishment and maintenance of the covenant, for it denies that Christ gathers His church also from believers *and their seed*. It denies that the children of believers as well as the adults are members of God's covenant and of the church of Christ.

Revivalism denies the work of conversion by distorting it. Revivalism teaches that conversion is a sudden, dramatic and once-for-all experience, accompanied by unusual and peculiar signs, that changes the one who comes under the influence of the Spirit from a life of sin to a life of holiness. Scripture and the Reformed confessions teach that conversion is the daily work of the Spirit in the hearts of God's saved children, because of which work the believer fights against the sins present in his flesh, confesses them with shame and flees for refuge to the cross. Such work of the Spirit in conversion takes place throughout the life of the child of God.

Revivalism is a denial of the work of the Spirit because it makes this work dramatic, utterly bizarre, noisy, attracting attention, a work that calls attention to the Spirit Himself, and a work that

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shakes towns, cities, nations and countries. Scripture teaches that the Spirit is self-effacing, never calls attention to Himself, leads always to Christ and speaks of Him. The result is that the work of the Spirit is quiet, unnoticed, as a still, small voice and not as an earthquake or a wind that smashes rocks or fire (I Kings 19:11-13). It is like the plant that quietly and almost invisibly pushes its way from under the soil and even moves rocks to reach for the light.

Revivalism is wrong because, while shaking fiercely those who supposedly are moved by the Spirit, it frequently has no lasting effects. The work of the Spirit, though quiet and unnoticed, is irresistible and forever.

Let us not look for the work of the Spirit in false revivalism or foolishly pray for revival as the necessary key to the reformation of the church, but let us rather faithfully preach the gospel, for the Spirit will do His work without fail.

Zechariah, in his vision of the two candlesticks, learned that it is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God that the church is gathered (Zech. 4:6). Let us abandon all human might and power and let us believe that the Spirit does and will gather the church of Christ.

This vision of Zechariah was of great comfort to the small band of returned exiles who faced so many obstacles and hindrances to the work. It is of equal comfort to the church today to know that Christ through His Spirit gathers His church without fail. None can ever be lost.

But let us also remember that because the Spirit is the instrument whereby God through Christ accomplishes eternal election, the Spirit also hardens those who are not elect. The Spirit accomplishes the purpose of God as He has determined it eternally. The gospel is a two-edged sword. It saves by bringing to faith and conversion, but it is also the power to harden in unbelief. This, too, is the work of the Spirit. We bow before the sovereignty of the

Spirit in humble thanksgiving that the Spirit is pleased, according to the will of God, to save us (II Cor. 2:14-17).

The Holy Spirit in Defending the Church

From our perspective here on earth, the church is always in an extremely precarious position. Its existence seems always in doubt. Isaiah speaks of the fact that the church is very small in size, a hut in a garden of cucumbers, but also a besieged city constantly under attack by strong and powerful enemies (Isa. 1:8). Jesus speaks of it as a little flock (Luke 12:32) and Paul warns the elders of Ephesus that wolves will enter the flock to endanger it (Acts 20:29). Paul, referring to Isaiah 1, describes the church as a very small remnant (Rom. 11:5). When Elijah was filled with despair at the apostasy in Israel, God reminded him that he had reserved unto Himself seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (I Kings 19:18). There were still a few who were faithful but they were indeed few.

Our *Belgic Confession* refers to these dreadful days during Ahab's reign when it tells us that God preserves His church in the world in her darkest hours, as is

evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be. And this holy church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing, as during the perilous reign of Ahab the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal.²

Contrary to the claims of those who see golden visions of a huge throng, marching from victory to victory in this present world, Scripture speaks of the church becoming smaller and smaller eroded in numbers by apostasy (Matt. 24:12; Luke 18:8). Contra-

² *Belgic Confession* 27.

ry to the shrill cry of prosperity gossellers, who lie by promising those who believe in Christ a life of ease, riches, health and long life, Scripture speaks of the church harried by constant persecution, killed all the day long, led as sheep to the slaughter (Rom. 8:36), and a people who are carrying their crosses throughout life. It is a despised, hated, mocked and altogether unattractive band of people to whom no one in his right senses would join himself. Her present condition is like a city in ruins, and her promise for the future in this world is bleak, an institution that has seen its day and is rapidly disappearing.

This precarious state of the church is due to many factors. Satan is the implacable enemy of the church and has as his primary goal the destruction of the church and the annihilation of the people of God. When he was cast out of heaven at the ascension of Christ, he “was wroth with the woman [i.e., the church], and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God” (Rev. 12:17). Even the angels in heaven declare, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (v. 12). Peter speaks of the fact that the devil goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). And those whom he needs to devour are those who belong to the church. That is why the devil is always busiest in the church. The devil is mean, hateful and viciously opposed to God, to Christ and to Christ’s people. He has great power, uncountable demons at his command, and is devoid of any sense of decency or fairness.

Persecution is the lot of God’s people.

Satan rules in this world and is the powerful commander of the world’s actions. The world confronts the church with countless temptations trying to persuade the people of God that happiness can only be found in pleasure, earthly wealth, the lusts of the flesh and a long life here below. These allurements are strong and many succumb to their enticing and beckoning finger. The church to-

day is rotting in materialism and worldliness. As a last resort, the world always has at its disposal the threat of persecution and is not at all reluctant to use it.

But perhaps the very worst of the dangers that confront the church are the dangers of our own sinful lives. The church is composed of sinners: redeemed, yet sinful still; sanctified, yet wicked; saints, but sinning saints; consecrated to God, but always pulling towards the world. We are our own worst enemies. These sinning people, members of the church, are enemies to themselves but also enemies to the church of which they are a part. Our sinful flesh makes us vulnerable to the temptations of the world and easy prey for Satan.

And, although God's people are sinning saints, many in the church are carnal seed, devoid of grace, hidden spies, enemies within the gates. They, too, are bent on the destruction of the church, that is, to make the church a tool for their own ambitions and goals. They introduce false doctrine that is a poison in the church and will, unless vomited out, destroy her. They are the worldly ones who are really friends of the world and cannot be the friends of God (James 4:4).

Thus it is a great wonder that the church survives. It seems incredible that there remain faithful on the earth until the very end of time. We must come to grips with this in our own lives. Peter speaks of the fact that the church is scarcely saved, that is, saved with the greatest difficulty (I Peter 4:18). We barely make it to heaven. We escape damnation by the skin of our teeth. God must, and I speak as a man, exert the greatest effort to save us—even sending His own Son to the death of hell for us. And in our own lives, we arrive at heaven's gates, not as triumphant warriors who have conquered the world, but as battered, wounded soldiers who can barely stand; as staggering, hopelessly weak pilgrims who crawl the last little distance to glory as a man dying of thirst crawls over the sands to the oasis that lies before him.

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Yet the church is preserved. That is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. If any part of the salvation of man is left to the power of man, it is hopeless. That is true! I know that! I know that for myself. I know that with a certainty that is unshakeable. My salvation, if it is not in its entirety, the work of the Holy Spirit of Christ, is hopeless. So it is with every individual member of the church and so it is with the church itself.

The Holy Spirit preserves the church in two outstanding ways. First of all, because Christ is raised to a position of highest glory and power where all authority is given Him in heaven and on earth, the enemy is in Christ's hand and under His sovereign rule. Paul shouts loudly that we are "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Not only conquerors, but *more* than conquerors. Christ rules over our enemies so that they cannot do one thing against the church without His will. This rule Christ exercises through His Spirit.

In John 16:7-12, one of the passages in His sermon at the last supper, Christ speaks of this. The Spirit "reprove[s] the world of sin;" He testifies through the preaching of the church and in the consciences of the wicked that all their rebellion against God and their hatred of the church is sin and displeasing to God. He also reproves the world "of righteousness;" that is, he constantly testifies in the world that the cause of God, represented by the church, is a righteous cause because it is the cause of God's own righteousness revealed in Christ and will, therefore, be victorious. Further, the Spirit reproves the world "of judgment;" that is, He testifies that the wicked are under the judgment of God and subject to fierce punishment. God's cause shall triumph and the wicked shall be destroyed. In these ways the Spirit turns the enmity of the world against themselves.

From the viewpoint of God's people themselves, the Spirit preserves them in the world, even against the enemy of their own sinful flesh. He sanctifies them so that they fight in the world for the cause of Christ. Although they sin and continue to sin all their lives, they are brought by the Spirit to confession of sin and

the assurance of salvation. They are made new by the Spirit, new people who have the life of Christ in their hearts through the Spirit. This new man hates sin and hates the world. He conquers sin in his own life by repenting of sin and seeking forgiveness at Calvary. The Spirit works faith so that the weary warrior lays hold on the promises of God and knows that the battle is not his battle but Christ's and that Christ cannot be overcome.

He is given by the Spirit the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10-17). With the armour of God he is able to fight by the power of the Spirit within him, who upholds him, gives him courage and protects him in the battle. The Christian warrior is faithful unto death, for he knows that no one can take his crown.

All that work of the Spirit is also given through the Word. The preaching is Christ Himself giving the church all her weapons, all her strength to fight and all her victories as He goes marching forward in the battle. The Spirit binds Himself to the Word and will not work apart from it. The Spirit does so because the Word is our armour, our strength, our courage, our hope for the future, the assurance of our victory through Jesus Christ. When the battle is over, Christ comes through the Spirit to take His weary warriors, victorious to the end, to be with Himself.

The Holy Spirit in Preserving the Church

The preservation of the church is really bound up in the defence of the church. If the church is defended successfully from all her enemies, she will also be preserved unto the end.

The preservation of the church is the preservation of each elect. It is the doctrine of the preservation of the saints, a doctrine discussed at the last British Reformed Fellowship Conference.³

Jesus speaks of the preservation of his people in John 10:27-30:

³ David J. Engelsma, "The Perseverance of Saints," in Herman Hanko and David J. Engelsma, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: British Reformed Fellowship, 2008), pp. 101-118.

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My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.

This preservation of each saint takes place through the work of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is described by Jesus as being dependent on the Word: "My sheep hear my voice." Christ speaks to His people through the Word. He comes with His Word in all their sorrows, their struggles, their weaknesses, their fierce battles and speaks to them. He speaks to them through the Scriptures, but He speaks to them in such a way that the Spirit applies the Word of the Scriptures to them so that they hear the voice of Christ Himself and follow Him. The Word, sealed on the hearts of the people of God by the Spirit, is the great preserving power of the church.

From a subjective point of view, the preservation of the saints, which is really the preservation of the church, is manifested in sanctification. The new man, created through regeneration by the Spirit, is triumphant in the life of the child of God. He sins much and his best works are corrupted and polluted by sin. But he is victorious, for the Spirit nurtures and strengthens that new man and causes him to grow. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16).

That new man manifests itself in this great victory of the Spirit: the saved sinner confesses his sin. Confession of sin is the great victory over sin because, through bringing the sinner to confession, the Spirit assures the sinner that all his sins are forgiven, that the righteousness of Christ is his possession, and that the life within him shall blossom into everlasting life with God. By confessing his sin in sorrow, the child of God also turns again to fight under the banner of the cross and overcomes all his enemies.

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Thus also the church is preserved. The preservation of the church is essential, for the church is the mother of the saints, the one institution through which God cares for His people, strengthens them, blesses them and thus preserves them and the church of which they are a part.

We all need the church. The Spirit works through the church and not apart from it. We need the Spirit and we need the fellowship of God's people, for the way is long, the path most difficult and the sins we commit are many and serious.

We know from Scripture that there will be a short time before the end when the (institute) church will cease to exist (Rev. 11:7-8). This will be true partly because apostasy is so great that few are left; partly because persecution is intense and has destroyed the church—except for a few scattered believers, hiding in holes in the mountains; and partly because Antichrist will have set up his image in the church, so that it is impossible for the church to worship God any longer. We would, if we tried to worship, be able to worship only the image of the beast.

But the demise of the church institute at the end of time need not concern us, for that only means that the Spirit has finished His work of finding and saving every one of the elect and bringing them to conversion and faith in Christ. The church is almost gathered. There are only a few gaps in that perfect and glorified church, and those gaps will soon be filled and so Christ will come again, victorious and triumphant, to destroy all His enemies and ours, and take the whole church to glory.

In the perfection of heaven, the Spirit will still be with us and in us. We cannot fall in heaven as Adam did, but only because of the preserving power of the Spirit. We are united to Christ and see Him face to face, but only because we are kept in union with Christ by the Spirit. We shall be one church, perfectly united in glory, freed from sin, because the Spirit gives us full and free salvation. We shall be cleansed from sin in body and soul, and we shall be renewed after the image of Christ, because the

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Spirit raises our mortal bodies so that they will be like the body of Christ. And we shall dwell with God because the Spirit takes us into God's own Triune covenant life to dwell with Him forever, world without end.

Therefore, my brethren, take good courage. The church shall endure to the end. All the elect shall be saved. No matter the dangers and seeming defeat, Christ works through His Spirit to accomplish all His good pleasure. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The Spirit works faith and faith is the victory that overcomes the world (I John 5:4).

PART II
Chapter 7

The Out-Flowing Spirit of Jesus



Prof. David J. Engelsma

Scripture: John 7:37-39

Introduction

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified) (John 7:37-39).

Jesus cried these words on the last day of the Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles, as verses 2 and 14 indicate: “Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand”; “Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.”

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three great Old Testament religious festivals or feasts as Leviticus 23 teaches. It was held yearly on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. All of Israel’s males appeared at the temple in Jerusalem. The feast lasted seven days. The last day, called “that great day of the feast” in the text, was a sabbath.

The Feast of Tabernacles had two main purposes. The first was

that Israel would celebrate with thanksgiving to God the completed harvest of their crops. Tabernacles was a harvest festival. It occurred in the fall of the year, after the grain and the grapes were in the granaries and storehouses. For this reason, Exodus 23:16 calls this feast “the feast of ingathering.”

The second purpose was that Israel would remember the hardships of the wilderness wandering, the forty years when the nation was in the great and terrible desert on the way from Egypt to Canaan. God commanded Israel to remember those hardships in a peculiar, vivid way. During the seven days of the feast, Israel had to dwell in little booths made of the branches of trees, for such were their habitations during the wandering in the wilderness (Lev. 23:42-43). Hence, the name of the feast: Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths. Remembering the hardships of the forty years in the wilderness, Israel would be reminded of God’s goodness in bringing the nation safely into Canaan, where they live in goodly houses.

Therefore, Israel celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with joy. They rejoiced over the harvest, now gathered and safely stored in the barns. They rejoiced over God’s deliverance of them into the land of promise. When Judah kept this feast in the days of Nehemiah, “there was very great gladness” (Neh. 8:17).

It is significant that Jesus spoke the words of John 7:37-38 on the occasion of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. He proclaimed the fulfilment of the entire Old Testament ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles. The fulfilment is Himself. Regarding the Feast of Tabernacles and its proper commemoration, Jesus stood and cried, “Come unto *me*.”

But Jesus Himself is the fulfilment of the feast inasmuch as believers receive from Him the Holy Spirit. John tells us this in his inspired commentary on Jesus’ cry, in verse 39: “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.”

And with regard to the receiving of the Spirit by believers, it is es-

pecially the Spirit's subsequent *out-flowing from* the believers that is the fulfilment of the Old Testament feast. John's commentary continues: "out of his [i.e., the believer's] belly shall flow rivers of living water."

A Striking Promise

When Jesus promised to every believer that "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," He was promising the Holy Spirit. The loud cry of the Lord at the Feast of Tabernacles was the promise of the coming of the Spirit in the future. This is the authoritative interpretation of Jesus' words by the apostle: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive."

That was a striking promise, for, as John remarks, it implied that the Holy Spirit "was not yet." "Was not yet" is the correct reading of the text. The word "given" does not appear in the original Greek, but was inserted by the translators of the Authorized Version, as the italics indicate.

Before Jesus' glorification, that is, His death, resurrection, ascension and sitting at the right hand of God, the Holy Spirit was not. Those who believed in Jesus prior to His glorification did not have the Holy Spirit. How could they have Him, since He "was not"? This is why Jesus promised that they *would* receive Him in the future.

The meaning of this striking promise is not that the Holy Spirit did not exist prior to the glorification of Jesus. As the Third Person of the Trinity the Spirit is eternal, as Hebrews 9:14 expressly states. But the meaning is that the Spirit was not *as the Spirit who is given to Jesus to be His Spirit* and *as the Spirit who will dwell richly in the church as the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. The Spirit would become the Spirit of Jesus Christ when Jesus is glorified, as Acts 2:33 teaches:

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy

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Ghost, he hath shed forth this [i.e., the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ on Pentecost].

When the crucified and risen Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sat down on the right hand of God, the Triune God gave the man Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit to be *His* Spirit, so that Jesus Christ could send the Spirit to His church as the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

That was a real and significant event for the Third Person of the Trinity, similar to the event in which the Second Person became a man in the womb of the virgin. God the Holy Spirit became the Spirit of the exalted man Jesus (without, of course, ceasing to be God the Holy Spirit).

The Spirit's becoming the Spirit of Christ depended upon the glorification of Jesus: The Holy Ghost was not yet, "because that Jesus was not yet glorified." By His death, Jesus must earn for Himself the right to receive the Holy Ghost as His Spirit and the right of His thirsty people to receive this Spirit from Him. By His resurrection, He must become the glorified man who is *able* to receive the Holy Spirit as His own Spirit. By His death and resurrection, He must complete the harvest of salvation and store up all the blessings of salvation in Himself at the right hand of God in heaven. Then the Spirit can come to the church bringing the risen, glorified Jesus to the church in all of Jesus' life, salvation and power. Then the Spirit can bring to every elect child of God the first-fruits of the blessings of salvation.

Thus, Jesus' promise of the Spirit in John 7 foretold the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Israel celebrated the completed harvest. Now they could begin to enjoy the corn and the wine. When the Spirit is received by those who believe in Jesus, all the full harvest of salvation has been gathered by Jesus Christ and is securely stored up in Him at God's right hand in heaven. When believers receive the Spirit, the Spirit not only assures them of the completion and security of salvation but

also begins to bestow the beginning of this salvation upon them for their life and enjoyment.

Pentecost!

Jesus promised Pentecost!

Before Pentecost, the Spirit was not. Now He is.

Before Pentecost, the believers did not possess and enjoy the Spirit, not as though they did not have Him at all, for it was only by the power of the Spirit that Old Testament saints could and did believe in the coming Messiah. Besides, when Old Testament saints, including Jesus' own disciples before Pentecost, believed in the coming Messiah, they had the forgiveness of sins and the other benefits of salvation by the working of the Holy Spirit, although only because of the future glorification of the Messiah. But the Old Testament saints did not have the Holy Spirit and the benefits of salvation in the riches and abundance of a glorified Christ and of a finished salvation. Now every believer has the Spirit and the benefits of salvation in overflowing, rich abundance.

Now out of the belly of every believer flow rivers of living water.

Out-Flowing

This aspect of Jesus' promise is also striking: The Spirit of Pentecost will flow *out of* the believer. That the Spirit flows out of the believer is another of the unexpected, surprising teachings of the Bible that reveal new treasures to the student of the Bible and to the congregation. Such teachings make the study of the Bible interesting and delightful. The surprising thing here is that the rivers of living water flow *out of* the believer. One would expect that Jesus would have said that the rivers of water flow *upon* the believer or *into* him. Rather, He taught that the waters flow *out of* him. He promised Pentecost, not as the *incoming* of the Spirit *to* the people of God but as the *out-flowing* of the Spirit *from* the people of God.

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This out-flowing qualifies John's explanation of Jesus' words as promising the reception of the Spirit by believers. Jesus did indeed promise the reception of the Spirit by those who believe on Him but a reception that issues in out-flowing. Jesus promised an out-flowing receiving of the Spirit.

"Rivers of living water" is a figurative description of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. John tells us this: "This spake he of the Spirit." But these waters figuratively describe the Spirit with regard to His gracious operations in the people of God—His powers, gifts and blessings of salvation. These operations, powers, gifts and blessings are alive as the very life of the risen Jesus Christ. They give life, sustain life and increase life—the life of Christ in His church. The living water is eternal life itself, which the Spirit gives to Christ's people. The water sparkles with peace, joy, holiness, assurance and zeal.

The water flows out of the people of God. The water of eternal life is not given to believers simply so that they may drink of it, possess it and be refreshed by it. The water is given also so that it may flow out of the believers to others.

Since the water represents the Spirit, the Spirit is not given to believers simply so that believers may have Him, live from Him and enjoy Him. But He is given to believers also so that He may flow out of believers to others.

He will flow out of believers *in abundance*. Always, the pentecostal gift of the Spirit is described in the Bible in such a way as to indicate rich abundance. For example, on Pentecost the Spirit is *poured out* on the church. Jesus' promise of the Spirit in John 7 also suggests abundance. Not merely a few dribbles come out of the believer, not merely a creek and not even one river, but rivers—many of them, wide, deep and overflowing.

There is, first, the flowing out of the Spirit from the people of God to *God*. Water always seeks its own level. Being heavenly and originating in heaven at God's right hand in Jesus Christ,

the living water seeks the heights of heaven. Coming from God in Christ, the Spirit returns to God again. The Spirit flows out of believers to God in the worship of the congregation, the prayers of the saints and the lives consecrated to God of the holy people of God.

Second, the Spirit flows out of the church to all the nations of the world in the church's work of missions. There is allusion to this effect of Pentecost in verse 35 of John 7. In response to Jesus' declaration that soon the Jews would seek Him, but not find Him, the Jews asked, "Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" The flowing of the Spirit from the church to all nations in the preaching of the gospel was the immediate effect of Pentecost, as the book of Acts indicates. Rivers of living water have been streaming to the nations, saving the elect out of the nations and thus the nations themselves.

There is, third, the out-flowing of the Spirit from each believer to his neighbour in the example of his godly life, in his faithful carrying out of his Christian calling, in his testimony to the truth, in his mercy to the needy, in the obvious hope, joy and contentment of his life. The neighbour is the member of his or her own family, whether father, mother, wife or husband, child, brother or sister. It is the fellow-member of the church. It is anyone and everyone with whom the believer comes into contact in the providence of God.

It must be noted that Jesus spoke of each believer personally: "He that believeth ... out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." I may not think of my Christian life only as a receiving of the Spirit of Christ and thus as the personal enjoyment of the benefits of salvation. But my Christian life is to be an out-flowing from myself of the Spirit to others, and then in abundance: "rivers of living water."

One who knew the Old Testament Scripture would not have been surprised by Jesus' teaching of the out-flowing of the Spirit. Jesus grounded His prophecy of the out-flowing of the Spirit in Old

Testament revelation: “as the scripture hath said.” Isaiah prophesied the Spirit as water upon the people of God that would cause them to “spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses” (Isa. 44:3-4). Zechariah foretold that in the time of the Messiah “living waters shall go out from Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:8).

What is true of earthly water is likewise true of the living water that is the Spirit of Christ. A body of water with no outflow is dead, as the Dead Sea in Palestine. A body of water with an outlet is alive, as the Sea of Galilee in Palestine.

A Strange Source: The Belly

As the promise of an out-flowing of the Spirit is striking, so is the source of the out-flowing Spirit strange: out of the belly of the believer.

That the source of the out-flowing Spirit is the believer’s belly is strange. We would have expected Jesus to speak of the heart or the mind or the soul or the mouth. But He referred to the belly. He did that deliberately, thinking, as He did, as a good Hebrew. To the Hebrew, the bowels, situated deep in the belly, were the seat or location of the *experience* or *feeling* of salvation. God gives a man salvation in his heart. The man knows salvation with the mind. He experiences salvation in the belly. Both Old and New Testaments speak of “bowels of compassion.” When Elihu is eager to speak the Word of God about Job’s affliction, he says that his belly is like wine that has no vent, that is, Elihu’s belly is ready to explode in his zeal for God and his love of the truth (Job 32:19). We Gentiles have sayings that indicate that we too associate the belly with deep feeling. If something disgusts us, we say that it makes us “sick to our stomach.”

In our belly, we *experience* the comfort of salvation, the peace of pardon, the joy of eternal life, the love of God and of Christ. And just as we *experience* the comfort of salvation, the peace of pardon, the joy of eternal life, and the love of God and Christ do the rivers of living water flow out of us to others.

The church that experiences the comfort of salvation praises God in pure worship.

The church that experiences the love of the truth proclaims it abroad.

The man or woman who experiences the peace, joy and hope of the gospel manifests these gifts and powers in word and deed.

The pentecostal Spirit of Christ comes to the believer and bestows the benefits of salvation upon the believer in such a way that the believer has and knows them *experientially*—in his belly. Only such a reception of the Spirit and His blessings comforts, rejoices and assures the believer. Only such a reception of the Spirit results in the out-flowing of the Spirit from the believer.

A Strange Source: The Believer

No less strange, however, is it that the source of the out-flowing of the Spirit is said to be the believer. If it seems strange that the source should be the belly, it is strange also that the source is the believer at all. This is what Jesus said: “He that believeth on me ... out of [him] shall flow rivers of living water.”

Since the rivers of living water are, in reality, the Spirit of Christ in His gracious operations, the Lord taught that the *Spirit* would proceed from the believer. The Spirit is always a proceeding Spirit. Eternally in the Godhead, He proceeds from the Father and the Son. On Pentecost, He proceeded from the exalted Jesus Christ. Now He proceeds from every believer. The Holy Spirit is a moving, active, living Breath or Wind of God. Wherever He may be, whether in the Godhead, in Jesus Christ, in the church or in the believer, the Spirit is never stagnant, never still, never lifeless.

But what is the believer that the Spirit should flow from him as living water, much more as rivers of water? The believer is no source of water, but a dry and thirsty wilderness, in which no waters be. He is not a spiritual man, but naturally worldly and devilish. He is not alive by nature, but dead in sin. He is not a source

of praise and thanks to God, but a God-denier and blasphemer. He is no witness of the truth to the nations, but a purveyor of the lie. He has no peace in his soul, but only the unrest of guilt and depravity. He is not joyful in the Lord, but anxious and despairing. He is not holy, but unclean.

O, the wonder! Out of him flow rivers of living water. That was Isaiah's prophecy of Pentecost: God would pour floods on the wilderness of sinners. That was Zechariah's prophecy of Pentecost: These floods would flow forth from Jerusalem.

The Fountain of Water

The believer is not the ultimate source of the water, nor is he an independent source. He is only a channel through which the living water flows. That the believer is neither the ultimate source nor an independent source, Jesus made plain when He described those who believe on Him as naturally thirsty: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37). The promise that water will flow from the believer is related to the call to the thirsty in verse 37, that he come to Jesus and drink. The thirsty man or woman comes to Jesus and drinks the living water. Then that living water not only refreshes the thirsty one, but also flows out of him or her to others. The ultimate source of the water, therefore, is not the believer.

On the contrary, the believer by nature and of himself is *thirsty*. He has no living water. He is entirely lacking in all moisture. He has no peace, no joy, no comfort, no hope, no spiritual life.

He is dry with the guilt of sin, dry with the burning of the wrath of God, dry with the barrenness and unfruitfulness of total depravity.

The fountain of living water is Jesus, as the one who (at the time that He spoke the words of John 7:37-38) would give His life a ransom for many, would rise from the dead as the living one, who had conquered death and the grave, and would receive the Holy

Spirit as His living and life-giving Spirit. “Come unto *me*,” He calls to the thirsty. The thirsty one comes to Him and drinks by believing on Jesus, thus satisfying his thirst. Then, the water flows out of the believer to God, to the nations and to the neighbour.

Christ is the rock in the wilderness of this world out of which gushes the rivers of living water for and through the Israel of God, which is the church of believers and their children. Did not the Jews, who at that time were commemorating God’s care of Israel during the wilderness wanderings, think of the rock from which Old Testament Israel drank, when Jesus cried, “Come unto me, and drink”?

The water is the Spirit. This is the explanation of the apostle in John 7:39: “This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.” The water that flows out of the believer is the Spirit. But also the water that the thirsty one drinks by believing on Jesus is the Spirit. And this Spirit is the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit poured out after Jesus is glorified.

How is this to be understood? How is it to be understood that believers, for example, His own disciples at the time Jesus uttered these words, would receive the Spirit in the future? And how is it to be understood today that believers receive the Spirit by believing on Jesus?

With regard to believers at the time that Jesus gave the promise of a future reception of the Spirit, the explanation is that, even though the Spirit had already regenerated their heart and given them faith in Jesus, those believers did not have the Spirit in the rich abundance of Pentecost. Those believers did not yet have the Spirit as the rich experience of a finished salvation and of a completed harvest of the blessings of salvation. That was impossible at that time, for “Jesus was not yet glorified.” But on Pentecost, they would receive the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus.

With regard to believers today, it is still true, as John explains Jesus’ promise, that those who believe on Jesus receive the Spirit.

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They receive the Spirit by believing on Jesus. The meaning is not, and cannot be, that there is no reception whatever of the Spirit until one believes on Jesus. As Jesus Himself taught earlier in John's gospel, chapter 3:3-8, no one can even "see" the kingdom of God (which is necessary if one is to believe), much less "enter" into it, except he has been born again from above by the Holy Spirit. Or, as Jesus said in John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." One who is spiritually thirsty and comes to Jesus to drink by faith in Jesus has been born again by the Spirit.

But the believer receives the Spirit, and he receives the Spirit by believing. He receives the Spirit *in his consciousness* and *as the experience* of the completed salvation obtained by the glorified Jesus. In the language of the text, the believer, and the believer only, receives the Spirit *in his belly*. The believer receives the Spirit in this vitally important sense by believing, and by believing only.

The promise that those who believe on Jesus will receive the Spirit of Pentecost refutes the doctrine of the Charismatic movement. The Charismatic movement restricts the reception of the Spirit to some believers only, those who, according to Charismatic doctrine, are baptized with the Spirit. Also, the Charismatic movement denies that reception of the Spirit takes place by faith in Jesus Christ. According to the Charismatic movement, one can believe in Jesus for salvation without receiving the Spirit. For the reception of the Spirit, another activity is required, an act of seeking the Spirit that is above and beyond the activity of believing on Jesus.

Jesus plainly contradicted both of these fundamental tenets of the Charismatic movement. Jesus taught that every one who believes on Him would receive the Spirit. And He taught that one receives the Spirit by believing on Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the fountain of living water, that is, the Holy Spirit, for all those who are spiritually thirsty and, therefore, He gives the stirring call to every one of them with its implied promise

that in the way of coming and drinking all of them would receive the Holy Spirit.

A Stirring Call

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”

Jesus' call is to the thirsty. A thirsty person in natural life is not simply one who lacks water. A dead person lacks water but he is not thirsty. An unconscious person may be as dry as a bone but he is not thirsty. Likewise, a spiritually thirsty person is not simply one who is guilty on account of his sinfulness and sins, exposed to the wrath of God because of his guilt, totally depraved by nature, without hope and without God in the world. But he is one who, by the regenerating grace of the Spirit of Christ, *knows* his misery of sin and *desires* deliverance from this misery, as a thirsty man knows that he needs water and desires the quenching of his thirst. The spiritually thirsty desire the Spirit of forgiveness, of righteousness with God, of holiness and of the joy of communion with the ever-blessed God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus' call in John 7:37 is not general, to all humans without distinction, but definite and particular: “If any man *thirsts*.”

To the thirsty, to *every human* who is thirsty, regardless how enormous his guilt and how vile his depravity, the call is gracious. There is a fountain of water for your thirst in the infinite mercy of God in Jesus Christ. You may come. You are summoned to come. Drink freely by faith in Jesus Christ. There is no price to you for the water of eternal life—absolutely no price of your worthiness, your works, conditions you must perform or your merit.

Not even the faith by which you come to Christ and drink of the water is a price you pay for the water. Your faith, which is the gift of God to you, is only the means, but then necessarily the only means, by which you come to Christ and drink the water.

God Himself paid the full price of the water for you in the life-

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long obedience to the law and in the suffering and death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

O, the stirring call is given today, when it is read and preached. Not the preacher but Jesus Himself cries today to every thirsty soul in the audience, “Come to me, and drink.”

He adds a promise, as He did when He first gave the call in the temple in Jerusalem. The promise assures that no one’s coming will be in vain. Especially does it encourage the thirsty one to come and drink who fears that his or her misery of sin is so great that there can be no salvation for such a one.

There is an *implicit* promise: Your thirst will be quenched with the Holy Spirit.

There is an *explicit* promise: The rivers of living water that flow to you, to satisfy your thirst, will flow out of you to others.

Thus, the New Testament believer keeps the Feast of Tabernacles. Amen.

Chapter 8

The Bride's Prayer for the Bridegroom's Coming

Prof. Herman Hanko

Scripture: Revelation 22:17

The text which we consider together is found in Revelation 22, the first part of verse 17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come."

In certain respects, this is an unexpected text. Perhaps for that very reason it is placed at this strategic point in the book of Revelation. Throughout the entire book of Revelation, the Lord revealed to John "the things which must be hereafter" (Rev. 1:19), that is, the things which will take place in the history of the world before the Lord comes again to take His church to glory. Many of those things are dreadful events that cause the church to suffer greatly. It is no wonder, in a way, that the book of Revelation is interspersed with visions that are designed especially by Christ to teach the church that, in spite of all the dreadful things that will happen in the world and to the church, the Lord will take care of His people and save them to the end. Nevertheless, the church hears that wickedness will abound, that evil will grow, that it will develop in the history of the world to such an extent that it reaches a terrible climax in the reign of the Man of Sin, the Antichrist. He will do dreadful things and see to it that the church is obliterated so that it ceases to exist in the world. He will accomplish this through a terrible persecution of the church.

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The book of Revelation informs the people of God that their life will be, from an earthly point of view, bitter. They will be hated of all men. They will be driven as dogs, wild dogs, into the mountains. They will flee for their lives. And finally, the church of Christ itself will cease to exist and the cause of Satan and evil will seemingly triumph. As the church reads all of these things that are given in visionary form, the response of the church in the text is very unexpected.

You might think to yourself a more appropriate response would be “Lord, keep us in that evil day. Lord, preserve us faithful unto Thee when persecution becomes almost unbearably great.” But that is not the response of the church. Or, you might say to yourself, “I hope these things do not happen in my lifetime. I hope that the Lord delays His coming until I am dead.” Yet the response of the church is—almost, I would say, with a sense of impatience—“Never mind all these things, so be it. Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly. Come in spite of everything that must happen. Come, even though the church shall have to endure untold grief and pain. Come, Lord Jesus.” That is unexpected. But in order that it may be driven home in our hearts, the Lord says this is the response of the church in every age and in every generation. And it will continue to be the response of the church to the end of time.

But then comes the admonition: “Let him that heareth,” whatever the Lord has to say, “Let him that heareth say, Come.” That is also unexpected. It is true that the church of all ages and the church today earnestly prays, “Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly.” But then the question arises: why then the admonition? If, in fact, the Spirit and the bride pray, “Come,” why must we be urged with intense urgency to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus”? Yet if we know ourselves and if we know how difficult these days before Christ comes will be, then we will see also beyond any doubt the necessity of such an admonition.

I call your attention to this passage under the theme “The Bride’s Prayer for the Bridegroom’s Coming” and ask you to notice:

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1. Who Prays. I refer to that part of the text, at the beginning, "*the Spirit and the bride say, Come.*" "The Spirit and the bride"—that is a remarkable and very beautiful combination.
2. The Content of This Prayer. This is defined in the text by the one word, "Come."
3. The Urgency of Making This Prayer. This is underscored in the admonition, "Let him that heareth say, Come."

Who Prays

It ought not to surprise us that the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is described here in the text as "the bride." This is a figure which is found throughout the Scriptures. Already in Psalm 45 the psalmist sang of the church as the bride of Christ, who is the bridegroom. It seems to us sometimes as if the prophets in their prophecies delighted in reminding the people of God that they were God's wife, God's bride and that God was married to them. They did that, on the one hand, to describe in a graphic way the dreadful nature of the sin of unfaithful Israel and Judah, as well as all unfaithful who were and are unfaithful to the Lord. But the prophets also speak of Israel as the bride of Christ that the people of God may be comforted in the midst of terrible apostasy and wickedness.

The church is the bride of Christ, and the church is the bride of God. You may say either one; it makes no difference. To be the bride of Christ is to be the bride of God and to be the bride of God is to be the bride of Christ. The church is God's bride only through Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God in our flesh. Here the reference is specifically to Christ because the prayer which the bride makes is for the bridegroom's coming.

The New Testament picks up this theme and develops it. Jesus Himself spoke of it repeatedly in His earthly ministry. He closed His earthly ministry with a parable that described the church in

the figure of ten virgins. This significant parable concludes Jesus' discussion of the signs that are present throughout history in the new dispensation before the Lord Himself returns to take His bride unto Himself. The parable, if it does anything at all, underscores the need for the admonition which is a part of our text, "Let him that heareth say, Come." That parable is, from a certain point of view, a damning indictment of the apostate church and a serious warning to the true church to watch and pray.

Paul picks up the same theme in Ephesians 5:22-33, where he informs us that our earthly marriages are pictures of a greater reality and that two Christians united in marriage depict the relation of Christ and His church. Paul emphasizes the point that marriage today is not only the restoration of the original institution of marriage but the great renewal, the great transformation, of the institution of marriage. The restoration of the institution of marriage is its glorification in Jesus Christ, for the reality is to be found in the relation between Christ and His church. Christ and His church who through the work of the Spirit become one bone, one flesh, of one blood, united in the most intimate union possible is the true marriage. The church is considered in the text as Christ's bride.

In the old dispensation, the coming marriage with Christ was promised. God, as it were, promised His church that the day would come when He would marry her. In the fullness of time when Christ was born, suffered under the wrath of God, died on the cross, performed all His mighty work of atonement and sealed the worth of it in His resurrection from the dead. He went to glory at the Father's right hand and the marriage ceremony took place. The marriage was sealed: Christ and His church stood before God and took upon themselves the vows of marriage and Christ promised eternally to be faithful to His church and His church faithful to Christ.

But the bridegroom went away as soon as the marriage ceremony was over. There was not even time for the reception. The bride-

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groom left the place where He spoke His vows and went away “to a far country” (Matt. 25:14). He said to His bride, “I have to leave you, and I have to leave you for a very long a time. You will have to remain in the world while I am gone. While you are in the world you are my bride. Never forget that. Remember always in all that you do that you are my bride, that I have purchased you with my own blood, that I married you and that I will fulfil my promises to come to fetch you. But you will have to be without me for a little while in the world. And the world will hate you because you are my bride.”

That grieves the bride. Imagine a bride, who has just married the man whom she loves and adores and with whom she wishes to live. She would certainly be grieved if, at the moment the marriage ceremony was over and the presiding minister introduced them to the witnesses at the wedding, the bridegroom would go away and say to the bride, “Now you are on your own for awhile and you won't have my presence with you. You will have to be without me. But don't forget, I am your husband; you are my bride. It is better for you that I go away but I will come again. I will. I promise that. I will come as quickly as I can. I will allow nothing to deter me, nothing to postpone my coming, for I am the Lord of lords and the King of kings. All the business with which I have to busy myself in my absence, I will perform for your sake that I may come again and take you unto myself where we may live together forever and ever in the bliss and joy of an everlasting marriage.”

The bride quite naturally responds to that with the words, “Come, Lord Jesus. Yea, come quickly. It is intolerable to live without you. The life that we are called to live in your absence is most difficult, most grievous. We can hardly stand it when the enemy grows strong and fierce and we see our fellow saints murdered in cold-blooded and ruthless hatred. We, your bride, are raped and beaten and abused in every way which the ingenious minds of the enemy can invent. Come, Lord Jesus. Yea, come quickly.” It is the prayer of an anxious bride for the return of the bridegroom.

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In the second place, the text informs us that it is also the Spirit that prays, “Come, Lord Jesus.” That is an astonishing statement. First of all, the text does not mean, and we must divest ourselves of any such notion, that there are two who pray, the bride and the Spirit, both praying independently. That is not the case and that is not the meaning of the text. The meaning of the text is—and that is the significance of that little word “and”—the Spirit *through* the bride prays, “Come, Lord Jesus.” It is quite understandable that the Spirit prays through the bride. By the Spirit, the church is united to Christ her head. The Spirit, by the Word that Christ Himself spoke, makes the bride aware of His love. And the Spirit works in the bride’s heart the longing for Christ to come. So the Spirit in and through the bride prays, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

That the text makes a point of it here that the Spirit prays through the bride means especially two things. First, it means that the church will never pray this prayer without the Spirit in her heart. The joy that the bride finds in being married to Christ and the longing that the bride has for Christ to come are both created by the Holy Spirit. Without Him there would not possibly be a saint throughout the entire two thousand years of New Testament history that would ever make this prayer his own. The Spirit makes the bride pray this prayer because in the great mystery of salvation it is the Spirit who brings Christ Himself to the church in a wonderful way. Jesus Himself said before He went into heaven, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). And although He is absent and we cannot see Him and the distance between us and Him is great, nevertheless by His Spirit He Himself is present with His bride. The marriage that makes Christ and His bride “one flesh” is consummated by the Spirit. And so this text means that the Spirit prays through the bride because through the Spirit Christ dwells in His church and the church with Him. The all-powerful bridegroom enables His church to remain His bride in the midst of a sinful world and creates in the hearts and minds of the bride this urgent and even passionate prayer.

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In the second place, however, the text mentions that this prayer is also the prayer of the Spirit because the Spirit Himself desires the coming of Christ. We must understand that. The Spirit does not simply act on behalf of the people of God and on behalf of the coming of Christ when He rouses in the hearts of the faithful this urgent prayer. The Spirit is expressing in the hearts of the church and of the saints His own personal desire that Christ come. The reason is that the Spirit is fully conscious of the fact that He is the Spirit of the exalted Christ given to Christ at His ascension by the Triune God. The Spirit knows all God's works that God performs through Christ. He is given to Christ at Christ's ascension to bring to us the work of Christ. He works the work of Christ that Christ Himself accomplished in all His work here on earth. He works the purpose of Christ, which great work is the salvation of the church, the marriage of the Lamb, the union fully consummated of Christ and His elect bride. The Spirit desires that the bridegroom come that Christ's work may be perfected. Therefore, though His prayer stimulates the church's prayer, it is an expression of His own desire as well. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." There is profound theological truth wrapped up in those simple words.

The Content of This Prayer

The content of the prayer of the Spirit and the Bride is expressed in the one word, "Come." There is in that brief one-word prayer both a kind of urgency and a firm assurance that Christ, who is in heaven, will hear. We do not have to make a long prayer that goes into all kinds of detail and explains all the implication when we express to Christ our desire that He come again. To say, "Come," is enough. The Lord knows what we mean. The Lord understands for He knows the anxiety with which it is expressed. The Lord understands the brevity of that prayer and the assurance with which the child of God prays.

The full prayer is expressed, of course, in other parts of this same chapter, "Come, Lord Jesus. Yea, come quickly." And the full

prayer, which is expressed in different texts, expresses, if I may put it that way, a kind of oppressing necessity, almost as if the church means to say, as she struggles in the midst of the world, "Lord, I have time for only one word, 'Come.' The struggle is too great; the battle is too fierce; I cannot be distracted for a moment from the enemies that surround me and from the perils that lurk after my soul. It is terrible down here, and it keeps me occupied every moment of the day. 'Come.'" It is like a cry wrung from the heart of a church hard-pressed. Especially as that church has heard the Word of Christ in this wonderful and profound book of Revelation and contemplates all the dreadful things that must befall the church ere the Lord come back, the prayer is all summed up in the one word: "Come"!

There is implied in that prayer, "Come," a few more things to which I briefly call your attention. There is implied, first of all, a love for the Lord, that is urgent and passionate. What bride, tell me, what bride who loves her husband can bear to be separated from Him, at the moment the ceremony is completed? What bride must live, as it were, alone in the world without her husband? If she loves her husband, then this cry becomes a prayer of love. "I can't wait until the time comes when I can experience thy everlasting arms of love embracing me and taking me into your own heart. Then I shall look in your face and see the love that shines from your eyes. That is all my longing; that is all my delight; that is what I want more than anything in the world."

That love, of course, as is always the case even in an earthly marriage, is a love which is instilled in the heart of the bride by the bridegroom. Christ loves her first and her expression of love for Him is only because she is overwhelmed with the consciousness of the love of the bridegroom for her.

She has questions and her questions demand an answer: How can He love me? Before He came to me and took me as His bride, I was a spiritual prostitute, who lived in the depths of the depravity of unfaithfulness and loved every minute of it. How can He love

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me? The answer can only be that God eternally loves Himself. He reveals that love for Himself by loving me. He loves us in Christ with an eternal love and He sheds that love abroad in my heart by His Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

The bride is overwhelmed by this truth. The bride is overwhelmed not only with the knowledge of that love of God for her but the bride is assured of that love because the Spirit creates that certainty. There are so many reasons from an earthly point of view why the bride would say, "I don't know. I doubt it. I doubt very much whether He loves me."

Doubts also arise because the bridegroom does not come back. "He just lets His bride struggle along here in the world. It's almost as if He became preoccupied with other things and became so deeply involved in other things that He forgot all about me. I expected Him to come long ago, but He didn't come. And every day it grows more difficult and He doesn't come. Maybe He has changed His mind when He sees all these sins. Maybe he says, 'No. My wife, whom I married, is unfaithful, and I will divorce her. I will forget about her.' If He would say that, I would have to admit that He has every right to do so, that is, as far as my life is concerned, He has every right to do so."

But, you see, through the Spirit we have Christ with us, He assures us that no matter what happens and no matter how unfaithful we are, He loves us. He sheds that love abroad in our hearts in such a way that it creates in us an overwhelming love for Him. He loves us. What can the bride say but, "My Lord, I love thee"? It is out of the love that His own love creates in us that we say, "We can't wait. We can't wait until we are with Him." Out of that love, we say, "Come. May the day be soon when we live together and when our marriage is consummated. What a day that will be!"

In the second place this prayer is not only an expression of love but, as I said in my introduction, there is a certain impatience about it, an impatience that arises out of the seeming delay of the Lord. This impatience arises out of the difficulty of being without

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Christ our bridegroom in this world. The bride is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a terrible enemy. The Lord Himself told us what a struggle it would be to be faithful to our bridegroom. The Lord said, "Your lot in this world is going to be this: You are going to suffer. You are going to be hated of all men. You are going to be dragged in front of rulers and kings. You are going to be imprisoned. You are going to have to suffer as I suffered here on earth when I was among you. You are going to have to die a martyr's death. The life you have to live without me is a life of great difficulty" (cf. Matt. 24).

You ask why Christ wills so much suffering for His church? The answer is that He gives us the privilege of suffering with Him. Suffering brings us into His fellowship more closely. It sanctifies and purifies. It prepares us for glory.

The impatience which the bride expresses in this prayer is born indeed out of her suffering. Even the souls under the altar cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10). The church willingly bears the suffering which is her lot in the world on behalf of the gospel. She understands full well that we must with much tribulation enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). While it is impossible to be indifferent towards the suffering which we must endure, eagerness to be with the Lord is so great that it overrides our fears. It is like a sick person facing a dreaded operation and the inevitable pain, who is willing to endure the pain to attain health. So, you see, there is a kind of what I could call impatience about this prayer. That is expressed in that brief, short, emphatic word, "Come."

In the third place, that expression of the church for the Lord's coming implies that the church is faithful. If a husband who has just married a wife goes away for thirty years and the wife says, "I am now free and I am going to have a good time," she is unfaithful. If she says, "Now he is gone and I can do as I please," it surely cannot be said of her that she longs for his return. If she then says

to a friend, "I wish my husband would come back," that friend would say to her, "You would rather have him away. You would rather not have him come back, because, if you really wanted him to come back and you were longing to see him, you wouldn't live unfaithfully." This implication of the text comes to us with a great deal of force. The one who prays this prayer expresses in it a certain faithfulness, a desire to keep one's garments unspotted from the world, a willingness to endure what must be endured, regardless of the allurements and temptations that come upon her. I mean, if I may put it briefly, it is impossible to pray this prayer if we are having a good time here and enjoying the world and its pleasures and all the lusts of the flesh. If our life is characterized by a life that differs in almost no respect from the ungodly in the midst of whom we live, we are not going to convince Christ or the world about us that we want Him to come back. We say, "Life is too good; we are having too much fun; this world is too nice a place. We are going to enjoy it to the full." If these things are true, there is no sense to any such kind of prayer as, "Come, Lord Jesus. Yea, come quickly."

The Urgency of Making This Prayer

Therefore, because the Lord knows our sins and the struggle to be faithful to Him, the Lord comes to us with an admonition. "Let him that heareth say, Come." Do you hear this admonition of the Lord? That is, Do you hear the words of Christ that speak of the fact that God's eternal purpose is to glorify His own great and glorious name through Christ and the salvation of the church married to Him? Do you hear that? Do you hear the Word of God that says, "Christ has Himself married you through the blood of His cross and He loves you with an eternal love and gave Himself for you out of love and compassion?" Those moving words of Christ, which you can hardly read without a break in your voice, and which the apostle John uses to introduce the foot-washing at the last supper, say it all: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). He does not love His own because we are so noble, best suited of all

The Work of the Holy Spirit

the people in the world to accomplish His purpose or because He finds us virtuous. No. He loves us with a sovereign love that is rooted in God's eternal good pleasure. He loves us so much He shed His blood for us. So this is His word to us here in the world. This is His Word not only as it comes to us objectively through the gospel but also His Word given by His Spirit in our hearts that seals His love upon our hearts so that we know and experience that love, marvel at it and are overwhelmed by it. But we are in the world and the Lord knows that. So He says, "If you hear my words to you, then pray, 'Come, Lord Jesus.'"

This, then, is an admonition that we all need to hear. In fact, the need for an admonition is strongly spelled out in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:14-30). As the hours during which the virgins were waiting rolled by and the time for the bridegroom's arrival came and went and the bridegroom did not appear, all ten virgins, the wise and the foolish, fell asleep. That is frightening. They *all* fell asleep. That is a description of the church: we fall asleep. We fall asleep partly because there is that in our own sinful natures that *does* love this world and *does* find it an altogether attractive place in which to spend the years of our life. And we are most reluctant to shake off, and separate ourselves from, the ungodliness that surrounds us and the wickedness that fills the cup of iniquity. We fall asleep because, when we are in that frame of mind that allows the world to fill us with its attractiveness, we do not want Christ to come. Why should He interrupt our party? Why should He cut short the good time we are having? Let Him postpone His coming.

There is an urgency about this admonition. Do you hear the words of Christ, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life. You are my bride. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world"? We need that admonition. We need that admonition over and over again. And it is only when the Word of Christ sinks deeply into our hearts and seizes us by its power that we walk as the bride of Christ and are able to make this prayer our own. But it must be our prayer. It must be on our lips. It must be expressed in all our life.

The Bride's Prayer for the Bridegroom's Coming

We are yet far from the spiritual frame of mind and heart that this prayer is truly ours. But then, too, when we look at our own weaknesses and sins, there is this comforting and assuring word of Christ, "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world. I will take care of you. I know your sins; I know your failures. I died for them. Your sins are forgiven. Wonderfully, amazingly forgiven. I will be faithful to you in your unfaithfulness. I will take you to Myself. The marriage feast of the lamb is about to be celebrated where we will be together and you will see Me face to face and I will embrace you with the arms of My love and take you into My bosom. Then we shall live together in wonderful, perfect, sinless marital bliss world without end." That is His promise. That promise inspires in us the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus. Yea, come quickly." Amen.

APPENDIX

About the British Reformed Fellowship



The British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) was founded in 1990 by a group of Reformed Christians set for the defence of the historic Reformed faith in the British Isles. Its doctrinal basis is “the inspired, infallible, inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as summarized and systematized in the Reformed confessions, specifically the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Standards*.”

The BRF produces a biblical and theological journal, the *British Reformed Journal (BRJ)*, four times a year or as frequently as possible. Subscription rates, as of 2010, are £10 (UK, Europe & elsewhere) or \$20US (N. America) for four issues of the *BRJ*. Membership in the BRF, which includes receiving four issues of the *BRJ*, costs the same as subscription to the *BRJ* and is available to Reformed Christians in the British Isles and Europe who agree with its doctrinal basis. New subscribers and members are welcome.

The BRF holds biennial family conferences at various locations in the British Isles for a week in the summer, usually in the beginning of August. Previous conference themes include Marriage and the Family, The Covenant of Grace, Sovereign Grace, The Church, The Last Things, The Kingdom of God, Assurance, Keeping God’s Covenant, The Five Points of Calvinism and (of course) The Work of the Holy Spirit. Why not consider joining us for a relaxing week’s fellowship around God’s Word?

The BRF website (www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk) con-

Appendix

tains articles from the *BRJ*, as well as information on BRF conferences, free audios, contact details and other materials. So look us up on the web!