

— *Be Ye* —
HOLY

*The Reformed Doctrine
of Sanctification*

David J. Engelsma ~ Herman Hanko

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Foreword

“Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” This is the admirable, succinct definition of sanctification given in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. & A. 35).

The truth of God’s definitive and progressive work of making us holy, beautifully summarized in the sentence above by the Westminster divines, is explained, illustrated, defended and applied in great depth and length in the ten chapters of this book. In this little volume, the orthodox teaching of sanctification is set forth over against various heresies, especially antinomianism or antinomism. Here Scripture (and its exegesis), the Reformed confessions (both the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Standards*) and church history are all brought to bear on the glorious subject of the believer’s conformity to Christ in sanctification.

The goal is that we might know the truth of sanctification—which biblical doctrine, like all other aspects of God’s truth, makes us free (John 8:32)—and obey the gospel call to holiness in heart and life, by God’s grace. Some 2,000 years ago, on the day before His crucifixion for us, our Saviour prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Christ’s prayer on that momentous night and His continuous intercession for His church embraces not only the billions of God’s elect over the millennia and the innumerable occasions whereby He uses His truth in various ways; it also includes this humble book and all the saints who shall read it.

The two main authors of this work are Profs. David J. Engelsma and Herman Hanko, who are responsible for the first eight chapters which

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are contained in the first two parts of the book. Part 1 embraces, in written form, the six main speeches at the 2014 British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference at Gartmore House, near Loch Lomond in the southern part of the Scottish Highlands (26 July - 2 August). Part 2 consists of the Sunday sermons at that Conference by our two chief speakers; they supplement the six core lectures by developing various aspects of the doctrine of sanctification. Part 3 begins with the introductory speech at the 2014 BRF Conference by Rev. Martyn McGeown, editor of the *British Reformed Journal* (BRJ) and missionary-pastor of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) in the Republic of Ireland, and concludes with the special lecture on James Fraser of Alness and his famous “explication” of Romans 6:1-8:4 by Rev. Angus Stewart, the minister of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in Ballymena, N. Ireland.¹

Be Ye Holy is the sixth BRF book co-authored by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma, the others being *Keeping God’s Covenant* (2006), *The Five Points of Calvinism* (2008), *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (2010), *The Reformed Worldview* (2012) and *Ye Are My Witnesses* (2014).²

As you read this book, heed the biblical commandment: “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Pet. 1:16; cf. Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26)!

Rev. Angus Stewart
BRF Chairman

¹ For publication in this book, Prof. Engelsma has expanded his lectures in places and has inserted notes documenting most of the quotations in the speeches. What is not fitting in an oral presentation is helpful in their written form. The three other writers of this book have also done this to a greater or lesser extent.

² All six of these books, plus many others by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma, as well as other fine Reformed literature and box sets of CDs and DVDs, are available from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Bookstore (www.cprf.co.uk/bookstore). The main distributor of *Be Ye Holy* in North America is listed opposite the Contents page. Most of the works of Profs. Engelsma and Hanko are published by, and available from, the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) in Jenison, Michigan, USA (www.rfpa.org).

Part 1: Chapter 1

The Divine Work of Sanctification

David J. Engelsma

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (I Pet. 1:15-16).

Introduction

The biblical truth that is the subject of this conference and of this book—an aspect of the saving work of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit—is as important, fascinating and profitable an element of the gospel as any we have treated before: “The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification.”

The Bible emphasizes the significance of sanctification. Our sanctification was the purpose of God in electing us in eternity before the foundation of the world. So we read in Ephesians 1:4: God elected us “that we should be holy and without blame before him.”

Our sanctification was the purpose of Jesus Christ in suffering the cross: “And for their sakes I sanctify myself [by the death of the cross], that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). All the way through His prayer in John 17, the concern of Jesus was the holiness of those whom the Father had given Him and for whom He was about to give up His life: “keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me” (v. 11); “keep them from the evil” (v. 15); “Sanctify them” (v. 17); and then verse 19, which I quoted previously. Evidently, the main purpose of Jesus and, therefore, of God in the death of Jesus was our sanctification, that is, that we might be holy.

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To complete the account of the Trinitarian importance of sanctification, the outstanding work of the Holy Spirit in salvation is the work of sanctification. The *Heidelberg Catechism* confesses this importance of sanctification as the outstanding saving work of the Spirit (Q. & A. 24). There, the *Catechism* analyzes the third part of the *Apostles' Creed* as teaching “God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification.”

Thus the Bible corrects the error of making justification the main purpose, if not the only purpose, of God in our election, in the atonement of the cross and in our renewal by the Spirit. Thus, also, the Bible exposes the heresy of denying that salvation includes, as a fundamental aspect of salvation, the sanctification of the saved children of God. This error is an aspect of the false doctrine of antinomianism or antinomism, which we will consider later.

What I and my colleagues will teach and defend in this book is the distinctively Reformed and Presbyterian truth of sanctification. The doctrine of sanctification is controversial. It is corrupted by grievous errors.

This truth was corrupted already in biblical times. Jesus' letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 expose and condemn false teachings and the resulting unholy practices regarding sanctification. In fact, the main error troubling the seven churches concerned sanctification. Ephesus had “left” its “first love” for God in Jesus Christ—the root of all unholiness—and no longer practised its “first works” (Rev. 2:4-5). Pergamos tolerated teachers who held the doctrine of Balaam, who was instrumental in getting Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to practise fornication, and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which was a teaching that promoted unholiness (Rev. 2:14-15). Thyatira had a female preacher who seduced Christ's servants to “commit fornication” in connection with idolatry. The theology of this “Jezebel” was that one ought to know the “depths of Satan” in order to appreciate salvation (Rev. 2:20, 24). Sardis was “dead” spiritually. Its “works” were not “perfect before God.” Members defiled their garments (Rev. 3:1-2, 4). Laodicea showed its lukewarmness by its unholy works (Rev. 3:15-18).

Today, too, many churches are rebuked, chastised and judged by Jesus Christ for their wickedness in the matter of sanctification. Many

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churches sin by their toleration, and even approval, of the unholy lives of the membership. There is no church discipline of members who go on impenitently in gross, open wickedness. Many churches, having succumbed to the wickedness of the surrounding society and of the prevailing culture, are filled with members who are unbiblically divorced and remarried. This is “adultery” according to Mark 10:11-12 and other passages. Young people of the churches openly “shack up,” which is the fornication forbidden in Ephesians 5:3.

Heresies concerning sanctification abound in Protestant churches. Arminianism in much of Protestantism makes good works the condition of salvation, as does also the heresy of the Federal Vision in nominally Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The churches in the tradition of Wesley make sanctification a matter of a dramatic “second blessing” with its implication of perfectionism.

And then there are the various forms of antinomianism, the mildest form of which false doctrine is the teaching that sanctification is not a necessary work of salvation for all Christians.

In my chapters in this book, I intend to explain and defend the distinctively Reformed doctrine, while at the same time I will expose and condemn the teachings that deviate from the Reformed or Calvinistic doctrine. Exposure of error serves at least two helpful purposes: It sounds a warning to Reformed saints against threatening evils and it serves to sharpen knowledge of the truth by means of the contrast with the lie.

The Reality

Sanctification, that is, literally, “making holy,” is a divine work. It is a divine work only and a divine work in its entirety. From its beginning in regeneration to its perfection in the resurrection of the body in the day of Christ, sanctification is the work of God, the work of God alone. This is the testimony of Scripture and of the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions. Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17 that He, God, would sanctify all those whom God had given to Jesus (v. 17). Jesus based this wholly divine work, not on anything in those whom the Father would sanctify, but solely on Jesus’ own sanctification of Himself in His death (v. 19).

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The Reformed confessions express this testimony of Scripture. At the very beginning of the third section of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, which sets forth the holy, Christian life of gratitude, the *Catechism* asks, “why must we do good works?” The answer is, “Christ ... renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image” (Q. & A. 86). Renewal by the Spirit is the work of sanctification. The creed attributes this work to Christ and His Holy Spirit. We *are* renewed. The work of renewal is Jesus Christ’s.

The first article of the fifth head of doctrine of the *Canons of Dordt* makes sanctification the work of God upon us and within us: “Whom God calls ... and regenerates by the Holy Spirit He delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life” (V:1). Deliverance from the dominion and slavery of sin is sanctification, and it is God who accomplishes this deliverance.

Likewise, the Presbyterian *Westminster Standards* teach that sanctification is the work of God. *Westminster Confession* 13:1 states,

They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are farther sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his word and Spirit dwelling in them.

We *are* sanctified by another and that other is Christ Jesus the Saviour.

Such also is the doctrine of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*:

What is sanctification?

Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God hath ... chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit ... renewed in their whole man after the image of God (Q. & A. 75).

In all these confessional statements, the passive voice of the verb is used with regard to us humans: we “*are* ... renewed.” He who actively renews or sanctifies is God.

According to the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, not only is sanctification the work of God but it is also the work of His “grace.” It is not,

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therefore, a work that we deserve or a work that depends upon us. In every respect, it is wholly and exclusively the work of God.

Sanctification is necessarily the work of God and the work of His grace. Our natural, spiritual condition, by virtue of our being conceived as children of Adam, is that of total depravity or spiritual death. Our entire nature—body and soul—is corrupt, inclined to hate God and the neighbour, and inclined to all evil. This wickedness of our very nature—what we are—is a bondage, a slavery, to sin and to Satan. Here we remember the great, decisive book by Martin Luther, laying bare the fundamental issue in the controversy of the church re-formed with the Roman Catholic Church: *The Bondage of the Will*.

The Bible describes the natural, spiritual condition of all of us humans as a “death”—a spiritual death. With regard to any and all possibility of being holy and good, and with regard to all possibility of performing good works, we are dead by nature, by virtue of our natural relation to Adam. This is the testimony of Ephesians 2:5: “Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ.” Ephesians 2:4 teaches that this quickening or resurrection-work of God is entirely due to His grace, not to anything we are or do to deserve this quickening: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,” quickened us when we were dead.

Dead people do not raise themselves!

Slaves cannot free themselves, not slaves whose masters are the mighty lords, sin and Satan!

Men and women who are totally depraved have no ability to make themselves holy or even to desire to be made holy!

If we are to become holy, God must accomplish this wonderful work. He must do it, not because of anything in us but because He is gracious to us. Ephesians 2:4-5 teaches that sanctification is due to God’s mercy—a rich mercy—and to His love—His great love.

Rather than take credit for our holiness, we should praise and thank God for it. All the more ought we to be motivated to praise and thank God that we are holy because our sanctification is such a precious,

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glorious aspect of our salvation. It is freedom from slavery—slavery to the destructive masters of sin and Satan. It is freedom to serve the honourable, gracious Lord Jesus, the service of whom is a privilege, delightful and rewarded. Spiritual liberty from the enslaving power of sin is a priceless grace empowering a blessed, beautiful, noble human life. I Peter 1:18 proclaims that sanctification frees us from our “vain conversation,” that is, from our formerly empty, worthless, purposeless lives.

Sanctification is resurrection from the dead. In sanctifying us, God raises us from a death in sin, a death that ends in eternal death in hell. Sanctification raises us into a life of sweet communion with God, into a life that has as its end and goal everlasting life in the new world, soul and body.

Sanctification makes beautiful the life that was vile and ugly. It makes honourable the life that was shameful. It makes worthy the life that was not only worthless, but indeed harmful and destructive, not only to oneself, but also to one’s neighbours and, worst of all, to the manifestation of the glory of God.

Rightly, John Owen has written:

Among all the glorious works of God, next unto that of redemption by Jesus Christ, my soul doth most admire this of the Spirit in preserving the seed and principle of holiness in us, as a spark of fire in the midst of the ocean, against all corruptions and temptations wherewith it is impugned.¹

What a robbery of the goodness, grace and power of the sanctifying God that we ourselves would take the credit for our holiness! We would show ourselves unthankful wretches. We would cast doubt on whether we were sanctified at all.

As sanctification is necessarily a work of God, so also is sanctification a necessary work of our salvation. Salvation necessarily consists of the sanctification of the elect, redeemed sinner. Without this work, one is not saved, nor can an unholy sinner consider himself saved.

¹ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Sovereign Grace, 1971), p. 399.

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Significantly, the *Westminster Standards* affirm God's work of sanctification as a work "in time" and "in this life," that is, in the lifetime of all the elect (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, A. 75; *Westminster Confession* 13:2).

Scripture teaches the necessity of sanctification in salvation. Exhorting the Hebrew Christians to "follow ... holiness," the writer declares, "without which [i.e., holiness] no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The Reformed "order of salvation" of every human who is saved includes "sanctification."²

Ultimately, the necessity of sanctification, and of the resulting holiness of God's people, is that expressed by Peter: "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:16). Our God is holy. Therefore, His saved people must also be holy. And, therefore, He makes us holy.

The necessity of holiness bears heavily on our assurance of salvation. Just as without holiness no man shall see the Lord, so also without holiness no man can be sure that he will see the Lord. Indeed, so long as one remains unholy, the unholy man or woman can only fear that he or she will not see the Lord. That holiness functions to assure us of our salvation is the testimony of the *Canons* V:10: "assurance [of salvation] ... springs from ... a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works." Noteworthy is that the *Canons* insist also that this assurance, which comes in part from holiness, results in even greater holiness: "consideration of this benefit [i.e., the assurance of salvation] should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works" (V:12).

Assurance of salvation does not lead to "licentiousness or a disregard to piety" (V:13).

This importance of sanctification raises the question: What exactly is this work of God in His people "in time" and "in this life," as the

² Representative is Herman Hoeksema: "the *ordo salutis* [i.e., order of salvation is]: [1] regeneration, [2] calling, [3] faith, [4] conversion, [5] justification, [6] sanctification, [7] preservation and perseverance, [8] glorification" (*Reformed Dogmatics* [Grandville, MI: RFP, 2005], vol. 2, p. 24).

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Westminster Standards put it? More particularly, what is this work of God, according to the Reformed and Presbyterian understanding of sanctification? The more particular form of the question is necessary because of the misunderstanding on the part of many nominal Christians and because of the heretical teachings of many churches.

A Sketch of the Doctrine of Sanctification

In the remainder of this chapter, I merely outline the main aspects of sanctification according to the Bible, in full knowledge that each of the aspects itself merits, virtually demands, a full chapter in its own right. In light of Peter's relating our holiness to God's holiness in I Peter 1:15-16, we must, first of all, view holiness in ourselves as God's own holiness shared with us in creaturely measure. In God, holiness—a prominent perfection; some have said the predominate perfection—is not only His separation from and detestation of sin, but also His consecration to Himself as the Good One. In us, accordingly, holiness is our spiritual separation from sin in hatred of it and our consecration to God in love for Him.

Holiness, therefore, is not mere morality—abstaining from certain immoral deeds and observing a code of decent behaviour.

Holiness is not, primarily, our activity at all: our separating ourselves from wickedness and our devoting ourselves to God the Good. But our holiness is this, that God delivers us from the world of iniquity—from everything and everyone that detests Him and violates His goodness—and consecrates us to Himself. In making us holy, God gives us a new nature—a sin-hating, God-loving nature. Governed by this new nature, our person is renewed as an “I” that hates the evil that he or she does and loves the good that he or she does not do (Rom. 7:15, 19).

Inasmuch as God's holiness is His self-consecration in the fellowship of the Trinity, our holiness is essentially fellowship with God. Holiness for a human is the love of God and, in this love, communion with Him.

This is the reality of the covenant of grace: communion in love of the holy God with His sanctified people.

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The realization of the covenant of God with His people in Jesus Christ is sanctification.

This was what Calvin's enemies noticed in him when they called him, not well-meaningly, that "God-intoxicated man."

Sanctification as "Antithesis"

That aspect of sanctification consisting of separation from everything and everyone sinful is, in reality, what especially Dutch Reformed theology calls the "antithesis." The antithesis is spiritual separation from sin and from the manifestation of sin in unholy humans and their evil deeds. The antithesis is the necessary implication and outworking of consecration to God.

That this would be an important aspect of His saving work in Jesus Christ, God made plain immediately after the fall of the human race in the first pronouncement of the gospel: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen. 3:15). Enmity, hostility, separation, antithesis—this is holiness in its negative expression. The truth that holiness, which is primarily devotion to and friendship with God, implies hostility towards, and separation from, the world of the ungodly is the teaching of James 4:4: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Sanctification's Beginning in Regeneration

For this separation from the wicked world and this consecration to God, nothing less than a rebirth is required. This is the second main aspect of sanctification: regeneration. Regeneration is the beginning of sanctification. The elect child of God is born again or born from above (Jesus' word in John 3:3 means both "again" and "from above"), as a man who is holy with the holiness of God Himself. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again" (I Pet. 1:3).

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Regeneration or rebirth is a radical spiritual change: the work of God on a man (not his own work) and the beginning of the divine work of sanctification—making one holy. This new birth from above restores to a totally depraved sinner the image of God in which God made man originally and which the race lost in the disobedience and fall of father Adam. Sanctification is the work of God that remakes us in God's image. The sanctified person resembles God, is like God, whereas before he or she resembled Satan. This image is knowledge, righteousness and holiness. "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24; cf. Col. 3:10).

So radical is the change in us by the new birth, so thoroughly does it change us, so much is it the case that it gives us a new nature and makes us a new person, that the Bible describes it as God's creation of us as new creatures. There is deliberate comparison with the divine work of creating all things, especially humans, in the beginning. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17).

We must know these marvels to be true of us who believe in Jesus Christ. We must know ourselves to be such marvellous humans. We can know this and we must know this about ourselves. There is no doubt that we believe in Jesus Christ and that, believing, we are spiritually alive, anymore than we doubt whether we were once born physically and are now alive physically.

The notion that many reborn Christians go through much of their lives doubting whether they were born again and whether they are alive spiritually is as foolish as it is pernicious. Holy people are different, are distinctive, are beautiful, are honourable, are glorious creations of God.

We must know God's sanctification of us, beginning with regeneration, so that we thank God for what He has done for us. We must thank Him for our being what we are, that is, holy, and for our living according to what we are, that is, a holy life.

Only a “Very Small” Beginning

Knowing that we are holy demands that we have right knowledge of sanctification in this life, lest ignorance or error concerning sanctification produce passivity. Here, especially, the distinctively Reformed doctrine of sanctification is important. First, in this life holiness is only a beginning, even a very small beginning. Holiness is never perfect in this life in any of God’s children, contrary to the heretical, but popular, doctrine of John Wesley. A prominent disciple of Wesley gave expression to the characteristic Wesleyan doctrine of perfection in these words: “As I trust Christ in surrender, there need be no fighting against sin, but complete freedom from the power and even the desire of sin.”³

Perfectionism is false doctrine concerning sanctification. Even though we have a new nature, we retain the old nature with which we were conceived and born. This old nature—the “old man”—is and remains totally depraved. Luther taught that the saved, believing child of God retains a totally depraved nature as long as he lives in the second part of his well-known description of the believer as *simul justus et peccator* (“at the same time righteous and sinner”).

Perfectionism, which is the teaching that Christians can become perfectly holy in this life, is false doctrine. Not only does the Bible teach every disciple of Jesus to pray for the forgiveness of his sins as long as he lives (Matt. 6:12) but it also teaches that the holiest of saints—the apostle Paul himself—retains a sinfully corrupt nature—which is sin—to the very end of his life. From that sinful nature proceed sinful thoughts, desires and feelings, which are sins, as well as sinful words and deeds (Rom. 7:7-25).

Perfectionism breeds despair. An honest Christian, recognizing his depraved nature with its evil lusts, observing that his best works are

³ Charles G. Trumbull, cited in Cary N. Weisiger III, *The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification* (Washington, D.C.: Christianity Today [Fundamentals of the Faith], n.d.), p. 7. As is also characteristic of the Wesleyan doctrine of perfect sanctification, Trumbull leaves the distinct impression that the Spirit’s work of perfecting holiness in him was an instantaneous, dramatic event in Trumbull’s experience—the vaunted “second blessing,” which Pentecostalism has then pressed into the service of its “Spirit baptism.”

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still defiled with sin, noting that he does not do the (perfect) good that he wants to do, but that he does the evil that he wills not to do, and impressed with the awesome holiness of God to which his life is called to compare, but supposing that he could be perfectly holy, will doubt whether he is a saved child of God at all. This is despair.

Perfectionism spawns hypocrisy. Supposing that he can be perfectly holy in this life, the disciple of a John Wesley or another such false teacher will excuse his sins as mere mistakes, will reduce the will of God for his life to the demand to do the best he can and will redefine sin as a deliberate act of gross violation of a known commandment of God, thus limiting sin to the deed and even then to certain gross deeds of disobedience.

John Wesley taught the possibility of perfect holiness in this life, as do at least some of his Methodist and Pentecostal disciples still today. With reference to the Bible's teaching of the circumcision of the heart, Wesley affirmed,

that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit'; and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so 'renewed in the spirit of our mind,' as to be 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.'⁴

Having committed himself to sinless perfectionism, Wesley found it necessary radically to redefine sin as "voluntary transgressions of the known will of God."⁵ Corruption of nature; vile thoughts, desires and passions; even spontaneous outbursts of wicked words or the spur-of-the-moment lawless deed are no longer sins. They are, according to Wesley, mere "mistakes."⁶ Thus Wesley and his followers achieved perfection, not by the sinner's increase in holiness but by the diminishing of the holiness of God.

⁴ Quoted by Laurence W. Wood, "The Wesleyan View," in Donald L. Alexander (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 109.

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 112. See also p. 85.

⁶ "Many mistakes [sic] may coexist with pure love" (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 112).

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Puffed up in the conviction of his sinless perfection, which is the worst of all forms of pride, the perfectionist will present himself to others as having attained perfection of holiness. To which boast on the part of a husband, one appropriate response would be, “Before I believe it, let me inquire of your wife.”

Concerning the truth that the regenerated, saved child of God retains a totally depraved nature all his or her life, Romans 7 is of great importance. Particularly in the second half of the chapter, the saved, believing child of God is speaking and describing his spiritual experience. The apostle Paul speaks, and he speaks about himself as he finds himself to be, spiritually, at the end of his life: “I am carnal, sold under sin” (v. 14); “in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (v. 18); “the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (v. 19); “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (v. 23); “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (v. 24).

The Reformed confession, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, teaches that we reborn, saved, believing children of God are “still inclined to all evil” as long as we live (A. 60). In Answer 114, the *Catechism* passes this judgment upon us: “even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience [to the commandments of the law of God].”⁷

A Victorious Beginning

Second, concerning God’s work of sanctification, even though only a “beginning,” indeed, a very small beginning, our holiness—our new, holy nature—is victorious. There is in the sanctified children of God a lifelong, tremendous, often violent conflict, a spiritual war. It is a war between the old, depraved human nature with which we were

⁷ The original German, here rendered “small,” is “*geringen*,” which translates as “very small” (Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 [New York: Harper & Brothers, rev. 1919], p. 349). Such is the depravity of nature of even the holiest child of God in this life that what is only a beginning of holy obedience to the law of God is, in fact, not only a *small* beginning but also only a *very* small beginning. This is the Reformed confession against Wesleyan perfectionism.

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born and the new, holy nature with which we have been reborn. It is a war between the old man and the new man. It is the war between Adam in us and Christ in us. In this war, the new man—Christ in us—is victorious. The victory takes the form of not going on impenitently in sin; of repentance, when we fall and disobey; and of renewal of a holy life after falling, so that we are more devoted to God than before our fall.

In this life, sanctification is not the eradication of sin from the regenerated, believing child of God but it is the overthrow in him or her of the reign of sin. Preaching sanctification to the believer, Paul announces, not that sin is no longer present in him or even that sin is no longer strong in him, but that “sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14). It is, therefore, a reasonable admonition, capable of fulfilment in this life: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12). Once we were the slaves of sin, but no longer. Now, as sanctified believers, we have become “servants of righteousness” and “servants to God” (Rom. 6:18, 22).

The Reformed faith confesses sanctification as deliverance, not in this life from sin altogether—perfectionism—but from the ruling power of sin, in the *Canons of Dordt*:

Whom God calls, according to His purpose, to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit He delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life; though not altogether from the body of sin, and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in this world (V:1).

Immediately, this Reformed creed makes the practical application:

Hence spring daily sins of infirmity, and hence spots adhere to the best works of the saints, which furnish them with constant matter for humiliation before God and flying for refuge to Christ crucified; for mortifying the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of piety; and for pressing forward to the goal of perfection, till being at length delivered from this body of

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death they are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven (V:2).

Wholly Sanctified

A third essential aspect of our sanctification is that God's saving work of making us holy applies to the whole of our life, not merely to parts of it. The sanctified man is holy at church and at work. He is holy in his personal devotions and in his marriage and family. He is holy in his study of the Word of God and in his eating and drinking. He is holy in his relations with his fellow church members and in his relations with his ungodly neighbours. He is holy in his testimony to others and in his business dealings. He is holy on the job and on vacation. He is holy with regard to the actions of his body and he is holy with regard to the thoughts of his mind.

It is not so that he is holy on Sunday but worldly on the weekdays; that he treats his neighbours in a Christian fashion but goes home to beat or otherwise mistreat his wife; that he reads the Bible and religious literature but also amuses himself with pornography.

Such a man or woman is not a saint but a hypocrite!

Sanctification in all parts of the Christian and, therefore, in all aspects of his or her life is the thought of the "whole" sanctification taught in I Thessalonians 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Fourth, sanctification is progressive, a work of God characterized by "more and more," as the *Heidelberg Catechism* describes the sanctifying work of God: "more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come" (A. 115).

Our Sanctifying Ourselves

Fifth, sanctification is a work of God that causes the child of God himself to be active in the work, intensely active. Nor is the intense

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activity of the child of God in sanctifying himself a contradiction of the truth that sanctification is the work of God and the work of God alone. The activity of the child of God in sanctifying himself is not cooperation with God in the work, as is the teaching of Jerry Bridges:

The pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking; He does not do that for us.⁸

The activity of pursuing holiness on the part of the believer is certainly not an activity upon which God's work of sanctifying depends.

But our being active in sanctifying ourselves is the manner in which God sanctifies us all our life long.

That God sanctifies us in such a way that we are active in sanctifying ourselves is the truth expressed in I Peter 1:16: "Be ye holy; for I am holy." The imperative "Be" is certainly a call to us to be active in our own sanctification. But it is also, and first of all, the powerful, indeed irresistible, Word of God to the elect believer *making* him or her holy and *causing* him or her to be active in his or her being holy. The "be ye holy" to the elect child of God is comparable to the "Let there be light" on the first day of the week of creation (Gen. 1:3). It is the Word of God that effects what it commands.

Verse 22 of I Peter 1 continues, "ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit." God's effectual Word realizes itself in such a way that the believer actively purifies himself or herself. Many passages of Scripture exhort us to practise and pursue holiness, that is, to sanctify ourselves. The truth that sanctification is God's work, and God's work alone, does not imply passivity on the part of the child of God. Divine sanctification itself is a work that effects our activity, even as parents' begetting and giving birth to a baby

⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1978), p. 14.

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causes the baby to be active from the very moment of birth in all the activity that develops the physical life of the child.

For this marvellous, mysterious work of God, comparable, and even superior, to His creation of the world, God uses means.

The Agent of Sanctification

The One who sanctifies is the Holy Spirit of the Godhead, as the Spirit who has become the Spirit of Christ upon Jesus' exaltation and who was poured out on the church at Pentecost (Acts 2). To Him the Bible attributes the saving work of making the members of Christ's church holy. According to I Peter 1:22, we purify our "souls ... through the Spirit." In John 14-17, Jesus' instruction concerning the coming of the Spirit culminates in the promise of the Spirit's work of sanctifying the disciples.

Only He—the Holy Spirit—can do the cleansing and consecrating that are the purpose of God in election and the goal of the atonement of the cross, and, therefore, Jesus told His disciples that it was "expedient" that He go away from them in the ascension (John 16:7). Only He, as Spirit, can penetrate into our innermost, spiritual being; recreate us there; and dwell in us—not *near* us but *in* us—creating, maintaining and increasing our holiness. From within us, the Spirit affects our thinking, our desiring, our feeling, our speech and our actions. Only He, as the Holy One within us, so affects us as to make us abhor what is evil and devote ourselves to the good, that is, to God.

It is this, namely, that the sanctifier is the Holy Spirit deep within us at the control-centre of our life, that not only explains our holiness but also explains the bitterest sorrow of our life. Ephesians 4:30 warns against this sorrow: "grieve not the holy Spirit of God." We grieve Him when we deliberately oppose His sanctifying work in us and wilfully give ourselves over to unholiness, whether corrupted worship of God, hatred of a neighbour or drunkenness. Since the Spirit is in us so intimately, He makes *us* experience His grief. Grieved *by* us, He becomes a grief *to* us. This grief is not the sorrow of repentance, although eventually it will lead to this. But our grief

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is the misery of the experience of God's anger and of the lack of His favour upon us. It is the grief of David when he lived impenitently in his sin of adultery and murder, as he describes his grief in Psalm 32: "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (vv. 3-4). This was David's experience of his grieving the Holy Spirit.

Who of us has not similarly grieved with the grief of having grieved the Spirit?

Preaching and Sacraments

In His work of sanctification, the Spirit uses means and, therefore, instructs us to use these means. The first of these means is the "truth," that is, the preaching of the truth of the gospel, including the truth of sanctification, by a sound minister. I Peter 1:22 describes our purifying our souls "in obeying the *truth*." In John 17, Jesus repeatedly declares that God's sanctification of us happens by means of God's truth (vv. 17, 19).

The truth is confirmed by the sacraments so that the means of sanctification include the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. By means of the sacrament of baptism, Jesus Christ is at work, giving believers that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of His fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man and putting off the old man with all his deeds.

Thus baptism "avail[s] us," not only "at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life" (*Belgic Confession* 34).

Likewise, the Lord's Supper is a means of our sanctification. *Belgic Confession* 35 declares that "we are excited by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor." Fervent love towards God and the neighbour is holiness.

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Since the means of the Spirit's saving work of sanctification are the preaching of the truth and the administration of the sacraments, for holiness of life, membership in a true, instituted church is required. There are the truth, the sacraments and also discipline, should a believer stray and fall from holiness of life. In his admonition to the Hebrew Christians that they continue in "love and ... good works," that is, in a life of sanctification, the writer immediately warns, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:24-25). Abandonment of membership in a true church is fatal to sanctification of life.

The Blood of the Crucified

The truth that sanctifies is specifically the gospel of the "blood" of Jesus Christ, that is, His redemptive death for elect sinners. *Blood* cleanses from sin. *Only* blood cleanses from sin. Only the blood of *Jesus* cleanses from sin. Not even with the energetic application of an abundance of water could Lady Macbeth wash away the sin of her murder of the king. "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" she cried, regarding the bodily instruments of the killing of Duncan. In the desperation of her guilt, she exclaimed, "Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!"⁹

Hebrews 9:14 teaches that "the blood of Christ ... purge[s] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." The shed blood of Christ obtained the right for us to be freed from the bondage of sin. Holiness is not only a benefit; it is also a matter of right. The totally depraved, enslaved sinner is in bondage to sin as a matter of justice. The sinner's condition is total depravity, according to the Latin of *Canons III/IV:2*, "*justo Dei judicio*" ("by the just judgment of God" or "in consequence of a just judgment of God").¹⁰

⁹ William Shakespeare, "Macbeth," in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (New York, NY: Dorset Press, 1988), p. 880.

¹⁰ *Canons III/IV:2*, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, pp. 564, 588. Unfortunately, this phrase accounting for the sinner's total depravity as the judgment of God upon him is omitted in many English translations of the *Canons*, including that used by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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Canons II:8 confesses that “the most precious death of His [i.e., God’s] Son” *redeemed* us from our depravity and obtained for Christ the *right* to “purge [us] from all sin, both original and actual.”

Then, according to I Peter 1:2, the Spirit sprinkles the “blood of Jesus” upon us, cleansing us from sin’s filth and breaking sin’s power.

This cleansing with the blood, by the Spirit, which takes place by means of the truth of the gospel, is applied to us and received by us by faith in Jesus Christ. Like justification, sanctification is “by faith”—by faith *alone*. Our sanctification is not by the law and its commandments. It is not by our works. This is the express doctrine of the Scriptures. In Acts 15:8-9, the apostle preached that God gave to the Gentiles the “Holy Ghost ... purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 26:18 teaches that those whom God saves “are sanctified by faith that is in me [i.e., Jesus].”

The Reformed faith confesses that a holy life is lived *according to* the law of God. It does not teach that the law of God, as law, is the means of a holy life. The law is the guide or rule of a holy life. It is not the power of a holy life.

Aids to Sanctification

All additional helps to the holiness of the saints are dependent upon the chief means, which are the preaching of the cross and the sacraments. There are additional helps of which the people of God must be aware. One such help is affliction, with its various forms of suffering. This is surely true of those afflictions that are divine chastisements for our disobedience. These afflictions correct us. They bring us to repentance and restore us to the holiness of obedience to God’s law. God’s chastening of His children has as its purpose “that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

But this is also true of those sufferings, whether of body or soul, that are not chastisements, of those sufferings that come upon the godly man or woman who is, in fact, living a holy life. Paul’s thorn in the flesh was not a chastisement occasioned by the apostle’s sin. It was given him “lest [he] should be exalted above measure” (II Cor. 12:7).

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“Affliction has been for my profit,” we sing in a musical version of Psalm 119:71, “That I to thy statutes might hold.”¹¹ How this is so, experience teaches every regenerated child of God. Affliction, by the grace of God, loosens our attachment to this life and causes us to long only for God and the resurrection of the body in the day of Christ Jesus.

As one has said, the afflictions of the believer are God’s “severe mercies.”

Augustine wisely admonished all suffering Christians:

What you suffer, what you complain about, is your medicine, not your penalty; your chastisement, not your condemnation. Do not put away the scourge if you do not want to be put away from the inheritance.¹²

Prayer is an additional help to holiness. The *Heidelberg Catechism* explains the necessity of prayer as in part this, that “God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only” who pray (A. 116). This grace and Holy Spirit are the sanctifying grace and Holy Spirit. The sixth petition of the model prayer consists of the petition for holiness: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). The positive request implied in the petition is, “Preserve me in holiness of life; sanctify me.”

There is the help of the fellowship of the saints. Just as illicit friendship with the ungodly weakens holiness and invariably results in unholy behaviour, the friendship of God’s holy people protects and strengthens the holiness of the child of God, and not only for children and young people. Again, the importance of membership—*live-ly* membership—in a true church is emphasized. Nor is it far-fetched to conclude from the danger to holiness of wicked friends and from

¹¹ Psalter number 329:4, in *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 284.

¹² Augustine, quoted in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.4.33, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 1, p. 662. Calvin adds that “in the bitterness of afflictions, the believer must be fortified by these thoughts” (3.4.34; p. 663).

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the help to holiness of godly friends the necessity of good, Christian schools for the covenant children of believing parents. Apart from the anti-Christian education of the state schools, the covenant father and mother shudder at the thought of sending their little one, or even their high school student, off to the school environment permeated with and controlled by the godless, unholy lives of the children of the darkness of the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, in this life sanctification is never perfect. In this life, sanctification is at best only a very small beginning.

Perfect sanctification in the future, however, is certain for every one in whom God has begun the work of making him or her holy.

The Perfection of Sanctification

Perfection in holiness is certain for all of God's people. Perfection is made certain by the Father's election of them unto holiness (Eph. 1:4), by the Son's redemption of them from slavery to sin unto the service of God (I Pet. 1:18-19) and by the Spirit's sanctifying power (Eph. 5:26-27). Because of the faithfulness of the Triune God, perfection in holiness is sure for every one in whom God has begun the work of sanctification: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

This certainty of perfection of holiness is assurance of salvation for everyone in whom the Spirit has begun the work of making him or her holy. It is assurance in the face of the strong, threatening powers of unholiness. It is assurance in the struggles against some besetting sin that the believer fears may conquer him, draw him away from God and damn him.

This is the truth of the preservation or perseverance of the saints. The truth of the preservation of saints is not simply that all those whom God begins to make holy in this life will be saved at the return of Christ. Much less is this truth the notion that those who claim to believe on Jesus will be saved in the end, regardless that they lived unholy lives. But this truth, widely known as the fifth of the "Five Points

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of Calvinism,” teaches that God sanctifies every one of those whom He has elected and for whom Christ died; that God maintains this work of sanctification in them throughout their life and increases this saving work with the passing years; that in the way of continuing holiness all of the elect will finally be saved both on the day of their death and in the day of Christ; and that our perfect salvation, whether at the moment of death or on the day of Christ, will consist of the perfecting of holiness.

There is no falling away of saints—no falling away from the grace of God, no falling away from salvation and no falling away from the power of holiness.

The doctrine of dispensationalist Zane Hodges, that God saves some humans without sanctifying them or without preserving them in holiness of life, is gross heresy, a perversion of the gospel, which is not merely the good news of salvation from damnation but also the good news of salvation from sin; not only the good news of deliverance from the guilt of sin but also the good news of deliverance from the reigning power of sin; not only the good news of escape from the wrath of God but also the good news of rescue from the defilement of sin; and not only the good news of Jesus as Saviour but also the good news of Jesus as Lord.¹³

Perfection of holiness, however, is the hope of the elect believer for the future, whether at the moment of death or at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Perfection is the *goal* of the Christian life. It is given us in the soul at the moment of death: “... under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God ... And white robes were given unto every one of them” (Rev. 6:9, 11).

Perfection is fully realized in the children of God in the resurrection of the body at Christ’s return. Essential to the change of the saints from corruptible to incorruptible and from mortal to immortal and, thus, the swallowing up of death in victory in Christ’s raising of His

¹³ See Zane C. Hodges, *A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation: Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).

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people from the dead at His coming, is the Saviour's perfecting them in holiness (I Cor. 15:42-58).

“Till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a *life to come*” is the Reformed, Christian confession in the *Heidelberg Catechism* (A. 115). The preceding answer has affirmed that “even the holiest men, *while in this life*, have only a small beginning of this obedience [to the law of God]” (A. 114).

Perfection, therefore, is our Christian hope. This hope sustains us, and even invigorates us, on our death-bed. This hope inspires our longing for the second coming of Christ. Christ's coming is not simply, or even mainly, for us the end of physical suffering but rather the end of sin.

Our hope is not simply a desire for intense pleasures but the desire for fellowship with the holy, ever-blessed God—fellowship that is no longer hindered and weakened by our sinfulness and sins.

“Come, Lord Jesus *for our perfect holiness*, that is, for our perfect salvation from sin!”

Part 1: Chapter 2

Justification and Sanctification: Their Differences and Their Relation to Each Other

Herman Hanko

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth (Rom. 8:33).

But 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).

Introduction

Justification and sanctification are two of the many blessings God gives to His people that He has prepared as a part of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Usually in theology, the main blessings of salvation are listed in what is called the *ordo salutis*, which is the order in which the blessings of salvation are given to the elect. This term is not, however, entirely correct. The first blessing of salvation is regeneration, by which God works in His people so that they are born again with the new life of Christ implanted in their hearts. But principally the new life of Christ given in regeneration includes all the blessings mentioned in the *ordo salutis*: faith, calling, justification, sanctification, preservation and glorification. While, therefore, justification and sanctification are to be distinguished from each other as two different blessings of God's grace in Christ, they are of necessity related to each other, for both are included in regeneration.

Because the theme of this year's conference and of this book is the blessing of sanctification, it is good that at the outset we distinguish

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between justification and sanctification. The two are often confused. Roman Catholicism, Arminianism and the so-called Federal Vision are instances of the confusion of these two blessings.

Confusion on the differences between these two blessings frequently (if not always) has theological motives. Whether justification is identified with sanctification or whether sanctification is said to precede justification, the motive is to make justification dependent on sanctification so that sanctification becomes a condition to justification: we are justified on the ground of, and because of, our holiness.

In this way of error, justification is based on works instead of being by faith alone, with the result that the truth of sanctification and the truth of the sovereign grace of God and the great truth of the sixteenth-century Reformation, justification by faith alone, are lost in the swirling dust of heresy. We must approach this subject with care.

Justification is a legal act of God by which He declares the sinner to be without sin.

In a very simplified way, the difference between justification and sanctification is the difference between the verdict of a judge legally declaring an imprisoned murderer to be innocent of the charges against him, and his release from the prison cell in which he is incarcerated. Justification is the legal declaration of our innocence; sanctification is our release from that prison of sin.

The figure, suggested by Paul in Romans 8:33, is that of a court in which God Himself is the judge and the one being tried is the elect sinner. His accusers are many. The devil accuses him of being a servant of Satan, for Satan's bidding is the sinner's delight. The world accuses him that he is exactly as they are because he has committed, and does commit, all the sins found in this sorry world. The man himself is accused in his own conscience, by which he is forced to admit that the accusations made against him are in all respects true.

God as judge weighs carefully all the accusations and examines their truth. He knows the heart and the mind, as well as man's outward deeds. Is there none to come to his defence? None challenges the sinner's guilt. But then the sentence comes from the judge. What is

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it? This man is totally innocent! There is no fault to be found in him!
The accusations are false! Case dismissed!

That is justification.

This divine sentence is found already in the Old Testament in Numbers 22-24. Israel was on the border of Canaan, camped east of the Jordan River, in a valley where the whole nation could be seen from the heights of Moab. Balak, King of Moab, knew that Israel's victory over the nations east of Jordan was due to the blessing of Almighty God. He therefore devised a way to escape Israel's power by hiring a prophet from Mesopotamia to curse Israel. Because of the status of Balaam as a prophet of God, the prophet's curse would be effective, even though Balaam was a prophet who had turned from his calling into sin.

By means of sorcery and witchcraft, Balaam attempted to satisfy Balak's request. His efforts were in vain. Balaam, speaking just as his donkey had spoken to him, blessed Israel instead.

Almost in desperation, Balak took Balaam to another spot on the plateau of Moab where only a part of Israel, the part that was called the mixed multitude, could be seen. Here lived those Israelites who had married Egyptians and other foreigners. It was from the mixed multitude that much of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness had originated. It was Israel at its worst: many of the reasons for God to curse Israel through Balaam were there.

What did Balaam say?

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them (Num. 23:19-21).

That is justification, the doctrine that Paul sets forth in detail in Romans 3-5. It is the great doctrine that brought Luther to the wonder

of his salvation. It is, as Luther said, the article of a standing or falling church. God declares the sinner innocent. He who is dead in trespasses and sins, corrupt in all his ways, deserving hell and an enemy of God, is declared by the judge of all the earth to be without sin.

Truths Included in Justification

That great blessing of justification includes especially the blessing of the forgiveness of sins. If we are declared by God to be without sin, it is because our sins are forgiven and exist no longer. We have no blessing greater than the forgiveness of sins, for the pardon of our sins bring us to the cross of our Saviour.

Justification is eternal. God, in His eternal and unchangeable counsel, willed to justify His people whom He had chosen. God never saw any transgression in Israel nor perverseness in His people. They were forever before Him as a people without guilt. He eternally chose them in Christ to be His covenant people. He gave them to Christ to do what had to be done to secure their salvation. He redeemed them in the blood of Christ who died for them. He determined that in time He would accomplish what He had ordained in His counsel.

Justification is a blessing that is only for the elect, who are elect in Christ.

Justification becomes our own through faith in Jesus Christ. It is well to emphasize this. Repeatedly in the history of the church, efforts have been made to base our justification, at least in part, on our works. This evil continues today. The battle cry of the Reformation was *justification by faith alone* without the works of the law (Rom. 3:28). Faith is the only means to gain justification, for faith is the God-given gift which unites us to Christ.

Justification means, therefore, that Christ's righteousness is imputed or reckoned to us by God. Christ's righteousness is judicially declared to be our righteousness. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Christ Our Judicial Head

When God created Adam in paradise, God created him as the head of the entire human race. Adam was the organic head because the entire human race was born from Adam and his wife, Eve. Because Adam was the organic head of the human race, he was also the judicial head. That is, Adam was responsible for the moral state of the whole human race. When Adam sinned, he sinned as the judicial (or legal) head of the human race. The guilt of his sin was imputed or reckoned to the whole of mankind. We and every individual person are guilty before God for Adam's sin and worthy of hell because it is as if each of us and all mankind ate of the forbidden fruit in rebellion against God.

Romans 5:12-14 is decisive:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Some, hating the doctrine of imputed sin, have distorted this text and especially the phrase, "for that all have sinned." They interpret the clause to mean, "All are themselves sinners who sin." But this is not the meaning. The meaning is simply that death passed upon all men because all men sinned in Adam; the meaning is not that death passed upon all men because all men themselves commit sin. Indeed, we do: all men sin; that is true. But here in this passage the meaning is that all men sinned in Adam. Because all men are guilty of Adam's sin, death came upon all men.

Adam is "the figure of him that was to come."

Christ is the judicial and organic head of the elect, appointed as such eternally by God. Adam was the "figure," while Christ is the reality. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22).

Christ the Judicial Head in Justification

The wonder of the cross of Calvary, where our Lord was crucified, is exactly that He died as our legal head. He was appointed to be our legal head from all eternity. He was revealed to be our legal head in the Old Testament Scriptures:

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart, I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest (Ps. 40:6-9; cf. Heb. 10:5-9).

Christ took all our sin and guilt upon Himself: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). He was considered as guilty in the place of His people and He bore the punishment of hell, which is the penalty for sin.

As our head, He represented us in such a way that, as we are responsible for Adam’s sin, so we are now responsible for Christ’s perfect obedience.

What Is Sanctification?

The English word “sanctification” is from a Latin word that describes accurately this blessing of God. It comes from *sanctus*, which is the Latin word for “holy,” and *facere*, which means “to make.” Thus sanctification is that work of God by which He makes His people for whom Christ died a holy people.

When Adam sinned in paradise, the punishment of God for his sin was death. Death is God’s condemnation and judgment upon the sinner. Death is to live apart from God, as the versification of Psalm 73 has it: “To live apart from God is death.”¹ Adam was created as God’s covenant friend, appointed to represent God’s cause in the

¹ Psalter number 203:5, in *The Psalter*, p. 171.

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world. When he fell, Adam chose not to represent God's cause any longer but, rather, to represent the cause of Satan. Satan's goal was to make the entire earthly creation his own kingdom but, because he has no access to the creation apart from men, Satan had to enlist Adam in his vicious plot.

Because Adam committed this dastardly deed, God (apart from salvation) had no more use for Adam or for the entire human race who chose also for Satan rather than God. Adam's punishment was, therefore, banishment from God's presence. God drove him out of His world. Adam's death was spiritual (total depravity) and physical. He began to die at the moment he sinned and did finally die; his death was the gate to hell where he would be banished forever—apart from God's promise (Gen. 3:15).

Sanctification means that the moral corruption of Adam's nature and of the nature of all the elect who died in Adam was taken away. God Himself is holy. He calls His people to be holy as He is holy: "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:16).

Holiness is, by definition in Scripture, dedication to God. God, as the Holy One, is completely dedicated to Himself. He seeks His own glory and honour as supreme, and as the "wholly other" one. We are to be dedicated to Him.

When God created man in His own image, He created him in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Adam was, therefore, completely dedicated to God. His entire life in all its aspects was for God's honour and praise.

The priests who laboured in the tabernacle and temple wore a plate on their foreheads that read, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" (Ex. 28:36). Their lives were completely dedicated to the Lord in their work in the tabernacle and temple. All of God's people become a holy priesthood and are dedicated to God and His service (I Pet. 2:9).

God's holiness is so great, so intense, so perfect that it can be described in Scripture only as a brilliant light, before which no one can stand. It is a holiness so awesome that the seraphim cover their faces and feet with their wings and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of

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hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). When Isaiah saw that holiness, all he could do was cry out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

Sanctification is that work of God by which He restores in us His image so that we are actually “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4). This is possible because we are brought into covenant fellowship with Him and reflect in our lives the glory that is God’s alone.

Yet this great blessedness must not be construed as being a restoration of the holiness that Adam possessed in paradise, as great as that was. Adam belonged to this earthly creation and was certainly unshuffled by sin. The glory of the holiness that he and Eve possessed made them God’s friends who were strong, beautiful, like God Himself and possessing a holiness of which we know nothing.

But the holiness of Adam and Eve was but a flicker of the holiness that is ours in the work of sanctification. Sanctification is a perfect holiness but it is also a heavenly holiness. It is a holiness that comes to us through Christ, for we shall be transformed after the image of Christ (II Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). We shall be more glorious than the angels and shall possess the glory of heaven itself. We shall be in body, soul and spirit wholly dedicated to God.

The Judicial Basis for Our Sanctification

The juridical or judicial basis for our sanctification is our justification. We are totally corrupt because we chose sin rather than holiness and Satan rather than God. Our corruption is the punishment for our sin. It is the dark, evil hopelessness of the prison cell of depravity from which there is only one exit, the gate to hell through which we pass when we die.

But justification means that God declares us to be righteous on the grounds of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. According to perfect divine justice, we cannot stay in prison any more when we are justified. As it is an injustice to keep an innocent man in prison, so it

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is an injustice to keep an innocent sinner in the prison of depravity when Christ has completely paid his debt. Sanctification is possible but also necessary because we are justified.

This is the teaching of Scripture when it develops the idea of righteousness. God is the one righteous God. God's righteousness means that all He does is in conformity with Himself as His own standard. Justification means that we are declared righteous, that is, we are completely in conformity with God's own righteousness. That declaration of the judge of all the earth is ours because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. We are righteous, although sinners.

Sanctification is that glorious work of God that goes beyond a declaration that we are righteous. This work *makes* us righteous for it changes our corrupt and depraved nature to be in complete conformity with God's own holiness. Thus in sanctification we are *made* righteous—not only *declared* righteous as in justification, but actually *made* righteous in sanctification. Our natures are made righteous in sanctification, so that our nature and all our activities are in conformity with God's holiness.

This wonder of divine grace is also based on the work of our Saviour. Christ's work earned for us both the forgiveness of our sins *and* the great holiness that is ours through the work of sanctification.

We cannot fathom the depths of the suffering of the Son of God. There are mysteries we cannot probe. There are depths of His agony into which we cannot look. Scripture draws a veil over the suffering of our Lord in all its intensity.

Christ suffered the wrath of God, which means that He suffered that terrible agony of being driven away from God—into hell itself. And yet He was always God's beloved Son in whom God was well pleased. Christ knew the wrath and the favour of God, or God's love and God's curse both together and at the same time.

It seems as if, gradually through the course of our Lord's life here on earth, the consciousness of God's favour grew weaker while the consciousness of God's wrath grew stronger. The tension was always there, for on more than one occasion in our Lord's ministry the voice

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from heaven comforted Christ in the burden of God's wrath: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). But gradually the shadow of the cross fell upon Him in darker measure.

During those first moments of the cross, our Lord could still call God His "Father" (Luke 23:34) but eventually the horror of God's wrath intensified until all He knew was wrath. He dared not call God His Father; it was only "My God, my God" (Matt. 27:46). The consciousness of God's wrath drove away completely the consciousness that God was His Father who loved Him. The horror of the swirling maelstrom of hell was so great that He momentarily did not understand any more why He needed to suffer such awful agony: "My God, my God, *why ...?*"

To be abandoned by His Father was almost more than He could bear. He Himself had said shortly before He died, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name" (John 12:27-28). Even an earthly child who loves his father cannot bear his father's wrath but this was infinitely more true of Christ. He was, after all, the only One who could truly sing, "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Ps. 63:3).

This very truth was the key that opened heaven to Luther who sought God's favour. In awe and astonishment, he cried out, "God abandoned by God!" The mystery of it; the wonder of it; the "impossibility" of it! Yet that was the key that unlocked heaven and showed him the wonder of the cross.

Yet at that very moment when Christ knew only the wrath of His Father, God said of Christ, hanging in shame on a wooden tree, overwhelmed by God's anger, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." God—and I speak as a man—was never so pleased with His own Son as at that awful moment.

In the awful agony of His suffering, when the Lord knew only the swirling blackness of abandonment and saw not a glimmer of heavenly love, He still obeyed God and kept His law perfectly. He loved the Lord His God with the whole of His being. "*My God, my God ...*"

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It was as if the Lord said, “I do not know and I cannot understand this awful darkness. I am destroyed by Thy wrath. I cannot bear to be abandoned by the One whom I love above all others. But whatever the reason, My God, I love Thee still. Do with me as it seems good to Thee. I come to do Thy will, O My God.”

That perfect obedience, when our Lord was engulfed in God’s wrath against sin, earned for us the same holiness that was Christ’s. And so the cross is also the ground and source of our sanctification. His obedience becomes our obedience. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. His holiness becomes our holiness—by faith in Him!

Justification! Sanctification! Two glorious blessings. Yet really one, one work of God in the wonder of our salvation.

Part 1: Chapter 3

The Role of the Law in Sanctification

David J. Engelsma

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day (Ps. 119:97).

So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin (Rom. 7:25).

Introduction

With the subject of this chapter, “The Role of the Law in Sanctification,” we are plunged into doctrinal controversy; exposed to one of the main issues concerning the gospel of grace throughout the New Testament; and confronted by a truth that is fundamental to the Christian life and experience.

The role of the law in the holy life of the elect, redeemed, believing child of God is controversial. Some churches, notably the Roman Catholic Church, teach that the law’s role is to justify, sanctify and save the law-keeper. Other churches and theologians deny that the law has any role in the Christian’s holy life whatever. These are the antinomians, to which heresy I devote chapter 5 of this book.

The Reformed faith (I include Presbyterianism) has its own distinctive, unique doctrine of the role of the law in sanctification. It is of the greatest importance that we maintain this aspect of our faith for ourselves and that we witness of it to others. This unique doctrine of the law, I propose, explain and defend in this chapter.

I note here that the truth of the role of the law was controversial in the church already in apostolic times, as the book of Galatians dem-

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onstrates, and it is controversial on the pages of the New Testament, as we read in Romans 7.

The role of the law is no minor matter but a major aspect of the gospel of grace. This is evident in Romans 7, as will be shown later. The importance of the doctrine of the role of the law in salvation is indicated also in Galatians 5. Those who assign an erroneous role to the law, namely, that of justifying the sinner, deny Jesus Christ and have “fallen from grace” (v. 4). On the other hand, those who deny the law any role in salvation at all, particularly regarding a holy life, are guilty of an error that results in fulfilling the lust of the flesh and of not walking in the Spirit (vv. 13-26).

The Reformed faith does justice to the role of the law in sanctification and the Christian life.

The truth of the role of the law is immensely practical. It is fundamental to the Christian life and to the Christian experience. To teach that the law itself will make God’s people holy, so that the Christian life consists of striving to obey the commandments in order by this means to make oneself holy, is to set the confessing Christian an impossible task. On the other hand, to exclude the law from the Christian life altogether is to expose the church and her members to the deadly error of antagonism toward the law (i.e., antinomism or antinomianism), which ends in supposing that behaviour that is, in fact, rebellion against the holy will of God is godly.

The Reformed doctrine of the role of the law avoids both these fatal errors. It guides the believer on the narrow way that has God’s approval and that leads to eternal life and glory.

Romans 7 plainly addresses our topic of the role of the law in sanctification. The subject is the Christian life of holiness and the Christian experience of God’s favour upon him in this Christian life. The issue governing the chapter is how we shall bring forth fruit unto God and not fruit unto death (vv. 4-5). The theme of the chapter is that we “serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (v. 6).

In the preceding chapters, the apostle has condemned the teaching and practice of seeking justification in the law.

In Romans 7, the apostle condemns the mistaken teaching and practice of seeking sanctification in the law—without denying any important role to the law at all.

What the Role of the Law Is Not

The law—the law of God, the good, holy and just law of God, the Ten Commandments—does not sanctify us. It does not make us holy, so that we devote ourselves to God and live in obedience to His will.

It is a serious error to suppose, and especially to teach, that the law's role in our salvation is to sanctify us. Reformed and Presbyterian people recognize that the law does not, and cannot, justify the sinner, that is, constitute him righteous before God the judge. The book of Romans is clear, for example, in chapter 3, verse 28, that “a man is justified by *faith* without the deeds of the law.” Galatians 3:11 denies, explicitly, that any man “is justified by the law in the sight of God.” The reason for this denial is then stated: “The just shall live by faith.”

But Reformed people can suppose that in the matter of our sanctification, our living holy, obedient lives, the law is the means and power to accomplish sanctification. In this aspect of our salvation, the law, banished regarding justification, comes back, comes back into its own and indeed plays the decisive role. The gospel then justifies, by faith; the law, however, sanctifies, by our working.

There are reasons for this error—no biblical or confessional ground, but reasons. First, the law is the good and holy Word of God, as the apostle recognizes in Romans 7:12: “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”

Second, the law obviously is concerned—*deeply* concerned—with the holy life of the chosen and redeemed child of God. What then is more natural, more fitting, than that for sanctification we look to the law?

Third, every Reformed or Presbyterian or Calvinistic Christian is, and ought to be, on his or her guard against the gross heresy and wicked practice of antinomianism. This is the denial that the law has

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any role in the Christian life other than to show us our sinfulness and the proposal that the believer may freely transgress the commandments of the law. If we deny that the law sanctifies, are we not guilty of that dread error of antinomianism or at least of opening ourselves up to that false doctrine and its subsequent lawlessness of life?

It is worthy of note that the antinomians defend their heresy against the Reformed faith by charging that Reformed theology attributes sanctification to the law. Their argument is that what is known in Reformed theology as the “third use of the law” amounts to the teaching that the law sanctifies the believing child of God.¹ Since it is erroneous to attribute sanctification to the law, the Reformed doctrine of the “third use of the law” is mistaken, according to the antinomians. Therefore, antinomians conclude, the Christian life has no need of, or use for, the law of God; it is, in fact, “anti” (against) “nomian” (“the law”).

This is the defence of the heresy by David H. J. Gay in a book which, in contradiction of its subtitle, is a defence and advocacy of antinomianism.² The book is an attack on “Reformed thinking on sanctification.”³ Gay presents Calvin and the Reformed faith as teaching that the power of sanctification is “the law! Preach the law to them! Hammer the law! Take them to the law!”⁴ On the basis of this misunderstanding of the Reformed doctrine of the place of the law in the holy life of the Christian, Gay advances to the slanderous misrepresentation of the Reformed faith as teaching that the believer is “*under* the law of Moses.”⁵

¹ Traditionally, the Reformed churches have acknowledged three distinct uses of the law of the Ten Commandments. The first is to keep outward order in civil society. The second is to give knowledge to the believer of his sinfulness. The third is to serve as a rule or guide for the thankful, holy life of the Christian.

² David H. J. Gay, *Grace not Law! The Answer to Antinomianism* (n.p.: Brachus, 2013).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28. For Calvin and the Reformed, according to Gay, the power of a holy life—the “motive ... energy ... will and the desire”—is the law (p. 53).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7; italics mine. To be “under the law” in the biblical sense is to be obligated to obey the law perfectly for obtaining righteousness with God and to be subject to the curse of the law for failure to obey. The honouring of the

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In opposition to his (mis)representation of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification, Gay proclaims that “the new-covenant way of sanctification ... is not by the law but by grace.”⁶

Showing his true, antinomian colours, Gay concludes that “every believer is liberated from law,” particularly the law of the Ten Commandments.⁷ Lest anyone fail to understand this declaration of freedom from the law in the absolute sense that Gay intends, Gay expressly *denies* that “the moral law ... is of great use to [believers] ... as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs them and binds them accordingly.”⁸

Important to keep in mind about this blatant defence of antinomianism, specifically against the Reformed doctrine of the law, is Gay’s inexcusably mistaken presentation of the Reformed faith as teaching that the law is the power and means of a holy life.

The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as confessed by the Reformed faith, is that, as little as the law justifies the guilty sinner, so little does it sanctify the depraved sinner. That the law does not, and cannot, sanctify is the burden of Romans 7. The message of Romans 7 is not only that our sanctification in this life is always imperfect but also that the law does not sanctify, so that for this aspect of salvation one looks to the law in vain.

The great theme or subject of Romans 7, continuing the subject of the preceding chapter—chapter 6—and concluding in chapter 8, is that aspect of salvation we call sanctification: deliverance from the *power* of sin and cleansing from the *pollution* of sin, so that we yield our life to God in holiness.

That holiness is the theme of chapters 6-8 is stated in Romans 6:1: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” That the truth of

law by the Reformed faith does not consist of teaching that the child of God is “under the law.” The doctrine that the redeemed believer is required by God to live “*according to the law*” in thankfulness for gracious salvation is not the teaching that he is “*under the law*.”

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18. Gay is here quoting and opposing *Westminster Confession* 19:5-6.

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holiness is continued and completed in chapter 8 is apparent in verse 1, which speaks of walking “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Walking after the Spirit is the Christian life of holiness, by virtue of the divine, saving work of sanctification.

Nowhere in this section of Romans do we read that sanctification is “by the law,” that is, that the law sanctifies us, so that we are to look to the law for sanctification. On the contrary, Romans 7 is at pains to deny that the law sanctifies and to warn us not to look to the law, or to depend upon the law, for holiness of life. For holiness, we had to become dead to the law. Only in this way could we “bring forth fruit unto God” (v. 4). To serve God in “newness of spirit,” we must be “delivered from the law” (v. 6).

So far is it from being true that the law sanctifies, that is, that the law is the power of making God’s people holy, that, on the contrary, it is exactly the law that is the occasion of sin, even the abounding of sin, and the means by which sin in us becomes “exceeding sinful” (v. 13).

“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead” (v. 8), for “when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (v. 9). “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it [i.e., the law; the good law of God] slew me” (v. 11). “But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good [i.e., God’s law, summarized in the Ten Commandments]; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (v. 13).

However this is to be explained (and the apostle repeatedly warns that the explanation is not that the law is evil), it is beyond all doubt that the law cannot sanctify, cannot make us holy, righteous and good. The law does not have this power. God, whose law it is, does not purpose such a function and use of the law.

This emphatic denial that the law sanctifies, and thus saves, the people of God is found elsewhere in Scripture. Romans 8:2-4 declares that the law is unable to free us from “the law of sin and death” or to realize in us “the righteousness of the law.” This sanctifying work is accomplished by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

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Similarly, when in Galatians the apostle comes to treat of the holy, Christian life, he does not appeal to the law as the power that must sanctify but expressly denies that believers depend on the law for their new obedience. Rather, we are “led of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:18). Verses 22 and 23 go on to identify “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” which are outstanding elements of holiness, as “the fruit of the Spirit.”

Nowhere, therefore, do the Reformed creeds ascribe sanctifying power to the law, even though they all recognize that the law does have a role in the holy life of the child of God. A striking, significant truth about Question 115 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* is that, at the conclusion of its thorough explanation of the Ten Commandments, it asks, “Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?” If no one can keep the law, it cannot very well function to sanctify us. To appeal to the law as the power of sanctification would be like looking to running a marathon as the enabling of an infant child to walk.

And when the *Catechism* answers the question, why God will have the Ten Commandments so sharply preached, the answer is not that the law sanctifies us.⁹ Not at all! But the answer is rather that, being continually reminded of our inability to keep the commandments because of our “sinful nature,” we always “pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit” to enable us to obey the law and increase in holiness.

As he is utterly mistaken in charging the Reformed faith with the error of ascribing sanctification to the law, so is antinomian David H. J. Gay’s similar charge against John Calvin false. In the thinking of Gay, Calvin is the source of Reformed and evangelical false doctrine that the law is the power of holiness in the life of believers. In this false doctrine concerning the law, “Reformed and evangelical believers ... follow John Calvin.”¹⁰

⁹ “Sharply preached” is the original German of Q. 115: “scharf ... predigen” (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, p. 349).

¹⁰ Gay, *Grace Not Law!*, p. 53.

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But Calvin explicitly denies the error with which Gay charges him. At the very outset of his treatment of the law of God in the *Institutes*, with explicit reference to the Ten Commandments, Calvin writes that “righteousness is taught in vain by the commandments until Christ confers it by free imputation and by the Spirit of regeneration.”¹¹

For Calvin and for the Reformed faith influenced by Calvin, the law does not sanctify.

What then does sanctify us? Where do we look for holiness, including victory over some besetting sin?

The Sanctifying Gospel of Jesus Christ

The answer is: the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, as He is made known and exerts His sanctifying power by the gospel.

I emphasize that this is the answer not of Lutheranism, which has a certain fearfulness about any positive use of the law in salvation, particularly the salvation of sanctification, but of the Reformed faith, which, as we will see shortly, heartily assents to the rightful place and use of the law.

Jesus Christ is our sanctification, as truly and fully as He is our righteousness. This is the testimony of I Corinthians 1:30: “But of him [i.e., God] are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Verse 31 adds that the purpose of Christ’s being our sanctification is that “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” If our sanctification—our holy life—were not Jesus Christ, but our own obedience to the law, that is, if the law sanctified us, we could, and would, glory in ourselves.

Jesus Christ is not only our righteousness. He is also our sanctification, our holiness.

He, He Himself, He in His resurrected body, He in His glorified soul and body in heaven at God’s right hand, is our sanctification. That

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.2; p. 351.

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is, He is our consecration to God in love; He is our cleansing from, separation from and hatred of sin. This He is, not legally, not as our representative head in heaven; Jesus is our sanctification as He becomes ours actually—I may say, experientially—by our union with Him, that is, our faith in Him.

Just as we are justified by faith and not by obedience to the law, so are we sanctified by faith in Him and not by the law. That sanctification is by faith, not by the law, is the explicit testimony of Scripture. At the great Jerusalem synod of the early, apostolic church, where the issue was not only the truth of justification but also the truth of sanctification—the truth as to how one becomes and remains holy—Peter preached that God purifies the hearts of His people “by faith”—not by the law, but by faith (Acts 15:9). This faith is union with, knowledge of and trust in Jesus, who is our sanctification. Jesus sanctifies us with His own holiness by faith in Himself.

According to Acts 26:18, when Jesus Christ called Paul to apostleship, the Lord promised Paul that He would turn the Gentiles “from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” “Sanctified *by faith* that is in me [i.e., Jesus]”!

Through the bond of faith, which is union with Jesus Christ, who in heaven is our sanctification, the holy Jesus Christ becomes ours in such a way that He sanctifies us and works in us His own holiness. This is our cleansing from sin! This is our consecration to God in love! Jesus Christ in us!

Because our spiritual union with Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, and because the presence of the holy Christ in us is by the indwelling Spirit, our sanctification is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The power of our becoming and remaining holy as well as of our making progress in holiness is not the law but the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul stresses this in Romans 8, which is the conclusion of his doctrine of sanctification in chapters 6 and 7. “For the law *of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (v. 2). “But ye are not in the flesh, but *in the Spirit*, if so be that *the Spirit of God* dwell in you” (v. 9). “For

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... if ye *through the Spirit* do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (v. 13).

What the Spirit does in the children of God to accomplish our holiness is sprinkle the blood of Jesus upon our soul. Sanctification is the divine work of cleansing from the filth and pollution of sin. There is only one cleansing agent with regard to the impurity and foulness of sin: the blood of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, Hebrews 9:14 proclaims that it is the “blood of Christ” that “purge[s] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Therefore, “To fancy that there is any cleansing from sin but by the blood of Christ is to overthrow the gospel.”¹²

This sprinkling of the cleansing blood of Jesus within or upon our souls is by means of the gospel. In John 15:3, Jesus tells us, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” In John 17:17, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Sanctification takes place, continues and increases progressively in the church as one attends a true church diligently, especially on the Lord’s Day, and hears the gospel of the blood of Jesus.

Summing up what we have learned from Scripture and the creeds so far about sanctification, Jesus is our sanctification. He sanctifies by the power of His gospel, sprinkling His cleansing blood upon our souls by means of our faith in Him. This sprinkling with His blood is a reality in us by the presence of His Holy Spirit. And this mysterious, marvellous saving work takes place in the fellowship of the true church of Jesus Christ.

This vital aspect of salvation is promised to all elect believers. We receive and enjoy the salvation of sanctification not as deserved or worked for—not by the law—but as the gracious promise of God. “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer. 31:33). Ezekiel 36:25-27 is an especially clear and full sounding of the gracious promise of sanctification:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols,

¹² John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 456.

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will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you ... And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

What an encouragement to us in our struggle with sin: the sure, gracious promise of God that He will sanctify us!

Neither is our sanctification by the law in the sense that it depends on something we have done or must do. No more than justification is sanctification conditional. Rather, it is the realization in the elect for whom Christ died of the purely gracious promise of the sanctifying God.

The denial that the law sanctifies invariably raises the question, “Does then the law have no place with regard to our sanctification?” Indeed, in view of the law’s becoming the occasion of more aggressive sinning, “Is the law evil?”

What the Role of the Law Is

First, we must, with the apostle in Romans 7, affirm that the law is not sin (v. 7) but holy, just and good (v. 12). Nor is it the case with the law that, though good in itself, it has become “death unto me” (v. 13).

The law is good!

The law is only good!

There is nothing bad about the law whatsoever!

How could it be otherwise with the law, since the law is the perfect will of God, expressing the goodness, righteousness and holiness of the good God Himself?

Romans 7’s explanation why the law cannot sanctify and, in fact, becomes the occasion for our greater sinfulness is not the evil of the law but the evil of the depravity of us sinners. The truth is that “the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (v. 14). When the good law comes into contact with me, especially by being sharply preached, it

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exposes to me my totally depraved, corrupt nature. The result is that I become a much worse sinner *in my own consciousness*. Especially does the tenth commandment expose me, inasmuch as it forbids and condemns not only wicked deeds, but also wicked desires and passions. “For I was alive without the law once [in my own consciousness]: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (v. 9). “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust [i.e., any and all sinful desire], except the law had said [in the tenth commandment], Thou shalt not covet” (v. 7).

In addition, the law arouses my sinful nature, so that my innate wickedness becomes more vigorous and vehement, as though a sleeping bear were aroused to fury by a prodding stick. Thus “sin by the commandment ... become[s] exceeding sinful” (v. 13). Command a little child, “Don’t touch that vase,” and there is nothing more in all the world that the child wants to do than touch the vase. Command a grown, married man, “Don’t touch that other woman,” and there is aroused the burning passion to touch her at all cost.

But this denial that the law sanctifies is by no means the outlawing of any role at all for the law in the Christian’s holy life. This denial does not render a role of the law in sanctification unnecessary. Neither does it suggest that the role of the law is unimportant.

The law has a role or function in our holy, Christian life.

The role of the law is of vital importance. A holy life is impossible without the law.

This role of the law is not only or even mainly that the law shows us our sinfulness. Teaching us our misery of sinfulness is a function of the law in the church and in the life of each believer. The Reformed faith recognizes, with the Bible, two main roles or functions of the law in the life of the child of God. One function of the law is to give us the knowledge of our misery concerning our sinfulness. The *Heidelberg Catechism* confesses this function of the law in Question and Answer 3: “Whence knowest thou thy misery? Out of the law of God.” To this function of the law in the Christian’s life, Paul refers in Romans 7:7: “I had not known sin, but by the law.”

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But the law also serves another purpose of God regarding salvation. In the Reformed estimation, this other role of the law is the more important.

The Law as the Rule, Guide or Standard of the Holy Life

The law is the rule or guide or standard of a holy life of gratitude for salvation to the glory of God. To the law as this clear, infallible rule, the apostle refers in Romans 7:25: “with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” In Romans 8:4, Paul states that when we live a holy life, “after the Spirit,” we are, in fact, fulfilling “the righteousness of the law.”

This is the role recognized by the *Heidelberg Catechism* in its third main section, which gives instruction concerning the Christian’s holy life of thankfulness (Lord’s Days 32-52). The good works that Christ produces in us are done consciously “according to the law of God” (A. 91). “According to” describes the law as the rule or guide or standard of holiness. In its third section, the *Catechism* carefully and thoroughly explains all of the Ten Commandments, obviously with the intent and expectation that the Christian will obey the commandments. Question and Answer 114 of the *Catechism* states that those converted to God begin to live “according to ... all the commandments of God.”

Our Need of the Guide

Such is our spiritual need, even as regenerated children of God, that we must have clear, full, explicit direction as to what kind of life and behaviour are pleasing to God, and how we are to express our love to Him and to the neighbour. God must instruct us *that* we love Him. God must instruct us also *how* we are to love Him.

The reasons are at hand. We remain totally depraved by nature, inclined to evil. Although we now also have a new and holy nature—the beginning of eternal life—we remain weak and imperfect. In addition, the corrupt world surrounding us—ungodly men and women, and the culture they form and dominate—skilfully deceives us and

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powerfully puts pressure on us to conform to itself. As if this were not enough to account for our need of an authoritative standard for the life we are called to live unto God, there are Satan and his hosts of demons, whose avowed purpose is the seduction of us to live contrary to the will of God.

Without a clear, authoritative guide and rule for our life, we would certainly construct a Christian life after our own liking or be deceived into falsifying what a holy life is.

The law must be inscribed on our hearts by regeneration. Indicating the importance of the law for the Christian life, as well as God's estimation of His people's obedience to the law, Jeremiah 31:33 describes God's salvation of His people as His putting "[His] law in their inward parts" and writing it "in their hearts." Antinomians readily exclude the law from the salvation of sinners; God, in contrast, saves by writing His law on the hearts of His elect people.

But it is not enough that the law be written on the hearts of the elect, regenerated children of God. For their benefit, the benefit of their obeying it, the law must also be written on the pages of a book that the saints read and re-read: the Bible, specifically Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

If anyone still doubts the necessity of an authoritative guide for the Christian life, let him reflect on what the nominally Christian churches and theologians are teaching as the holy life of Christians in our day, and teaching with widespread approval and effect. They teach the goodness of revolution against the civil magistrates, in contradiction of the fifth commandment of the law of God. They teach the justice of stealing from the rich—stealing to give to the poor (so they say), but stealing nonetheless, in contradiction of the eighth commandment of the law of God. They teach the righteousness of divorce for any reason and remarriage while one's spouse is living (Matt. 5:32; Rom. 7:2-3), in contradiction of the seventh commandment of the law of God. They teach the holiness of sodomite and lesbian sexual relationships, such holiness as to share in the holiness of God's institution of marriage, in contradiction of the seventh commandment of the law of God. They teach the justice of the murder

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of the unborn and of the partially born—abortion—in contradiction of the sixth commandment of the law of God. They teach the lawfulness of the creation by false doctrine of new and different gods than the God revealed in Holy Scripture, in contradiction of the first commandment of the law of God. They teach the propriety of novel, man-pleasing forms of worship of the true God, in contradiction of the second commandment of the law of God.

Those professing Christians, especially pastors of churches and teachers of believers who deny the necessity of the Ten Commandments as the rule of the lives of the people of God, are not only heretical but also foolish. They are like parents who deny the necessity of firm, clear rules for their children, themselves sinful by nature growing up in a world of lawlessness and deceit. The end of such children invariably is ruin. Children need rules. They need law as a guide for their life. Baptized, covenant children need a law as a guide for their life. Similarly, all of God's children need the law as the guide of their life.

Rightly, in John Calvin and in the Reformed creeds, the use of the law as the guide of the Christian life is the most important. Calvin and the creeds devote more space to this use of the law and emphasize this use more strongly than the other uses of the law. That Calvin regarded the use of the law as the guide of the Christian life as the most “excellent use,” he himself stated. With reference to the law’s function of teaching believers “the nature of the Lord’s will to which they aspire” so that they obey it—the Reformed “third use of the law”—Calvin wrote, “The third and *principal* use, which pertains *more closely to the proper use of the law*, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.”¹³ The *Heidelberg Catechism* pays much more attention and devotes far more space to its explanation of the law as the guide of a holy life than it does to the other uses of the law.

God must be loved, thanked and praised by us. This is our ardent desire. We thank and praise Him by a holy life, as was His great purpose in electing us, according to Ephesians 1:4. And a holy life is the life that accords with His law, and no other life.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12-13; pp. 360-361; italics mine.

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The *Westminster Confession* explains the rightful function of the law in our Christian life: “[It is] of great use to [true believers] ... in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly” (19:6).

That the law of the Ten Commandments is our rule for a holy life does not exclude, but includes, other guides or rules of a Christian life as well. An important guide or standard is the gospel itself. The gospel is the power of our Christian life and it is also the rule: “Only let your conversation [i.e., conduct or life] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). “Becometh” translates the Greek word, “worthy of.” The gospel, therefore, functions as the standard with which our behaviour must harmonize.

On the basis of such passages as Philippians 1:27, John Owen argued that the law is not the rule of our life but that the gospel is the rule: “It is the doctrine of the gospel which is the adequate rule ... of [our holy life].”¹⁴ His argument was that “there are some graces, some duties, belonging unto evangelical holiness, which the law knows nothing of.” Owen mentioned “mortification of sin, godly sorrow, daily cleansing of our hearts and minds.”¹⁵

One need not dispense with the law as guide in order to agree that the gospel is the guide of the Christian life. The gospel only fleshes out and makes explicit what is found in the law implicitly, as the law functions in the hand of Christ and by the power of the Spirit. For instance, the law certainly is the demand for godly sorrow when, comparing ourselves with the law, we discover that we fall far short of its demand for perfection.

On the other hand, in rejection of Owen’s proposal to jettison the law as the guide of the Christian life in favour of the gospel, the law makes concrete the exhortations of the gospel. For instance, the gospel’s call that we love one another as God has loved us must take concrete form in submission to all lawful authority; in not killing persons, whether born or unborn; in not committing adultery with the neighbour’s wife or husband, whether or not she or he is divorced;

¹⁴ Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 507.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

and the like. The Ten Commandments inform the great commands to love God and the neighbour.

As the rule of our lives, we may add to the law the example of Jesus in the specific areas of life indicated by the New Testament. The explanation is not that the life of Jesus adds something that is not found in the law, much less that the life of Jesus contradicts the law. Rather, the life of Jesus illustrates the demands of the law in gripping, moving, perfect practice. I Peter 2:21 exhorts us to observe and follow the example of Jesus specifically in patiently suffering abuse and persecution at the hands of the ungodly: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” The apostle then reminds us that when Jesus was reviled, He “reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (I Pet. 2:23).

The life of Jesus Christ in the Bible is not only an example, but it is in certain respects an example. It is an example to the Christian, not as an addition to the law but as the instance of perfect obedience to the law.

How Church and Believer Maintain This Role of the Law

The church must teach the law and teach it as the rule of the Christian life. So important is this aspect of the church’s teaching, that it is a fundamental element of the chief mark of a true church. The first mark of a true church, according to Article 29 of the *Belgic Confession*, is a church’s preaching “the pure doctrine of the gospel.” The pure doctrine of the gospel includes the Ten Commandments as the guide of the holy life of the saints. Against the error of the antinomians, this fundamental truth must be emphasized and spelled out. Eliding the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 from the message of a church is not the preservation and defence of the gospel of grace. On the contrary, in thus removing the invaluable guide of the Christian life of thankfulness, the antinomian elision of the Ten Commandments from its gospel is the fatal corruption of the gospel of grace, which includes the sanctification of the life of the redeemed, the law being the infallible, clear and detailed rule.

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That the *Belgic Confession* regards the preaching of the law as an aspect of the preaching of the gospel is evident from Article 25: “we still use the testimonies taken out of the law ... to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, and to regulate our life in all honesty to the glory of God, according to His will.”

The Bible teaches the law as the rule of life of those who are saved. Nor is this teaching limited to the Old Testament, as some argue, erroneously supposing that the Old Testament is not authoritative for New Testament Christians but only for the Jews. Every New Testament book commands and exhorts the precepts of the law upon believers as the rule of a holy life of gratitude for gracious salvation. Many have observed that the New Testament mentions every one of the Ten Commandments as binding upon the church in the New Testament, except (according to them) the fourth commandment concerning Sabbath observance.

The observation is mistaken with regard to the alleged exception. Acts 20:7, I Corinthians 16:2 and especially Revelation 1:10 clearly imply the calling to keep the New Testament fulfilment of the Christian Sabbath, the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Revelation 1:10 sets apart one day of the week as “the Lord’s day.” This day is, beyond all dispute, the first day of the week as the day of the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead—our Sunday. The distinguishing of this day implies that the day is set aside for special usage by the church, thus fulfilling the Old Testament Sabbath. “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet”—the voice of the risen, living Lord Jesus, which is heard throughout the new dispensation in the preaching of the gospel (Rev. 1:10).¹⁶

The New Testament, like the Old, exhorts the law, not only as the means to know our sinfulness but also as the guide for an obedient, holy life. The second half of the epistle to the Ephesians is an

¹⁶ For a more thorough demonstration that the first day of the week is the fulfilment of the Old Testament Sabbath and that Christian observance of the first day of the week is the requirement of the fourth commandment of the law, see David J. Engelsma, “Remembering the Lord’s Day” (Crete, IL: Evangelism Committee of the Crete Protestant Reformed Church, n.d.).

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outstanding example. After proclaiming the source and basis of our salvation in the first three chapters, the epistle devotes the last three chapters to the calling that the elect, redeemed and regenerated believer has to live a holy life: “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). Then the last three chapters explain and apply the law, positively (“And walk in love;” Eph. 5:2) and negatively (“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;” Eph. 5:3).

Included in the explicit application of the Ten Commandments to the New Testament church by the second half of Ephesians is the fifth commandment: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord ... Honour thy father and mother” (Eph. 6:1-2). When Ephesians 6:2 describes the fifth commandment of the law as “the first commandment with promise,” it explicitly binds one of the Ten Commandments upon New Testament Christians as the rule of their life. It also clearly implies that all of the Ten Commandments are applicable to New Testament believers and their children.

Reformed churches carry out the calling of the church to teach the law by preaching the *Heidelberg Catechism* at one of the services on the Lord’s day. The third section of the *Catechism* consists in large part of careful, thorough explanation of the Ten Commandments (Lord’s Days 34-44). Every few years, therefore, the people of God are instructed in detail both concerning the law as the rule of their life and concerning of what this rule consists. The *Catechism’s* explanation of the commandments does justice to the fuller light that the New Testament sheds on the commandments.

The *Catechism’s* explanation of the eighth commandment is illustrative of the Reformed church’s preaching of the law as the rule or guide of a holy life:

What doth God forbid in the eighth commandment [i.e., “Thou shalt not steal”]?

God forbids not only those thefts and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate; but He comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor, whether it be by force, or

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under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, ells, measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all abuse and waste of His gifts.

But what doth God require in this commandment?
That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may, and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others; further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy (Q. & A. 110-111).

Whether it preaches the *Heidelberg Catechism* or not, a church that fails to give such instruction concerning the law becomes responsible for the unholy lives of its members.

With the instruction concerning the law as the rule of life, the church must discipline the unholy, barring them from the sacraments and ultimately excommunicating them from the church. The announcement of such discipline invariably mentions, as ground of the discipline, impenitent disobedience to one or more of the commandments of the law. Thus the church enforces in the mind of the members the necessity of obedience to the law.¹⁷

The Believer Maintains the Role of the Law as Guide

By the sharp preaching of the law as the rule of life in a soundly Reformed church, the believer is disciplined by Jesus Christ, through His Spirit, to measure his life by the standard of the law, and then to pray and strive that his life be in accord with the law. For this heartfelt desire and self-disciplining striving, the believer must be able to declare, with the psalmist in Psalm 119, “O how love I thy law!” (v. 97). And if he will love the law, so as ardently to desire and strive to keep it, he must be thankful to God for God’s gracious deliverance of himself from both the guilt of his disobedience to the law and the ruling power of sin over him.

¹⁷ See the Reformed “Form for Excommunication,” in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), pp. 276-278.

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This is how Romans 7 concludes.

“O wretched man that I am!” (v. 24)—not, “used to be, before I was born again,” but “am, now, after I have been born again, indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and united to Christ by faith.” I still possess a depraved nature, so that the good that I would, I do not do, and the evil that I would not, that I do. There is in me still only a very small beginning of the new obedience.

But, in answer to my anguished cry, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” I am delivered by God through Jesus Christ, in that God forgives my sin (justification) *and* empowers me anew to will and begin to do the good (sanctification).

As the effect of and in response to this deliverance, “I thank God.”

In this daily, lifelong thankfulness for gracious salvation, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God.”

Not, “*dispense with* the law of God.”

But, “*serve* the law of God.”

Part 1: Chapter 4

The Imperfection of Sanctification in This Life

Herman Hanko

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Rom 7:24).

Introduction

The elect child of God from the moment of his regeneration is a sanctified Christian saint. Yet if one would observe him in the world and, indeed, as he observes himself, he is, though sanctified, very much a sinner. He is a sinning saint or, to express it differently, he is a saintly sinner. He is both a sinner and a saint at the same time.

The elect and sanctified child of God in this world is a strange creature. The kind of life he lives is unexplainable. On the one hand, he is, in fact, a new creature who prays boldly, “Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity” (Ps. 26:1). And on the other hand, he cries out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). He claims perfection and is not afraid to have God, from whom no evil can be hidden, search his inner heart (Ps. 139:23-24). But of him it can be said that he has only a small beginning of the new obedience, and that his best works are corrupted and polluted by sin. He can confidently say with Paul, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37), yet he daily cries out, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

What kind of a person can he possibly be?

How God Created Him

Man was created out of the dust of the earth as one adapted to live in this earthly creation (Gen. 2:7). He was of the earth, earthy, and could not escape the earthly creation to soar into the heavenly. He was created to live in God's world with his wife, Eve. Yet God also breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he could, in distinction from animals and trees, live in a relationship with God as His covenant friend.

He was also created prophet, priest and king to represent God in God's world; and he was God's image-bearer, who bore in his nature true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. His holiness was the holiness of God Himself and it manifested itself in complete consecration to God with a holiness without any fault.

As far as his psychical make-up is concerned, he was created as a creature with body and soul. His soul was a spiritual substance, intimately connected to the body and pervading the entire body, but not material as was his body. The two faculties of his soul, and that which set him apart from birds and trees, fish and animals, were the presence in Adam of a mind to think and know, and of a will to make choices in the creation, by which choices he lived.

But Scripture speaks also of the "spirit" of man (Ecc. 12:7; Acts 7:59; I Thess. 5:23). While it is difficult to determine precisely what Scripture means by man's spirit and while the subject has been debated for centuries, it is clear that the spirit is not a third element in man's psychical constitution. It is probably the spiritual side of the soul that enables man, with mind and will, to know God, to know that he stands in a moral relationship to God, to know that before God he is called to live in humble obedience to Him and to know that he shall have to give account to God for all that he does.

In addition to all this, man was created as a person, which means that he was a self-conscious individual, and one who could stand and live in relation to God, either as God's friend or as God's enemy.

Scripture also speaks of man's heart, not the physical heart that pumps blood throughout his body, but the spiritual centre of his

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moral and ethical life. Scripture, especially in its description of man's dreadful fall into sin and of man's salvation, speaks a great deal about the heart. The heart, as it were, is to the whole nature in the same sense as an acorn is the whole of an oak tree: a microcosm of the entire nature. At the same time, it is the moral and ethical centre of a man's life. If the heart is morally good, the man is morally good in his entire nature. If the heart is evil, the man is evil in his entire nature.

What the Fall Did to Man

Scripture is absolutely clear on the fact that, when Adam chose to represent the cause of Satan in the world rather than the cause of God, he became corrupt and depraved in his entire being and in everything he did. This total corruption of man's nature is the death with which God threatened Adam if Adam should disobey Him (Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1).

Adam's heart was corrupted and, as a result, his entire nature was corrupted, which rendered him an enemy of God instead of a friend. His mind was darkened so that he could not know the truth. His will was depraved so that he could not will the good but could only will that which is contrary to God's commands. His body became an instrument to carry out his wicked designs in God's world. He is without any redeeming features, an enemy of God, a corruptor of God's world, a hater of everyone but himself and a hell-bent lover of all that is evil (Rom. 8:7; Titus 3:3).

This corruption of man's nature does not change, not even when an elect sinner is regenerated and not even when a regenerated saint is sanctified. It does not change during his whole life in the world. It changes only at death and at the end of time when the body of the elect child of God is raised from the grave.

A Truth Denied

All this is almost universally denied. The Pelagians and the Arminians, with whom many churches are filled, deny total depravity and claim free will for fallen man. That is, they drag into man's awful con-

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dition the strange and utterly false notion of a fallen sinner who has a free will and can still, although it might be with great effort, choose for the good, for Christ and God.

Those who hold to common grace deny total depravity by making the horribly depraved sinner the object of God's grace, love and mercy. They teach in their blindness that God wants all men to be saved and that God gives grace to all so that they too can do good and choose that of which God approves. Although they are the recipients of grace, they can still reject God's love.

The church has also been infiltrated with those who teach a certain perfectionism in this life. The Pelagians of Augustine's day claimed that man could, although with effort, attain a sinless state. More modern teachings of perfectionism began with John Wesley and his hatred of salvation for the elect by grace alone. Man, so Wesley claimed, could attain a state of sinlessness by pulling himself up by his own bootstraps out of the quicksand of depravity and into the state of pure love that God wanted.

The story is told of a deluded minister in the Netherlands who began the worship service on a Sunday morning with the announcement to his congregation that he was that day celebrating an anniversary. His anniversary, so he told his longsuffering flock, was this: It had been exactly one year since he had committed his last sin!

Many sects and quasi-religious movements have come as plagues into the church with the poison of perfectionism cleverly hidden behind their pious talk. These discourage the people of God, who, as a result of such error, view themselves as unsaved when they still see sin in their lives.

The perfectionist errs, for he does not know, it seems, what sin is. He, like the Pelagians and Arminians, finds sin only in the outward deed and considers himself to be capable of living an outwardly moral life in conformity with the law of God and, therefore, a perfect life. He has no conception of the fact that sin is the corruption of his nature. The outward deed by the greatest of sinners may appear to conform to God's will but this was also true of the Pharisees of Jesus' day whom the Lord condemned in scathing words. No human power

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can alter man's corrupt and depraved nature, for sin is the root of the whole nature of man.

Sanctification's Power

Scripture makes it clear that, while God's work of sanctification is a total cleansing from sin, total cleansing does not take place in this life. Paul teaches this in Galatians 5:17 which speaks of a warfare that goes on between the flesh and the Spirit in the regenerated Christian: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

He speaks of the flesh and the Spirit as the antagonists. By "flesh," the apostle, in keeping with other uses of the term in the New Testament, refers to our entire nature, body and soul, with all its powers, corrupted in its entirety by sin.

On the other hand, the apostle calls the enemy of our flesh the Holy Spirit. The AV or KJV is correct in capitalizing the word "Spirit," for the reference is not to our spirits but to the Holy Spirit of Christ who is given to the elect child of God. It is true, of course, that the Holy Spirit works in His sanctifying power through us, but the apostle means to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is in all respects the author of our sanctification and that the Holy Spirit is, so to speak, "on our side" or puts us on His side.

The warfare between these two antagonists is defined by the word "lust." "Lust" does not refer always to sexual desires; it has the broader connotation of any strong desire or yearning that arises out of the will. These desires are in direct opposition to the desires of the Holy Spirit, who causes us to "lust" after God, to want desperately the favour and love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to be led in all the ways of His holy laws. Our flesh desires exactly the opposite in every respect. Our flesh hates God and desires His destruction or, at least, the end of His efforts to direct our lives. The flesh strongly desires the approval of Satan, rather than that of God, and reaches out with exhausting longings for everything that is contrary to God's law.

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The result is that we cannot do the things that we would.

While I will say more about this later, I hope you notice a ray of hope in this statement of the apostle. While it is surely true that we desire with our wills all that is opposed to God, Paul emphatically states that our wills also desire the good, although we are unable to perform it. The apostle expressed much the same idea in that dramatic description of the war that rages in us in Romans 7:14-25. We read there: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (v. 15); "I do that which I would not" (v. 16); "to will [the good] is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (v. 18); "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (v. 19); "when I would do good, evil is present with me" (v. 21); "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (vv. 22-23).

How can all this be explained? The temptation is to explain all this in an academic and theological way so that it remains abstract, although interesting. The fact is that this terrible battle goes on every moment in the life of the sanctified child of God. Nor does old age diminish the force of the conflict; rather, with the passing of the years, the battle grows more intense and more deadly. This is not so much because the enemy grows stronger in us, although that is partially true, but it is because we recognize more clearly the battle and its terrible power, and are frightened by the awful power that sin has in us.

This battle is possible only because of God's work through the Spirit of Christ in the wonder of sanctification.

The following elements must be considered.

First, the heart, the moral centre of man and a microcosm of his entire nature, is sanctified. This sanctification takes place already in regeneration but it results in the creation by the Holy Spirit of what Scripture calls "the new man." It is the creation of a principle of holiness that is utterly free from sin, unable to sin and holy as God is holy (I John 3:9). This new man is fed and nourished by the Word of God so that he grows and develops within us.

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Second, that new man, created in the miracle of regeneration, never includes our sinful nature or flesh, which remains corrupted. But it does grow in its influence on our nature, until we die and our souls are made perfect when they go to heaven. The final perfection of the whole of our nature comes about in the resurrection of our bodies, when our bodies are conformed to the likeness of the body of Christ (Phil. 3:21).

Third, the battle that goes on within us varies, as it were, with one side dominant at one time and the other side at another time. There is an analogy between the history of the nation of Israel and the warfare that goes on within us. There were times in Israel's history (and later in Judah's history) when good kings ruled over the nation, as in the days of David, Solomon, Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah. Under their rule, prophets brought the Word of God, priests performed their God-assigned duties in the temple and the nation served the Lord. This did not mean that there were no wicked in the nation (surely there were) but the nation manifested itself as a whole as the people of God.

But there were also times when wicked kings ruled over the nation, men like Jehoram, Ahaz and Jehoiakim. During their reigns, the nation served idols, committed sins worse than the surrounding nations, closed the temple, killed the prophets and brought down upon the nation God's fierce wrath.

Did this mean that there were no people of God in the nation? Far from it. Elijah foolishly thought that he was the only believer left (I Kings 19:10) but God informed the despairing prophet that He had reserved to Himself seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (I Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4).

So it is in our lives. Sometimes the wickedness of our natures takes over. Our prayers are mechanical and without sincerity. Our consciousness of God's favour disappears. Sin controls our thoughts and our desires, our words and our deeds. When the consciousness of our sins and that inner dissatisfaction with our lives come to the fore, we may even pray, as Augustine did, "Lord, deliver me from my fornication, but not yet!" One need only read the Psalms, a marvellous

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biography of the Christian's life in this world, to appreciate how the sweet singers of Israel were overwhelmed with the power of their enemies, but were filled with praise and confidence in their holiness when sanctification gave the Spirit dominion over them.

Fourth, although there is growth in sanctification, it is not the kind of growth that men expect. In a sense, we do not become holier as if our natures were gradually cleansed while we remain in the flesh. The old man remains totally depraved until death but the Holy Spirit is a mighty power within us, who finally has the victory, which is a victory guaranteed by the cross of Jesus Christ.

It is possible to compare our depraved natures to a pit bull dog, vicious and fierce, bent on killing anyone within his reach. His master can, however, control him by holding him on a leash so that he is prevented from doing harm to anyone, although he makes vicious lunges at others. So our sinful natures are held on a leash by the Holy Spirit who keeps us from sins we would otherwise commit. He does this by answering our prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." He also does this when we are confronted with temptation for He gives us grace to resist.

But there is more. Even a pit bull, as vicious as he may be, learns to obey certain commands of his master. He knows his master and so he sits when his master says, "Sit." He heels when his master says, "Heel."

This too the Holy Spirit enables us to do. Our life of sanctification is not only a refusal to do evil; there is also in us a positive willingness and joy to obey our Christ. We do pray! We do confess our sins! We do love our God and His Christ! We do, though it be with struggle, submit to His will when His heavy hand is on us. We do obey Him in many ways. The beginning of eternal life in our hearts manifests itself.

Yet lest we should think at any moment that we have attained and achieved perfection, the *Heidelberg Catechism* pulls us up short with some necessary but crushing reminders. Lest we should say that our works are the ground of our justification, the *Catechism* reminds us

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that this is impossible, for “our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin” (A. 62). After explaining to us what the law of God requires of us, it asks, “But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?” The answer is, “No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience” (Q. & A. 114).

Thus the Spirit and the flesh engage in constant war within us! As a part of our life! In everything we do! That which emerges from our sanctified hearts is the perfect and sinless life of a sinless saint. But because the Spirit works in and through *us*, those works of the Spirit, while becoming our works, pass through our depraved natures, and are by our natures distorted and corrupted. The Spirit’s work is like a stream of water, pure and clear, but that must pass on its way to the mouth of the river through a pipe contaminated with toxic chemicals. Our depraved flesh pollutes our very best works.

The truth of our sanctification is not that the Spirit does all that is good, while we stand on the sidelines observing what is going on. Nor is it the opposite: Our natures are capable of doing some good, while the Spirit stands on the sidelines watching. Nor do we and the Spirit work together in an effort to overcome our flesh. The wonder is that the Spirit works only good in us and through us so that we do the good, but our flesh wars against the Spirit and against us in its continual struggle to maintain its corruption and to force us to do corrupt things.

Nevertheless, the Spirit of God works in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Thus we are called to fight. We are called to do what the Spirit makes it possible for us to do. We are called to do what the Spirit enables us to do by a conscious and complete reliance on the power of the cross on which our Saviour died.

Why God Saves Us Through Struggle

Two questions emerge from this discussion. The first question is: What is the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit in us and our doing good works?

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We cannot answer this question completely, for God's works, also in us, are so mighty, so great, so beyond anything human, that they remain mysterious, although profoundly wonderful—and the latter because of the former. Regeneration itself is a wonder of grace, as is sanctification which rests firmly on the ground of justification by the merits of Christ's atonement.

The fact is that salvation in Christ is the one great miracle that God performs, of which all other miracles are but signs. If we cannot understand the signs, how shall we comprehend the wonder of the reality? But we know it is true that the work of sanctification is entirely the Spirit's work. Yet we are called, solemnly and urgently, to do good works. So urgent is this calling that we are even promised a reward for these works (Rev. 22:12). We work and God works through the Spirit; all our work is also the work of the Holy Spirit, yet it remains ours.

The second question is: Why does God work sanctification in us in such a way that, although it dominates our entire life, it is never completed in our earthly pilgrimage, is only partially accomplished at the moment of death when our souls go to be with the Lord, and becomes perfect and complete only at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ when our bodies are sanctified in the resurrection?

From the viewpoint of His omnipotence, God could sanctify us completely in a moment. He could cleanse us when He begins His work in us. He could completely destroy our old natures, and give us new and glorious natures as they shall be in heaven.

But God has good reason not to save us in this way.

If we were completely sanctified when God began His work in us, we could not live in this world but would have to be taken immediately to heaven, for our sanctification is a new life that is heavenly and no longer earthly.

But if we were taken to heaven, the rest of the members of the church could not be born and the church would never be complete. God creates the church through earthly marriage, intercourse, conception and birth; and God saves His church in the line of generations in be-

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lievers and their seed, as well as through the preaching of the gospel on the mission field, by which other lines are grafted into the church.

God is a great God and in our salvation wants us to know His glory, majesty, grace and mercy shown in Christ. When we look at our salvation from our point of view, we must understand that our salvation is a very difficult work. It is beyond human power in every respect. But it is also difficult for God for, as Peter expresses it, we are “scarcely” saved (I Pet. 4:18), that is, we are saved with the greatest difficulty, by the skin of our teeth. I speak as a man but God has all He can do to save us. Ponder the fact that our salvation cost God the death of His own beloved Son in the agony of Christ on Calvary. We are so wicked that to make us saints requires God’s supreme power.

It is not easy to transform a dirty stone into a block of marble, fit for God’s dwelling place. It is not easy to make a prostitute into the bride of Christ. It is not easy to turn a blasphemer into a penitent sinner who, smiting his breast, cries out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” It is not easy for God to change a vile sinner such as I am into a saint who is more glorious than the angels.

Every step of the way to heaven, God is saving a sinner who fights His every effort and who resists His power as much as he can. We walk on the very edge of an abyss and our eyes look longingly into it. God must hold us every moment and sometimes He holds us even when we do not want to be held. When finally we arrive in glory, exhausted, beaten, stumbling and weary, our arrival is a testimony to the power of grace revealed in Christ.

That is the way it should be. That truth should and does live in our consciousness every step of our stay here on our pilgrim’s path. We are saved by grace. We are saved by a power infinitely greater than ourselves. We are saved so that it may be shown without any doubt that all praise belongs only to Him who has saved us. We are what we are that we may show forth the praises of our God. Paul’s anguished but joyful cry resounds in the hearts of all of God’s people: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24-25)!

Part 1: Chapter 5

“A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven:” The Threat to Sanctification of Antinomianism

David J. Engelsma

Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? (Jer. 7:9-10).

Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh (Gal. 5:13).

Introduction

I make bold to say that the subject of this chapter—antinomianism or antinomism—could well be the topic of an entire conference and book.

So important is the subject to the truth of sanctification and, indeed, to the entire gospel of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ!

So prominent and extensive is the subject throughout Scripture!

So frequent and dangerous is the evil of antinomianism in the history of the church!

So threatening is the heresy to the Christian church and to the individual child of God today!

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By well-nigh heroic effort, I keep this chapter within bounds. But the subject demands broader, longer and deeper treatment than a speaker can give it in one lecture or than a writer can give it in one chapter of a book.

With this topic, we come to a false doctrine and a controversy that are of special interest and concern to me personally, and that have been so from the very beginning of my ministry, now some fifty-odd years ago. I graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary with the instruction of Reformed theologian Herman Hoeksema prepared to do battle with the heresy of Arminianism in all, or nearly all, its forms and with its teaching that salvation is conditional, dependent on the will and obedience of the sinner. I knew a little about antinomianism, but barely more than the name and the faintest outline of its doctrine.

My first pastoral charge was a congregation in the West of the United States that had only very recently affiliated with the Protestant Reformed Churches. The members of the congregation had separated some years earlier from a church that was heavily influenced by a German Reformed theologian (of Dutch ancestry) named Hermann F. Kohlbrugge.

Kohlbrugge's theology and teaching suffered, basically, from the error not of Arminianism (he was strong on salvation by the grace of God only) but of antinomianism. His weakness is evident in his published commentary on the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The commentary is strong on the knowledge of misery and on the knowledge of redemption but weak on the third part of the *Catechism*, concerning knowledge of thankfulness, that is, the life of sanctification.

Indicating his weakness almost at once in his explanation of the third part of the *Catechism*, the German theologian asks, What is the most thankful creature of God? He answers his question with the words, “*Der hund*,” that is, “the dog.”¹ Such an answer is a disparagement of the truth of thankfulness, which embraces the whole of the holy

¹ H. F. Kohlbrugge, *Fragen und Antworten zu dem Heidelberger Katechismus* (Elberfeld: Len & Wiegandt, 1922), p. 151. The third question of Kohlbrugge's

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life of the believer, if it is not the ridiculing of this glorious work of salvation.

Kohlbrugge's disciples, who included the minister of the German Reformed church from which the members of my first congregation came, developed the error and weakness much further. Some denied that there is any spiritual life and power for a holy life in believers at all. In fact, the members of my first pastorate had been expelled from the German Reformed church in Nebraska because they confessed, with Lord's Day 45 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, that as believers they were required and able to pray. The eldership in the church denied that God "will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them" (A. 116).

To the appeal to this question of the *Catechism* in support of the truth of the holiness of the believer, the leading elder roughly responded that we are so devoid of holiness that our prayers do not get beyond the ceiling of the building in which we pray, much less enter into heaven.

This antinomian doctrine had been the powerful influence on the members of my first church for years, indeed for generations.

My struggle, therefore, as a pastor and preacher for the first eleven years of my ministry was not with Arminianism, which makes good works a condition of salvation, but with antinomianism, which denies that good works are necessary, or even possible, and which reacts strongly against the "must" or "ought" of the law of God as if it were the doctrine of salvation by works.²

exposition of the third section of the *Catechism* is, "*Welches ist das dankbarste Geschöpf Gottes?*" The answer: "*Der hund.*"

² Antinomianism's antipathy towards the "must" of the law, which "must" is of the essence of the law itself, is evident in its explanation of Q. 86 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The question is, "why must we still do good works?" exactly in light of the truth that "we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours." The antinomians in the sphere of the Reformed faith, specifically in the German Reformed tradition that comes from Kohlbrugge, explain this "must" as meaning "will," as a promise, not an

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For such a struggle, I was not well prepared. I had to devote myself to concentrated study of church history and, especially, of the Bible, in order to understand the false doctrine and then to expose it and root it out by my preaching.

Scripture recognizes the false doctrine of antinomianism, although not by the name. It recognizes the error as a real threat to the gospel and to the church. Scripture condemns the error. Scripture recognizes, exposes and condemns the error of antinomianism in Galatians 5:13-16. In the words, “ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,” in verse 13, Holy Scripture takes notice of the error, indicates that it is a real threat and exposes the nature of the error. The nature of the error is that it uses true Christian liberty, that is, freedom from the requirement to obey the law as the basis or condition of salvation, as an occasion to yield to one’s sinful flesh.

What is especially noteworthy about this warning in Galatians is that the apostle, who has devoted the entire epistle to a condemnation of the teaching that one must obey the law for righteousness, does not permit the error of “nomism”—the heresy of seeking salvation in obedience to the law—to drive him into the opposite extreme of “antinomism”—the utter rejection of the law from the life of the believer.

The apostle of the liberty of salvation by grace alone maintains the law and its requirements: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Gal. 5:14). The gospel does not proclaim the abolition of the law but its fulfillment. Jesus did not “come to destroy the law ... but to fulfil [it]” (Matt. 5:17).

imperative. The *Catechism*, then, does not teach the obligation of the Christian to do good works but only the certainty that he will do good works. However, stripping the German word, “*sollen*”—and the law—of all sense of obligation has the effect of destroying the certainty of the redeemed believer’s obeying the law (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, p. 338). If I am not obligated by “ought” or “must,” it becomes highly uncertain that I “will” (obey the commandments). To state the matter positively, God uses the “must” to realize the “will.”

Walking in the Spirit, which is the exhortation of Galatians 5:16, evidently does not mean repudiating the law of God, as is the fundamental error of antinomianism.

The Reality of the Threat of Antinomianism

Antinomianism or antinomism, as it is sometimes called, is the heresy of rejecting the law of God. It is especially the rejection of the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20. When it works itself out fully, the heresy is the rejection of *all* demands to live an obedient, holy life. The name itself of the false teaching expresses what the error is. “Anti” means “against,” in the sense of “opposed to.” *Nomos* is the Greek word for the “law.” An antinomian, accordingly, is one who not only does not honour the law of God but also opposes it. The antinomian cannot say with Psalm 119:97, “O how love I thy law!”

But antinomianism is not simply the error of rejecting the law of God, as also a rebellious unbeliever despises and rejects the law. The antinomian rejects the law of God on the ground that the gospel of salvation by grace alone does away with the law in the church and in the life of the Christian. It is the position and argument of the antinomian that grace rids the church and the Christian life of the law. Grace abolishes law, specifically the Ten Commandments. Robert S. Paul, author of a fine book on the Westminster Assembly, *The Assembly of the Lord*, described antinomianism, with which the Assembly concerned itself, this way: “Antinomianism is ... the view that the gift of grace by faith frees the true believer from any obligation to the moral law.”³

Exactly this is the appeal of antinomianism and exactly this makes antinomianism a real threat to the church. Grace and law are seen as opposites, indeed as implacable enemies. The claim always of the antinomian is that he or she (and I add “she” advisedly) is defending salvation by grace alone.

³ Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), p. 176. Many independent churchmen in England at the time of the Westminster Assembly were antinomian or had antinomian leanings. So much was their heresy a threat to the national church that Parliament ordered the Westminster divines to study “the Opinions of the *Antinomians*” (p. 177).

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The charge always of the antinomian against one, such as Calvin, who teaches the place—the important, necessary place—of the law in the life of the believer is that he is guilty of “legalism” or “justification by works”—the gross heresy that the Reformation opposed in the Roman Catholic Church and the perversion of the gospel that is condemned in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians.

In one of the historical controversies over antinomianism that I will describe later, the antinomians accused their opponents of teaching a “covenant of works” instead of the “covenant of grace.”

Because there is the very real danger of teaching justification by works and legalism, and because Scripture does condemn putting the church “under the law,” the reactionary, opposite error of antinomianism is a real threat to the church that confesses salvation by grace alone.

Because antinomianism rejects the law of God, specifically regarding our Christian life, it always is, or leads to, a weakening, and eventually a corrupting, of the Christian life of holiness. For this reason, an answer to the heresy of antinomianism is rightly, indeed necessarily, an aspect of this book on holiness of life.

Antinomianism is a threat to sanctification and a threat to a life of holiness. In its most advanced form, antinomianism is the error of teaching that the believer may, and even should, sin freely and grossly, in order to emphasize and experience that salvation is by grace alone and not at all by our own good works. In the words of Romans 3:8, antinomianism urges, “Let us do evil, that good may come.” Antinomianism answers the apostle’s question in Romans 6:1, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” with an enthusiastic “Yes,” rather than with the apostle’s “God forbid.”

So wicked is the heresy!

The Threat in the History of the Church

Antinomianism appeared in the early church already in the days of the apostles, as I will show when I note the condemnation of the

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heresy in the Bible. Despite the biblical condemnation of the heresy, Satan raised it in the early post-apostolic church. Sectarian groups arose that taught and practised the liberty to sin freely and grossly as the implication of salvation by grace alone. Leading churchmen and theologians opposed these antinomians, insisting and proving that the salvation that is in Jesus Christ includes, and emphasizes, holiness of life.

Understandably, the error appeared more prominently and in more clearly defined form at the Reformation. “Understandably,” because antinomianism is always a perversion of the gospel of salvation by grace. It is a cancerous growth on the body of the gospel of grace. And the Reformation was the proclamation of grace.

Luther himself was confronted by the heresy and its unholy behaviour, especially on two occasions. One was the debacle of the Anabaptist take-over of the German city of Münster (1534-1535). More was involved than only antinomianism but antinomianism was an important aspect of the event. A group of men seized the city and indulged in a riot of unholy behaviour, including polygamy, going about naked and engaging in other sexual filth.

That activity was antinomian because the leaders justified and encouraged their ungodly behaviour by appeal to salvation by grace and to justification by faith alone—the message of the Reformation.

Martin Luther’s own repudiation of antinomianism as it took form in Münster was evident from his searing condemnation of the goings-on there and from his much criticized appeal to the civil authorities to put down what was also a civil revolution with brutal force. It is likely that Luther was extremely harsh because the Münster antinomians claimed to be exercising the liberty of life given them by Luther’s own gospel of grace. In any case, Luther’s response demonstrated that the great Reformer rejected antinomianism as the implication of the gospel of salvation by grace.

More clear-cut during the Reformer’s own life was the antinomian teaching of one of Luther’s fellow ministers in the Protestant church. He was John Agricola. Agricola’s main opposition to the law was

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his denial that the law should be preached in order to give believers knowledge of their sin. According to Agricola, Christians should get knowledge of sin only from the gospel. But the German Protestant preacher also denied that the law serves as the guide or rule of the Christian life—the so-called “third use of the law.” A forerunner of the antinomians of the twenty-first century, Agricola contended that the only guide of the Christian life is the New Testament admonitions given by the gospel.

What made Agricola’s error genuine antinomianism was his argument that it is the gospel of grace that does away with the law. Agricola appealed in his defence to the strong statements of Luther himself against the law, failing to recognize, however, that Luther rejected the law as a means of being righteous in the judgment of God—justification—and as a means by which the sinner saves himself. Luther did not deny that the law functions as the rule of a Christian life.

Luther condemned Agricola’s theology in a powerful work titled, “Against the Antinomians.”⁴ With characteristic insight, Luther called Agricola and his antinomian comrades “fine Easter preachers” but “disgraceful Pentecost preachers.”⁵ The meaning of the charge, according to Luther himself, is that the antinomians preached “solely about the redemption of Jesus Christ” but nothing “about the sanctification by the Holy Spirit.”⁶ Luther continued by affirming against the antinomians that “Christian holiness” consists of the Spirit’s work of “inscribing the commandments of God not on tables of stone, but in hearts of flesh.” The content of the holy life of the Christian is his obedience to all the commandments of both tables of the law of God.⁷ Such is the gravity of the antinomian heresy, according to Luther, that those who are not sanctified by this inscribing of the law of the Ten Commandments on their hearts so that they obey these commandments “should not count themselves as Christians; nor

⁴ Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians” in *The Christian in Society IV*, volume 47 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 99-119.

⁵ Martin Luther, “On the Councils and the Church” in *Church and Ministry III*, volume 41 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 114.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-147.

should they be comforted with much babbling about the forgiveness of sins and the grace of Christ, as though they were Christians—like the Antinomians do.”⁸

But Agricola’s heresy was still worse. According to Luther, Agricola “taught that you may do murder, commit adultery, engage in all sorts of sins and scandals, and yet remain unharmed so long as you believe.”⁹ Regardless whether Agricola ever expressly stated this fully developed form of his antinomianism, this was Luther’s understanding of Agricola’s antinomian doctrine and this teaching is, in fact, the implication of the opposition to the law that Agricola advocated as the meaning of the gospel of grace. Luther charged that Agricola “dared to expel the law of God or the Ten Commandments from the church and to assign them to city hall.” The Reformer asked, “How can one know what sin is without the law?”

It is noteworthy that in his polemic against antinomianism as taught by Agricola, although Luther certainly did acknowledge the use of the law as a guide to the Christian life, he stressed the use of the law to give knowledge of sin. Much of Lutheranism has followed this lead of their great teacher by excluding the “third use of the law” altogether, something that Luther never did nor intended.¹⁰

John Calvin contended against antinomianism in Geneva nearly his entire ministry. He called the antinomians the “libertines.” His name for these heretics was apt. They claimed the Christian liberty to sin

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁹ Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 171. This quotation is from the chapter entitled “Against the Antinomians.”

¹⁰ Lutheranism’s rejection of the “third use of the law” was brought home to me years ago in an amusing encounter with my wife’s obstetrician, a devout Lutheran. Driving in the then small town of Loveland, Colorado, immediately after the morning service on a Sunday, my wife and I encountered her doctor, who by that time knew us well. He was pulling a large boat behind his vehicle, obviously heading for a nearby lake and a pleasurable Sabbath afternoon of water skiing. To my cordial “Hello,” he responded, after a moment’s reflection, with, “You know, Reverend, that we Lutherans do not hold the ‘third use of the law.’” To which, my rejoinder ought to have been, “You know, Doctor, that we Reformed are better disciples of Luther than are you Lutherans.”

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freely. Such was their doctrine of salvation that it divided each of them into two, distinct beings, a spiritual man and a fleshly man. The libertines argued that the spiritual man could not sin. Being saved, they were spiritual, sinless men and women. Their fleshly man still sinned but since what it did was not really their deeds as spiritual men, they could—and did—indulge freely in grossest deeds of uncleanness, especially fornication.

Always, the antinomian appeals to salvation by grace as an excuse for sinning freely, indeed, as a warrant for living an unholy life.

Against these libertines, Calvin wrote a powerful treatise, “Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines Who Are Called ‘Spirituals.’”¹¹ Calvin identified the libertines with the antinomians condemned in II Peter 2 and in the epistle of Jude. He charged the libertines with leading simple folk “into dissolute living;” with teaching that “each might indulge his appetite, abusing Christian liberty in order to give free rein to every carnal license;” and with overturning “human decency.” Calvin concluded his condemnation of the libertines with an exhortation to the saints: “Let us be on guard against profaning ourselves, since it has already pleased God to call us into sanctification.”

Antinomianism or libertinism is opposed to sanctification, and John Calvin was, outstandingly, the theologian of sanctification.

Anne Hutchinson

An especially notable, and well-known, instance of antinomianism in the history of the church was the controversy in New England in the years 1636-1638. The controversy raged in the Puritan community soon after the Puritans had fled England for the New World, to establish on that hill their city of God. The leading proponent of the antinomian heresy was every minister’s worst nightmare—a well-read, knowledgeable, apparently godly and eloquent, but heretical, outspoken female member of the congregation. In this case, she was

¹¹ This treatise is found in John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), pp. 159-326.

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Mrs. Anne Hutchinson. Mrs. Hutchinson was successful in gaining the support of a leading clergyman in the colony, Rev. John Cotton.

This lay, female theologian taught, contended for and spread through the church the following doctrines. First, salvation is by grace alone without any works. She emphasized that the covenant, which was vitally important to the New England colony, is a covenant of grace.

But, in the second place, the covenant of grace implies, according to Mrs. Hutchinson, that there is no place for the law of God in the Christian life. The law does not make known to us our sinfulness. The law is not a rule or guide to the Christian life. According to Hutchinson, "A Christian is not bound to the Law as a rule of his conversation."¹² In slightly different words, Mrs. Hutchinson and her party asserted, "We are not bound to the Law, no not as a rule of life."¹³

Hutchinson and her faction denied that sanctification, that is, a life of good works in obedience to the law, is an evidence of justification, of election and of salvation. Here Mrs. Hutchinson contradicted the apostle James in James 2:14-26: "I will shew thee my faith by my works" (v. 18) and "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (v. 24).

As antinomians always do, Mrs. Hutchinson and the New England antinomians taught lawlessness, that is, unholiness of life. John Winthrop, who witnessed the antinomian controversy first hand, charged that the party of Mrs. Hutchinson "grew (many of them) very loose and degenerate in their practices (for these Opinions will certainly produce a filthy life by degrees)."¹⁴

But my charge now concerns their *doctrine* of unholiness. The New England antinomians denied any "inherent righteousness:" "There is no such thing as inherent righteousness."¹⁵ There is, according to

¹² David D. Hall (ed.), *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 203.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

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them, only the imputed righteousness of justification. That is, there is no work of sanctification in the saved. They held that “the darker our sanctification is, the cleerer is our justification.” Indeed, with Mrs. Hutchinson “was there no speech so much in use, as of vilifying sanctification.”¹⁶

Where the disparagement of the law by the antinomians invariably leads is evident from this doctrine of Mrs. Hutchinson: “Not being bound to the Law, it is not transgression against the Law to sinne, or breake it.”¹⁷ The explanation of this antinomian tenet is that since the law is no rule for the believer, disobedience to the law cannot be sinful.

Significantly, the New England antinomians, led by Mrs. Hutchinson, denied *all* commands and exhortations, for example, the exhortation of Philippians 2:12, that we work out our own salvation. Even the gospel command to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation is a law and, therefore, is illegitimate. If a preacher does give this command, the command will not bear the fruit that anyone believes. Rather, the command [to believe] only “killeth.”¹⁸

In view of a contemporary espousal and defence of this particular aspect of their antinomianism, it should be noted that the New England antinomians, headed by Mrs. Hutchinson, taught that “the faith of the Son of God” of Galatians 2:20 is not *our* faith in Jesus, the Son of God, but *Jesus’* faith for us and in our stead. The thought of the antinomians in this teaching is that the believer remains spiritually dead. He does not believe. He cannot believe. He is not to be exhorted to believe. But Jesus believes for him. If there is some faith in the child of God, it is Jesus believing in him, not his own believing.

About the same time of the antinomian controversy in New England, prominent preachers in England were teaching the same heresy. The key surnames are Brine, Hussey, Eaton and Traske. Some add Crisp.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 302: Mrs. Hutchinson taught “that all commands in the word are Law, and are not a way of life, and the command of faith is a Law, and therefore killeth.”

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Indicative of the antinomianism of this party is the following quotation of Trask: “The law is [not] to be preached to believers at all ... nor is it a rule for believers to walk by.”¹⁹

About the theology of the New England antinomians, one critic in the seventeenth century described it as setting out “such a faire and easie way to Heaven that men may pass without difficulty.”²⁰

Lest anyone dismiss the warning against antinomianism as merely controversy with an error of the distant past, I call attention to a bold, contemporary expression of the antinomian heresy. This is a doctrine involved in what is known as the “Lordship controversy” in premillennial dispensational circles. The centre of the controversy and heresy is Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas in the United States. Prominent theologians teach that one can have Jesus as Saviour without having Him also as Lord of one’s life. This false doctrine argues for the real possibility of an impenitently unholy life on the part of those who claim to be, and are regarded as being, saved Christians, and who may have the assurance of salvation, indeed, who are and will be saved, despite their unholy life. Their unholy life is tolerated and excused by their having Jesus as Saviour, even though obviously He is not their Lord.²¹

This pernicious teaching harmonizes with, if it is not rooted in, dispensationalism’s rejection of the law of the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 as the authoritative rule of life of New Testament Christians. According to dispensationalism, the law was only for Old Testament Israel in a bygone dispensation. The present age of grace excludes the law. This is antinomianism. Even those dispensationalists who affirm “Lordship salvation” are committed to the antinomian

¹⁹ Quoted in William K. B. Stoever, *‘A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven’: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), pp. 141-142.

²⁰ Thomas Weld, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 11-12. This description of antinomianism explains the title of this chapter of this book.

²¹ A prominent opponent of “Lordship salvation” is Zane C. Hodges. See his *A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation: Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).

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rejection of the binding character of the Ten Commandments for New Testament Christians.²²

Scripture’s Warning Against Antinomianism

Scripture warns against antinomianism as a real threat to the true church. Jeremiah 7:8-10 records that the people of Judah deliberately, boldly and grossly transgressed the commandments of the law. They stole, murdered, committed adultery, swore falsely, burned incense unto Baal and walked after other gods. What made this wickedness antinomianism was that the people claimed that they were “*delivered to do* all these abominations.” They made this antinomian claim in the face of God in the temple. Jehovah called this antinomian doctrine “lying words, that cannot profit.” God warned Judah of impending judgment for their doctrinal and ethical evils (vv. 12ff.).

In Jeremiah 7, the prophet instructed the antinomian Jews that salvation includes sanctification and that the life of sanctification consists of obedience to the law. If, and only if, they amended their ways and doings, and lived in obedience to the law, would they dwell in the land of promise (vv. 1-7). To promise salvation to those who have the name of the people of God, even though they continue in the unholiness of life of disobeying the law of God, as did John Agricola, the libertines and Anne Hutchinson, and as do Zane Hodges and his anti-Lordship party today, is “lying words, that cannot profit” (v. 8).

The same gross form of antinomianism appeared in the apostolic churches, as the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and

²² A leading defender of “Lordship salvation” in dispensational circles is John MacArthur, although in his opposition to such as Hodges, MacArthur is careful never to affirm that New Testament Christians are commanded by God to obey the law of Exodus 20. As a dispensationalist, MacArthur is committed to the basic dispensational heresy that the law of the Ten Commandments was exclusively for the earthly nation of Israel in the dispensation of the law. According to dispensationalism, this law will be reinstated for earthly Israel in the coming dispensation of the millennium. The law does not apply to the church in the dispensation of grace. As a dispensationalist, therefore, MacArthur is, in fact, as antinomian (“opposed to the law”) as are his anti-Lordship adversaries. The entire “Lordship controversy” in dispensational circles is nothing but a “tempest in a teapot.”

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3 show. There were those in the church of Pergamos who held “the doctrine of Balaam,” who taught Balak to seduce Israel to engage in idolatry and fornication, and the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” (Rev. 2:14-15).

In the church of Thyatira was the female teacher whom John calls “Jezebel.” She was a self-anointed prophetess, who taught the members of the church to know “the depths of Satan” by practising idolatry and committing fornication (Rev. 2:18-29). Hers was the fully developed, grossest form of antinomianism: “Sin deliberately and as vilely as you can in order in this way most fully to enjoy salvation by grace.” With this passage in Revelation in mind, John Winthrop called Anne Hutchinson “this American Jezebel.” With Anne Hutchinson, the Jezebel of Revelation 2 and other women in mind, I observed earlier that antinomian teachers in the church may be female as well as male.

Significantly, Paul envisioned the antinomian heresy as a heretical response to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Some were slanderously reporting of the apostle that he taught, “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom. 3:8). About his doctrine of justification by faith without the law, the apostle asks, “Do we then make void the law through faith?” (Rom. 3:31). At the conclusion of his treatment of justification by faith alone, apart from works, he asks, in Romans 6:1: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”

These doctrinal issues, with which the apostle struggled, raise these questions: Does the gospel of grace abolish the law for believers? Does not ruling out the law in the matter of justification lead to unholiness of life? Indeed, does the gospel of grace not lead to the conclusion, “Let us sin freely and boldly, in order that grace may abound still more”? Is the gospel of grace antinomian?

The answer to these questions is an emphatic, uncompromising “No!”

The gospel of grace condemns antinomianism.

The Gospel’s Condemnation of Antinomianism

The gospel vehemently repudiates and damns antinomianism. Such

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is the sharpness and vigour of the instantaneous condemnation of antinomianism as soon as it rears its ugly head that there can be no doubt whether the gospel of Christ utterly disavows antinomianism. Antinomianism is not an aspect of the gospel. The gospel does not lead to antinomianism. Antinomianism is as much an enemy of the gospel as is legalism.

Scripture reacts against antinomianism with condemnation and with horror. About those who charge that the gospel teaches, “Let us do evil, that good may come,” Paul says, “whose damnation is just” (Rom. 3:8). Not only does he repudiate the charge of antinomianism but he also judges the charge as a wicked attack on the gospel.

In Romans 3:31, the apostle answers his question, “Do we then make void the law through faith?” with the strongest denial in the Bible: “God forbid”! He adds that, on the contrary, “we establish the law.”

Christ’s warning to the antinomian teachers in Pergamos is, “I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16). As for the Jezebel of Thyatira and her disciples, Jesus will “cast her into a bed,” bring “great tribulation” on those who practise her antinomianism and “kill her children” (Rev. 2:22-23).

Upon those in the church who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness—antinomianism, which Jude judges a denial of the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ—Jude threatens the execution of judgment (Jude 4, 15).

So also does the Reformed faith repudiate and condemn antinomianism in all its forms, whether carelessness of life, as though condoned by the gospel of grace or the fully developed appeal to grace as an occasion for lawlessness of life.

As much as the Reformed faith opposes self-salvation, *so much* does it oppose antinomianism. *As much* as the Reformed faith proclaims and defends justification by faith alone, *so much* does it proclaim and defend sanctification *according to the law*. *As strongly* as it rejects the law in the grace of justification, *so strongly* does the Reformed faith

insist on the law in the grace of sanctification—insist on the law *as the rule of a holy life*.

No Compromise of Salvation by Grace

The gospel does not, however, respond to antinomianism by compromising the truth of salvation by grace.

This is a temptation.

When some respond, illegitimately and wickedly, to the truth of justification by faith alone by riotous living, as though justification by faith alone gives such liberty, theologians react by teaching justification by faith and by good works. This is taking place today in North America in conservative Presbyterian churches in the theology of the Federal Vision. Leading theologians of the movement, including Norman Shepherd, Richard Gaffin and Douglas Wilson, plead for the doctrine of justification by good works on the ground that the gospel-truth of justification by faith alone takes the edge off the urgency of the calling of Presbyterian church members to live holy lives, if it does not produce sheer carelessness of life.

At the very beginning of the book that let loose the theology of the Federal Vision upon the conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches, Norman Shepherd informed these churches and all his readers that the purpose of his theology of the covenant was to counteract the antinomianism that the Reformation's gospel of grace has supposedly caused or allowed for. Only if the covenant with Abraham, which is the covenant that Christ fulfilled and establishes with humans today, is conditional, as Shepherd teaches, does it not "give comfort to the antinomians."²³

Arguing for his doctrine of a conditional covenant, particularly with Abraham, which doctrine of a conditional covenant—a covenant dependent upon the good works of those humans with whom God has established the covenant—is fundamental to the whole of his theology of Federal Vision, including his teaching of justification by

²³ Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), p. 22.

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faith and works, Norman Shepherd contends that only because the covenant is conditional does it ward off the danger of antinomianism toward which the doctrines of salvation by grace, justification by faith alone and an unconditional covenant “gravitate.”²⁴ This is the argument that gracious salvation in the covenant must be sacrificed to the threat of antinomianism.

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. defends his explanation of Romans 2:13 as teaching that sinners are, *in reality*, justified by doing the law, thus denying the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith alone, by claiming that the doctrine of justification by faith alone has resulted in a “pervasive” failure on the part of the churches of the Reformation to do justice to sanctification. That is, the gospel of salvation by grace must be compromised for the sake of achieving a holy life.²⁵

P. Andrew Sandlin is blunt: “To preach that the covenant is unconditional is to preach an antinomian gospel, false to its very core.” This is the Federal Vision sympathizer’s polemic on behalf of his theology of justification by works with its foundation in a doctrine of the covenant that has the covenant depend for its saving efficacy on the good works of the baptized infant.²⁶ The intention of this denial of the gospel of grace, according to Sandlin, is to guard against antinomianism.

Because some may respond to the truth of an unconditional, that is, purely gracious, covenant of grace by living loosely with regard to the law, Federal Vision theologians react by asserting that the covenant is conditional, that is, it depends on our deeds of obedience to the law and not only on the grace of God. Nothing if not consistent, these theologians make all of salvation, from election to glorifica-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁵ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “By Faith, Not by Sight:” *Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 75-77.

²⁶ P. Andrew Sandlin, “Covenant in Redemptive History: ‘Gospel and Law’ or ‘Trust and Obey’?” in P. Andrew Sandlin (ed.), *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2004), p. 83. The appeal to the threat of antinomianism as a reason for their teaching justification by faith and works runs through Federal Vision literature as a major theme. See also P. Andrew Sandlin (ed.), *A Faith That Is Never Alone* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2007), pp. 121, 215, 245-247.

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tion, conditional, that is, dependent on the will and works of sinners, all in the name of rescuing the gospel of grace from its alleged inherent proneness to antinomianism.

When the doctrine of salvation by grace seemingly fails to produce holy lives or even seems to result in ungodliness of life, theologians and churches react by corrupting the message of grace with a strong dose of salvation by the law.

Although he recognized, indeed faced, the threat of antinomianism as a wicked response to the gospel of grace, Paul never weakened or compromised his message of grace. Rather, he maintained justification by faith alone, apart from the law, and salvation flowing from unconditional election. The apostle's refusal to compromise grace was not only because salvation by the law is a false gospel but also because, in fact, the teaching of salvation partly by the law makes impossible a holy life of truly good works.

If anything, the gospel responds to the antinomian threat by proclaiming salvation by grace alone more vehemently than ever. It is the gospel of grace that alone produces a holy life of good works. First, the Spirit works by this gospel to make men and women holy, and by no other message. Preaching justification by works, a conditional covenant and salvation dependent on the law may make people moral, may scare people into a decent life, may cause people to get busy earning salvation but none of these is a good life. None is a life of *genuine* goodness.

Second, the gospel of grace makes people thankful, and produces the will and ability to perform good works of grateful love to God. Only a life of gratitude to God is good. We preachers are to preach grace and the Spirit will make such sermons fruitful in the gratitude of the elect, which expresses itself in good works.

The preaching of the gospel of grace instructs the congregation that the grace of God in Jesus Christ not only delivers from the punishment of sin but also from the ruling power of sin and that the latter is as precious as the former. That is, the preaching of the gospel sanctifies as well as justifies. This is the response of the apostle to the antinomian error in Romans 6. To the question, "Shall we continue

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in sin, that grace may abound?” he responds, “God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (vv. 1-2).

If we believe in Jesus, so as to be justified, we have been united to Jesus Christ by a living faith and are now dead to sin. Sin is not dead in us. But we are dead to sin, in the sense that sin no longer is our lord, no longer calls the shots in our life and no longer rules over us. We *can* no longer live in sin. Dead to sin, we are alive to God, that henceforth we should not serve sin, but God. Once we were slaves of sin; now we are servants of God (vv. 3ff.).

The truth of Romans 6 concerning a holy life is perfectly captured by the *Heidelberg Catechism* in Q. & A. 64. To the question, “But doth not this doctrine [of justification by faith alone] make men careless and profane?” the *Catechism* answers, “By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”

The Role of the Law in Sanctification

In the preaching of sanctification and in the life of sanctification, the law has a vitally important, indeed necessary, role. This necessary role is additional to the law’s exposure of our sinfulness our life long, so that we are daily fleeing to God for the grace of pardon, and for the grace to overcome our sinful nature and to make progress in holiness.

This role of the law is not that the law justifies us, sanctifies us or saves us. Jesus Christ saves us, by the pure grace of the gospel.

But the role of the law is that it is the rule—the divine, authoritative rule—that defines a holy life, expresses the will of God for our thankful life and marks out the way—the narrow, often difficult way—of salvation, the way to the celestial city. Thus the law must be preached. And it is to be preached thus, as *law*: demanding or forbidding; the divine “you *must!*” or “you *must not!*” “Thou shalt” in Exodus 20 is not only, or even chiefly, if at all, “Thou *wilt,*” as a promise. But it is also, and chiefly, if not exclusively, “Thou *must!* Thou art *required,* by Him who is God, and now your God.”

There is no place in the Christian church for antinomianism. As it is a pernicious heresy, so are its effects injurious.

The Pernicious Effects of Antinomianism

Antinomianism is harmful to the people of God. It opens them up to practising sin, to turning again to sin's bondage. A life apart from the law, indeed opposed to the law, is not pleasant but destructive; not enjoyable but misery; not glorious but shameful.

The life of disregarding the law, indeed of despising it, brings on those who live such a life the painful discipline or, as the case may be, the punishment, of a holy God. If the lawless one is a reprobate unbeliever, God punishes his lawlessness with curse and damnation. If the lawless one is an elect child of God, temporarily deceived by antinomianism, God chastises, in order to restore to a sound mind, and His chastisements are severe and sore.

If believers make concessions to antinomianism, their generations will perish in the unholiness to which their parents led them.

Still another pernicious effect of antinomianism on believers is that so long as a believer goes on in disregard of the law and disobedience to its commandments he loses assurance of salvation. An obedient, holy life is basic to assurance of salvation. The *Canons of Dordt*, than which there is no creed of the Christian church that is more emphatic concerning salvation by grace alone, confesses that the "certainty of perseverance" does not make one "carnally secure," but rather is the "real source of" and "incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works" (V:12).

As one of the reasons why believers must do good works, the *Heidelberg Catechism* gives this: "that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof" (A. 86).

Scandal

A second pernicious effect of antinomianism is that it is a scandal to the ungodly world. The ungodly world does not understand or pay

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any attention to the truth of justification by faith alone on the basis of the atonement of the cross of Christ. But it does pay attention to what we say about our life and behaviour, and to how professing Christians actually live.

If the world of the ungodly sees us profaning the Sabbath day, violating the marriage bond, drinking to excess, cheating and stealing, and generally living exactly as they live who are outside the church and outside of Jesus Christ, they will despise and ridicule our Christianity and its Christ. Still more, the world of the ungodly will use our unholy behaviour as an excuse for rejecting the claim and call of the gospel. They will stumble into perdition over our antinomian, lawless conduct. “Look,” they will say, “not only do Christians live just as we do but their Christianity is itself the basis of their unholy lives.”

This is pernicious! And antinomianism is to blame.

On the contrary, God uses our holy conduct of obedience to the law to gain others to Christ. This is the testimony of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Yet one more reason why we “must ... do good works” is so that “by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ” (Q. & A. 86). The *Catechism* here undoubtedly has its eye on I Peter 3:1-2, where the apostle holds before the wives whose husbands are unbelieving the possibility that, although the husbands will not heed their spoken testimony to Christ, they may be “won by the conversation [i.e., conduct] of the wives.” Unbelievers, who may understand nothing of the doctrine of the Christian faith or even close their eyes and shut their ears to the truth, cannot avoid noticing the distinctive, holy life of the believer. God may use this holy life to arouse in the unbeliever the question, “What accounts for such a glorious, beautiful, honourable, honest way of life?” Thus is opened the way for the word of witness to Christ.

By an antinomian theology and the antinomian way of life that such a theology produces, *in those claiming to be His people*, the holy God is dishonoured. This is the most pernicious effect of antinomianism. All Scripture teaches that our holy life and its good works glorify God, and that this is the supreme end or purpose of our holy life. To the question, “why must we still do good works?” the *Heidelberg*

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Catechism answers, first of all, “that He [i.e., God] may be praised by us” (Q. & A. 86).

As God is holy, so ought His children to be holy, and *will be* holy (I Pet. 1:16).

God not only saves from the guilt and punishment of sin. He saves from sin—including sin’s ruling, defiling power and stain. God not only saves *from*. He also saves *unto*. He saves from sin, unto holiness. He saves from shame, unto glory.

Therefore, in order to glorify God, as is the strongest desire of everyone saved by His marvellous grace in Jesus Christ, “as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (I Pet. 1:15).

The way of salvation, the way to heaven, is not the “faire and easie way” of antinomianism, but the demanding and difficult way of obedience to the Ten Commandments of the law of God.

Part 1: Chapter 6

The Victorious Christian

Herman Hanko

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:13).

Introduction

Many years ago, when I was a member of the Young Men's Bible Study Society at church, we decided to record the sermons and bring the recorded sermons to the shut-ins of the congregation, of which there were over fifty. These were the days when only wire recorders were available and they weighed about forty pounds apiece.

These aged saints, who could no longer enjoy the fellowship of the saints at worship services, enjoyed talking to us when we brought the recorders and enjoyed our company when we were able to stay a while. The conversations they loved best were concerning spiritual matters.

Inevitably, we discovered that these saints, without any exception that I remember, spoke of their lives as increasingly sinful as they grew older. This shocked me, for I had looked on these aged people as the epitome of holiness, to which I could aspire only in my own old age. Because their testimony was unanimous, I was deeply troubled to the point that I finally inquired of my father why this was so.

He explained to me that there were many reasons for this: a consciousness of a lifetime of sin, increasing awareness of how dreadful the sin is that we commit in defiance of the holy God and increasing awareness of the magnitude of one's own sin. He pointed me to Psalm

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25 in which the Psalmist, an older man, was still praying for the forgiveness of the sins of his youth (v. 7). The Psalmist knew they were forgiven but he carried the burden of them to the grave.

It was shortly after this that I heard a sermon on a Sunday morning, in which Rev. Herman Hoeksema, preaching on the subject of sanctification, made this statement: “The most important manifestation of sanctification in the life of a saint is his sorrow for sin.” It all fit together.

The sanctified child of God must be made aware of Scripture’s teaching that he is victorious over sin and death, and that this is true even in this life. There are times in the life of the child of God when he is so troubled by his sins that he is tempted to give up the struggle. He commits the same sin over and over again, and seems to make no progress against it. There are times in our lives when sin has so completely overwhelmed us that we fear lest it has overcome us. We imagine that we have been defeated in the continuous battle of faith that we are to fight against the sin within our own lives. Must the struggle against sin end in defeat? Or if not defeat, must we wait until Christ comes before we win the battle?

No, the Christian is victorious—in this life already, as well as in the life to come. He is gloriously victorious, even in the midst of the battle.

Victorious in Christ

Both in this life and in eternity in heaven, the victory over sin for the child of God rests in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He died in our place by taking upon Himself the guilt of all the sins of all the elect people of God. God Himself judged Him as being *the* sinner, not because of His own sins but for the guilt of all the sins of the elect laid to His charge. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21).

Our Lord, by His death on the cross, accomplished for us two blessings. First, He died for our sin and took away the guilt, with the result that we are without sin and righteous before God. Second, Christ

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earned for us everlasting blessedness in heaven. The righteousness that is imputed to us for Christ's sake is our justification. The blessedness of holiness in this life and in that to come is sanctification. It too is in the cross.

The sanctification that our Saviour earned for us is not a mere restoration of Adam's original holiness, which he received as part of the image of God. That holiness was a supreme blessedness, for Adam and his wife Eve reflected in the whole of their being God's very holiness. Adam's soul and body glistened with it. From Adam, the entire creation shone in all its glory, without sin, without guilt, without corruption and death, but alive, vibrant and beautiful.

Yet the glory of the holiness imparted to us is greater by far than the holiness that Adam possessed. It is a heavenly glory that lifts us above the glory of the elect angels. It is a glory earned by our Saviour and freely given to us. It is a holiness that is more like the holiness of God than Adam's holiness could ever be. It is the holiness of a heavenly creation. It is the holiness of covenant fellowship with God in which we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). The holiness that we have through Christ, while it is complete freedom from any moral corruption in the whole of our nature, is greater than Adam's holiness because in a positive way it reveals in greater measure the brilliant light of the holiness of God Himself.

We have this wonderful holiness only in Christ. He not only earned it for us but He also gives it to us by the work of His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Christ takes possession of us and grafts us into Christ by a true and living faith. We are one body with Christ. As Christ is Himself holy in the full manifestation of God's holiness, so we, as His body, are holy with Him and receive His holiness as our own.

Holiness Appropriated by Faith

We appropriate the holiness that we have in Christ by faith as we lay hold on Christ. We are assured of our holiness. This assurance of our holiness is a very real knowledge and it is crucially important in the life of the believer. Without this faith, the child of God can never know that he is victorious in his battle against sin.

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There are those who teach that the “norm” of the Christian life is doubt. We do not know whether we belong to Christ or are lost. We do not know whether our sins are forgiven and whether when we die we shall go to heaven. Our lives are a constant shaking of our heads in doubt and disbelief. The devil has his way with us in creating in us a fear that the great truths of the Scriptures may not be for us.

This doubt is not only miserable but it is also wicked unbelief. Christ commands us to believe in Him. Failure to do so is defiance of His command. If we are held captive to such doubt, we cannot consider ourselves to be victorious Christians. We remain the devil’s prey.

It is true that every Christian goes through moments and times of doubt. The devil does have his way with us when he assaults us by urging us to look at ourselves and to consider how great our sins are. If we listen and are convinced that our sins are too many and too great, Satan has accomplished his purpose.

But when by faith we lay hold on the Scriptures and so lay hold on Christ, we appropriate Scripture’s truth that no one can pluck us out of Christ’s hand (John 10:28-29). We heed the call of our Lord in Matthew 11:28 to come to Him for rest. As we come to Christ, we hear Him say that all who come to Him will be received for He will not cast them out (John 6:37).

Victorious in This Life

The struggling and weary child of God does not have to wait for heaven to enjoy victory, for he is victorious already in this life. His victory brings joy to his heart and songs of praise to his lips. He walks in the confidence that the battle that he must continue to fight is a battle in which the victory has already been achieved. The battle is over. The enemy of sin is conquered. Our role is somewhat similar to the “mopping up” performed by the infantry after the enemy has surrendered.

Christ has gained that victory for us. His heel was bruised for our iniquities. As God promised, the head of Satan is crushed and his power gone. When Paul comments on this, he speaks of the fact that

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we are “*more than* conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). To be more than a conqueror is not only to have a mighty victory over the enemy but also to see that the captain of our salvation uses even the enemy to advance our cause, to serve our salvation, to enhance our victory and to make it more certain. The captain of our salvation is in the enemies’ camp governing even what the enemy does. His orders are designed to further our cause. And the foolish enemy is not even aware of it or, if he is, he pays no attention to it.

The Evidence of Our Victory

What are the many evidences of victory in this life?

One of the great themes of the book of Romans, especially in chapter 6, is that we are dead to sin. The idea of being dead to something is a common expression in Scripture. For example, when the wayward son, in deep remorse, returned to his father’s house, his father explained to his jealous son the reason why he was so happy: “this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:32).

When the son was dead to his father, he was, as far as his father was concerned, as good as dead. The former relationships were broken; the love shared was changed to enmity; the fellowship between father and son was destroyed. The father thought of his son as, in fact, being dead.

To be dead to sin means, therefore, that the former relationship that existed between the Christian and sin is broken. By the power of sanctification already in this life, our relation to sin exists no longer. Sin once held us in slavery; we are now free. Sin once controlled everything we did; it can do so no longer. Sin infected the whole of our being; now we have the life of the exalted Lord within us. Paul explains it this way: “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

The passage in Romans 6 does not say that sin is dead in us. If it said that, we would despair, for every child of God knows that sin is very much alive in him. It is a reality against which he fights every day. But the truth is that he is dead to sin. That is different.

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Perhaps an analogy will help us understand. A tree may be killed by cutting it down. If it is left lying there, the branches continue for a time to be green and the tree's stump may even produce some shoots. The tree, although dead, continues to show some signs of life. So the Christian shows signs of the presence of sin that remains in him, although he is in reality dead to sin.

Abraham Kuyper used another illustration. He spoke of the presence of sin in the life of a sanctified Christian as analogous to a passenger ship heading towards a destination. Because of the dangers of icebergs ahead, the captain is forced to put the ship into reverse. Even though the engines are in reverse, the ship continues forward for a time because of its inertia. So the sanctified Christian is "put into reverse" from his direction toward hell but continues in sin for a while because of the "inertia" of sin in his nature.

This state of the Christian in this life is actually the Christian's own experience. Paul confesses that the evil he did he did not want to do and the good he wanted to do he could not do (Rom. 7:14-25). It seems as if, from a moral point of view, the will takes precedence in our lives. That is, the influence of a sanctified heart sweeps over the will first of all, so that we will the good and reject with our wills the evil even when we do the evil. The victory lies in our hatred of sin, even though we commit it. We know that sin has no more dominion over us because, although sin is still present in us, we hate it and do not want to do it but will to do the good. That is victory indeed, for our wills also were depraved and desired only sin.

There are other ways in which God works sanctification in us in such a way that we are victorious over sin.

To confess our sins before God brings forgiveness. That too is victory. When, at Calvary, we confess our sins and seek forgiveness through the blood of Christ, these sins are forgiven, and we know that we are righteous and sinless before the eyes of our Father in heaven. Sin cannot rob us of His love and care. Sin confessed cannot keep us from heaven. Sin washed away in the blood of Christ gives us victory over Satan and his hosts, the world and our own remaining sin.

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Thus the victory of the child of God is found in a good conscience. Our conscience condemns us because it shows us our sins. But Scripture speaks of consciences washed in the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14). With freedom from an accusing conscience, we walk in the joy and hope of our salvation. Free from sin in God's eyes, we are victorious.

The victory of the Christian is evident too in the fact that, although he falls in his path, he never gives up. He may yield to that temptation again and again, and commit the same sin repeatedly. The temptation to give up and fight no longer is strong. But he never does. Fallen, he rises again. Weary in the battle, he presses forward. Wounded and bleeding, he resolves to pursue his calling with renewed strength. He cannot be defeated, no matter how fierce the battle. He is more than a conqueror!

In Psalm 19, David makes his own prayer for forgiveness but, in doing so, he makes a distinction between secret sins and presumptuous sins. He has a prayer for both. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." But he also prays, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Ps. 19:12-13).

David confesses that, because of his depraved nature, he is guilty of countless sins of which he is not even aware. Most frequently, these sins are sins of omission. We are called, from the moment we wake in the morning until we close our eyes in sleep, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We not only fail utterly to do this but we are not even aware of our failure.

Further, we are capable of secret sins of commission also. We do not even know the evil motives that lurk in our hearts and that prompt us to do what we do. Apart from God's gracious work of sanctification, our depraved natures are, as Jonathan Edwards expressed it, "a nest of vipers."

Jeremiah recognized this fact as well. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Concerning all these sins, the Psalmist recognizes the impossibility of confessing them each and all. He prays for cleansing from them.

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But there are also presumptuous sins. They are sins that we commit consciously and deliberately. We know that they are sins against God. We know that God forbids them. We know that they can and do lead to hell. We do them anyway. Such is the depravity of our natures that the evil we hate, we do.

Concerning these sins, so many and so great, we ask our God to keep them from having dominion over us. That is, we pray that they do not rule over us, as drink rules a drunkard, as lies rule a liar or as adultery rules an adulterer. Sin is so powerful that we can become slaves to it. An addict cannot quit using drugs; a thief can and often does become a kleptomaniac; a homosexual is in bondage to his sinful lifestyle.

Two prayers are necessary. The one is that the Lord will keep us from these presumptuous sins. The second is that, if we should commit them, the Lord does not allow them to have dominion over us.

The Lord answers that prayer also. By the power of the Spirit of Christ who sanctifies us, we can and do escape them, and we can and do confess them and repent of them. That is victory.

The Lord works all these graces of sanctification in us and through us in such a way that we fight against these sins, repent of them, confess our guilt for committing them, and find victory over them as we lie prostrate and weeping at the foot of the cross of Calvary.

In Ephesians 6:11-18, Paul admonishes us to fight the good fight of faith, for which we need the whole armour of God. As Paul describes this armour piece by piece, it becomes clear that the Word of God is the strength of every piece and that the armour is both defensive to protect us from the enemy, and also offensive that we may strike back at the enemy and gain the victory over him.

And so we are victorious Christians in the battle. When the battle is over, the Christian warrior may be bleeding profusely, may have his helmet knocked askew, may be clutching a broken sword and may have his shield pierced by the fiery darts of the evil one. The field before him is strewn with the corpses of his enemies. He stands; weary

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to the marrow of his bones; exhausted by the ferocity of the fight; but “having done all,” he stands (Eph. 6:13).

Victorious in Death

Victorious in life, the Christian is victorious in death.

If the battle is fought for many years, seventy or eighty or ninety, there is not much left of him when he dies. He cannot hear or see or walk or eat or talk or do much of anything anymore in the world. Death comes and drags his ruined body to the grave.

Once, because of sin, the grave was the door through which we pass into hell. But sanctification means that Christ, our divine sanctifier, has broken through the wall of the grave in which He was buried, to make a new door, a door that opens in heaven. Through that door the Christian passes, first in his soul, while his wrecked body is committed to the ground.

How mysterious death is for the believer! Rome is wrong when it wants to introduce a third door in the grave, one that leads to purgatory, so that cleansing may be completed in fires like those of hell. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Cor. 5:1). At the moment of death, when our earthly house dissolves, we have, at that very moment, our eternal building of God.

That moment of death is also a moment of spiritual transformation. Every vestige of sin in our souls is obliterated by death. In mind and will, our souls are made perfect and sin forever banished. What a wonder! Then the work of sanctification has embraced our soul.

But what about our bodies? They are also sanctified. They may lie in the grave for many years or decades or even millennia. They may change into dust from which grass grows. It makes no difference. God takes care of them until Christ His Son returns. Then the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised. Then our bodies are also sanctified. Then we are made like the glorious body of our Saviour

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who has redeemed us (Phil. 3:21). Then sanctification shall be complete and the miracle of God's grace shall shine in us and through us into all eternity (Matt. 13:43). We shall be with God, holy as He is, to live with Him forever!

I believe in the resurrection of the body. And standing here on the battlefield of this earthly creation or at the side of the grave of a loved one, we can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:55, 57).

We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us in life and in death!

Part 2: Chapter 7

Only the Holy Inherit the Kingdom

David J. Engelsma

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (I Cor. 6:9-11).

Introduction

The Word of God in I Corinthians 6:9-11 is the truth of God's sanctifying us, and our holy life as the benefit of His sanctifying us. This is evident from the context. The preceding context rebukes the Corinthians for their unholiness of taking each other to court for gain and, in some cases, in order to defraud a brother.

The following context, verses 12-20, condemns the unholiness of fornication. In Corinth, it was common practice for men, including married men, to visit whores.

That the truth of the text is God's sanctifying us is evident from the text itself. It speaks of sanctification: "ye are sanctified." It warns against particular, gross sins, which are listed. In this way, by implication, the passage exhorts us to the opposite holiness of life: chastity with regard to sex; worship of the one, true God only; moderation in drinking; and the like.

We come to the text, therefore, expecting to be instructed in the truth of sanctification and to be admonished concerning a holy life.

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This instruction and admonition are important. The importance of hearing this instruction and heeding this admonition is that a holy life is a necessity. It is a necessity for final salvation, according to the text itself: The unholy person will not inherit the kingdom of God.

There is the danger that this necessity is explained wrongly, even heretically. This would be the explanation that by our holiness we ourselves earn final salvation. Or, it would be the explanation that our holiness is a condition that we must perform in order to obtain final salvation. In addition, there is the false doctrine that those who are saved in this life can and must be perfectly holy, that is, without sin.

But we may not question or deny the necessity of holiness. To deny the necessity of holiness is to be guilty of not knowing what is, plainly, a basic truth of the Christian faith. “Know ye not?” (the necessity of holiness), the passage begins. To deny the necessity of holiness is to be deceived: “Be not deceived,” that is, supposing that holiness is unnecessary.

Only the holy inherit the kingdom!

Meaning

In harmony with the passage’s being the Word of God about holiness, the “unrighteous” of verse 9 are those men and women who live unholy lives. Stubbornly, impenitently, they go on practising one or another of the sins mentioned in the text or some other sin. This unholy life is “unrighteous” because it transgresses the righteousness of God as expressed in the Ten Commandments of His law. An unholy life is one of disobedience to the law. In contrast, a holy life is a life of obedience to the law. It is a righteous life.

By implication, therefore, the passage condemns antinomianism or antinomism. Not only does the passage teach that the gospel of grace demands, indeed includes, sanctification but also, by calling an unholy life “unrighteous,” that is, not in conformity with the law of God, the passage affirms that the holy, Christian life of the New Testament child of God is, and must be, a life of obedience to the Ten Commandments of the law of God—a *righteous* life.

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The apostle becomes specific. He mentions certain forms of unrighteousness that make a life unholy. These were defiling sins that were a real threat to the members of the church at Corinth and that are still a threat to church members today. We preachers must learn from this that we, too, must be specific in warning our congregations. It is not enough that we warn against sin in general. We must condemn the particular sins that are especially a threat to the church in the twenty-first century and that some of our members may be committing.

Certain of the sins specified by the apostle in the text require explanation. Fornication is mentioned first. The apostle refers to fornication even before he mentions idolatry. This is not because fornication is the worst sin. But it is because fornication was such a powerful temptation and danger to the church at Corinth.

Fornication is sexual sin. Since adultery is also listed, fornication here is the sexual sin of the unmarried, as well as the sexual sin of the married in some other form than sex with another's wife or husband, which is adultery. In Corinth, fornication by the married men consisted of visits to the whores in the red-light district of the city (which may well have been most of the city). For married and unmarried alike in all times and in all places, fornication is the sordid pleasuring of oneself with pornography. For the single members of the church, fornication is sex before, and outside, marriage.

The prevalence, popularity and promotion of sexual sin in the British Isles, Europe, North America and all around the world today make it fitting for us, too, that fornication be mentioned first in a list of sins that defile a man or a woman.

Idolatry, which is mentioned next in the text, is the worship of anyone or anything other than the one, Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ in Holy Scripture. It is the Jews' worship of a god who is not the Father of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. It is the Muslim's worship of the false god, Allah. It is Rome's worship of Mary, of the saints and of a wafer in their corruption of the Lord's Supper. It is liberal Protestantism's trust in man himself for the earthly salvation it envisions. It is the Arminian's false worship of a god dependent on the sinner for

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salvation, including trust in the will and works of the sinner himself for salvation.

Adultery, according to Luke 16:18 and other passages of Scripture, is not only the married man's sneaking into the bed of his neighbour's wife but also all remarriage after divorce, while the original mate still lives.

The "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind" are homosexuals—sodomites and, by implication, lesbians. The effeminate is, literally, the "soft" man, the man who plays the role of the female in a homosexual relation. The abuser is the male who has sex with another male.

Here is the Bible's clear, explicit judgment on homosexuality. Those who practice it are "unrighteous." Their life is unholy. It is filthy and abominable before God. The gospel of Jesus Christ exposes and condemns current developments regarding sexual behaviour in the West today. Regardless of the approval of homosexuality by a majority of society, regardless of the favourable judgment by the Supreme Court of the United States and regardless of the defence of this perversity by the false church, no impenitent, practising homosexual shall inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived!

"Thieves" needs no further explanation.

The "covetous" are those who are earthly-minded. The controlling purpose of their life is to get things, to have things. Because money gets things, the desire of the covetous person—his or her one, all-consuming desire—is for more money.

The drunkard is the man or woman who regularly, as a way of life, drinks too much liquor. He or she is under the power of strong drink. Drink troubles his life—his marriage, his family, his driving, his work, his ability to think straight. He drinks too much every weekend. He frequents parties at which the liquor flows freely. But he also drinks secretly, when he is alone, from bottles hidden in cupboards, sheds and other places.

"Revilers" calls for explanation. The reviler is the man or woman who abuses and thus destroys others by his or her unloving, harsh,

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hateful, cruel speech. It is what Jesus' enemies did to Him, especially at the end of His life, according to I Peter 2:23: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." Reviling is what we did on the playground of a good, Christian school, to my sorrow still today some 60 years later, when we called a girl "ugly" and other names. Children and young people who read this chapter, reviling or name-calling is unrighteousness with God. Those who are guilty, that is, those who practise it impenitently, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Reviling is what a husband does to his wife, when he abuses her verbally, criticizes her harshly and calls her unkind names, thus making her feel worthless.

"Extortioners" seize the property and possessions of others by force. This may take the form of robbery, at the point of a gun. But there are forms of extortion that are legal in society. Employees seize the wealth of the businessman by the force of the strike. Employers extort from their employees by making themselves rich by the labour of the employees, while failing to pay their workers what they deserve and what they need. There is also the unjust lawsuit at court that forcibly takes away for oneself the money or property of the neighbour. Exactly this last was the sin of extortion being committed by some of the members of the Corinthian church (v. 8).

We recognize that the list of sins in the passage is not, and is not intended to be, exhaustive. There are many other forms of unrighteousness.

With regard to the forms of unrighteousness listed in the passage and with regard to all other forms, this is not who *we* are. *We* are not described in the passage. *We* are not among the unrighteous. By "we," I mean those addressed in the passage as "you." These are people who are members of a true church and members who are true believers in Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are genuine, living members of the church.

That these persons are not such unrighteous men and women as are described by the text—fornicators, idolaters and the rest—is the plain teaching of the text itself: "Such *were* some of you" (v. 11), that

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is, in the past, but no longer. Some members of the church were once guilty of one or more of the sins that are listed. This magnifies the grace of salvation: God saves wretched, vile sinners—fornicators, idolaters, homosexuals and the others. This also comforts the penitent sinner, that there is hope of salvation for him, even though he may have been living the corrupt life of such gross sins. Indeed, all of us were once defiled by sin and under sin's dominion, even though we may not have practised some of the gross evils mentioned in the text, for example, drunkenness or sodomy.

But this is what we *were*, in time past. Such we are no longer. It is not that we are free of all such thoughts and desires. It is not that we cannot, by our own folly and weakness, fall into one of these sins, whether drunkenness or fornication. It is not even that we no longer have an unholy, sinful nature, against which we must strive.

But we are no longer such sinners in that we do not practise these or other evils; in that our life is not controlled by any or all of these sins; in that our behaviour is not such as is described by the list of sins in the passage. Yes, the truth is that, even within, such thoughts and desires do not dominate us. We hate the thoughts and desires of these evils. We resist them. We repent even of the thoughts and desires. We strive to think good thoughts and to will good desires.

We *were* depraved. Now we *are* holy. The explanation of the change from what we formerly were to what we are now, according to the text, is that we have been “washed.” We have been washed of all the filth mentioned in the text and indeed of all the defiling pollution of sin. This washing has consecrated us to God, has made us holy. Loving God, we now hate the sin He hates. Living in communion with God, we separate ourselves from all that He abominates and loathes.

Because the holy life is governed by the law, our life now is righteous. It conforms to all the commandments of the law. We are no longer the unrighteous who shall not inherit the kingdom but the righteous who shall inherit the kingdom. We are holy and righteous. We must know ourselves to be such. Confessing this is not our boasting of ourselves but God's own estimation of us. He declares to us and about us: “Such *were* ... you: but ye *are* washed.”

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Necessity

The necessity of our holiness is twice stated by the apostle. The necessity is stated negatively: The unholy “shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Inheriting the kingdom of God, which is future, is our enjoyment of the life, the benefits and the glory of the perfected kingdom of God in all the new creation at Jesus’ coming. Included is the renewal of our soul at death and the resurrection of our body at Jesus’ coming, so that we can inherit and enjoy the kingdom in soul and body.

Inheriting the kingdom is perfect, final, everlasting salvation.

Such is the necessity of holiness of life that no unholy person will receive this final salvation in the day of Christ. Scripture warns, “without [holiness] ... no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Positively, such is the necessity of holiness that only the holy man or woman shall be saved in the day of Christ. All those who were, and remained, unholy will be condemned, damned and lost outside the kingdom, in the outer darkness of hell. All such will be excluded from the kingdom of God.

Do you not know this fundamental truth?

Let no one deceive you about this!

Realization

Our first question in response to this fundamental truth is not, “*Am I holy?*” (for we know assuredly that we are holy) but, “How did such unholy persons as we were by nature *become* holy?” The answer is, “By the cleansing, sanctifying work of God.”

Naturally, by descent from Adam, we were unholy. We were spiritually depraved and filthy, even with the gross sins mentioned in the text: “*Such* were ... you.” Our holiness, therefore, is neither our natural condition nor our own achievement. The necessity of holiness is not that of a condition—a work that we must perform, on which our final salvation depends.

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That our holiness is not a work of ours that earns or obtains for ourselves the kingdom is indicated also by the word that describes our possession and enjoyment of the kingdom in the day of Christ, the word “inherit.” We do not earn the kingdom. We do not receive it on account of anything we have done. But we receive it as an inheritance that God has graciously willed for, and to, us and that graciously He gives to us. The kingdom and our place in it will be a gift.

The sole explanation of our holiness, according to the text, is that God has cleansed us: “ye are washed” (v. 11). This washing was a spiritual washing away of the filth of sin in us, as a bath or shower washes physical dirt from our body. Of this washing, our baptism is a symbol, and ought to be the sign and seal to us every day of our life.

That spiritual washing of us was two-fold. It had two distinct, wonderful, spiritual benefits for us: “ye are sanctified ... ye are justified” (v. 11).

God’s washing of us justified us. It washed away the guilt of our sins. We experience this aspect of the divine washing as forgiveness, so that we have peace with God. This washing gives us the *right* to the kingdom in our own consciousness.

But this is not all there is to the washing away of sin. There is also another effect and benefit. And this is the main concern of the apostle in the text. God’s washing sanctified us. It washed away the filth, the pollution, the power of sin. We experience this aspect of the washing as the freedom to live with God and to serve Him, and as the ruling of our life, not by the devil, but by Jesus Christ.

Always, justification is accompanied by sanctification. Never is there justification without sanctification. One who is not sanctified has not been justified, regardless of his boast. If I am not sanctified, I have not been washed, and this washing is the accomplishing of my salvation.

Sanctification is mentioned first in the text, before justification. This is striking because this is not the order of salvation in Reformed theology. The order of salvation in Reformed theology is justification first, followed by sanctification. For this order in Reformed theology,

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there are good reasons. As the legal innocence of the elect believer, justification gives him the right to be delivered from the dominating, destructive power and shameful corruption of sin, which deliverance is sanctification. Also justification precedes sanctification in the believer's experience. He is justified. Then, in gratitude, he devotes himself to God in holiness of life.

But there are also good reasons why in I Corinthians 6:9-11 the apostle has sanctification precede justification. First, sanctification is the great concern of the apostle in the passage, not justification. Second, in the actual working of salvation in the child of God, sanctification precedes justification. Sanctification begins with regeneration or the uniting of the depraved sinner to Jesus Christ. Only the reborn, living child of God sorrows over sin, flees to Christ crucified for forgiveness and hears the blessed verdict, "You are righteous with the righteousness of Christ." Third, the apostle mentions sanctification first because our holiness is the great goal or purpose of God with all our salvation—election, redemption and justification—that we be holy, to the praise of the glory of the holy God (cf. Eph. 1:3-4).

How God washed us, with the two-fold benefit, the text expresses in the words, "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." God washed us in union with the Lord Jesus, so that His precious blood both takes away our guilt and cleanses our filth. Because this union with Jesus Christ is realized by the Holy Spirit, the washing is by the Spirit.

The necessity of our holiness is nothing less than the necessity of God's salvation of us and of the way He is pleased to save us. God saves by sanctifying. The necessary way of salvation in this life is holiness. The necessary way of entering into the final salvation of heaven at death and, in the day of Christ, into the new world is holiness. Only the forgiven have the right to the kingdom. Only the cleansed are fit to receive and enjoy the kingdom, which is a kingdom, not of filth but of holiness. Indeed, only the holy *desire* the kingdom. Nothing is more abhorrent to the unholy person than the prospect of a holy life in the realm of perfect holiness.

Ultimately, the necessity of our holiness is that God is holy.

Warning

Concerning the necessity of holiness, the text is a warning. This is the sense of the opening, virtually rhetorical question, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” The question suggests the possibility that we Christians may be ignorant of a fundamental truth of the Christian gospel or that we behave as though we were ignorant of this fundamental truth. The apostle expresses the warning in the admonition, “Be not deceived”!

It is a real danger that church members are ignorant of the necessity of holiness for final salvation. Others attempt to deceive us. We deceive ourselves.

Churches today leave the impression, and even teach, that sinners living impenitently in one or another of the very, gross sins listed in the text may expect, nevertheless, to inherit the kingdom of God. They appeal to the love of God or the mercy of God or a salvation in which Jesus is only Saviour and not also Lord or a justification that is not accompanied by sanctification or even a salvation that allows the saved to sin freely. This is ignorance. This is deception.

We can deceive ourselves. We deceive ourselves about *ourselves*, going on impenitently in some sin, assuring ourselves in one way or another that this unholiness is compatible with gracious salvation.

We deceive our family or our friends about their living impenitently in sin, by tolerating or excusing their sin in the name of the Lord Jesus. God is a God of love, we assure them, as though He were not the God of holiness. Conveniently ignoring that the way of forgiveness is repentance, we comfort our family member or friend going on in a life of disobedience to the law with the sweet message that God will pardon. Tolerating the wickedness of our family or friends, we present our toleration as the grace of the gospel, whereas those who condemn them and their wicked way of life are nothing but “legalists and Pharisees.”

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?”

“Be not deceived”!

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The warning has practical benefit. It is a means of God's sanctifying us.

The warning motivates us to fight our sinful, unholy nature and to strive after holiness.

The warning motivates one who is presently living impenitently in one of the sins mentioned in the text or any other sin to repent, be forgiven and begin again to live a holy life.

And the warning moves us to be thankful to God in Christ for the saving work of sanctification in our life.

For we do desire to inherit the kingdom. Amen.

Part 2: Chapter 8

Our Calling to Work Out Our Own Salvation

Herman Hanko

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

The Connection Between the Text and the Context

Other than the beautiful description of the humiliation and exaltation of our Saviour in Isaiah 53, I can think of no other passage in Scripture that portrays more forcibly our Lord's humiliation and exaltation than Philippians 2:5-11.

It describes our Lord, who is Himself God, in His descent into the low depths of hell in obedience to His Father: He was obedient even to the death of the cross.

Wherefore, God hath highly exalted Him. From the lowest depths of hell to the highest glory at God's right hand, our Saviour accomplished His Father's purpose. From that follows this striking description of our calling: "Wherefore ..."

Paul is writing to the saints in Philippi and, therefore, to the church of Christ. While Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, the Holy Spirit is writing to the church of all ages. Christ humbled Himself for us! Do we know and understand what He did for us? The fruit of such a great work as our Saviour performed for us is our full and complete salvation, which means every blessing we receive in this life and in

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the life to come. Does that leave us passive or with nothing to do? No, far from it. It lays upon us the solemn obligation to work out the salvation that we have received with fear and trembling. That is our calling as the saved people of God.

One's Own Salvation

The Scriptures most frequently speak of salvation with all of its blessings as a *common* salvation. Jude, the half-brother of the Lord, intended to write to the saints concerning that "common salvation" (Jude 3) but he changed his mind under divine inspiration. He wrote instead an urgent warning to the saints to be on their guard against heretics because there had come into the church antinomians who denied the Lord by whose work the church was saved. Such men were a grave threat to the spiritual well being of the saints.

But in this text the apostle speaks of one's *own* salvation in distinction from a common salvation. The meaning of this distinction is not that there are two salvations, one that all the people of God have in common and another that is unique to each individual saint. The meaning is rather that God gives the full riches of salvation to every saint, but that salvation is in keeping with the nature and calling of each saint.

Let us consider it in this way. When God eternally elected His church, He did not elect a mob, a crowd or an arbitrary bunch of people; nor does God save in an arbitrary and willy-nilly fashion, at random, as it were; nor, as the Arminian suggests, are those saved who happen to accept Christ as their personal Saviour.

Election includes Christ and, indeed, He is the first Elect in God's eternal decree; and in Christ are the elect who, in union with Christ their head, compose one body with individual members. Each saint is a member of the one body of Christ and, therefore, occupies his own place in the body. When each occupies his own place, then the body is complete.

This is such an important truth that the Bible uses different figures to underscore it. In Ephesians 2:20-22 and I Peter 2:4-9, Scripture uses

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the figure of a temple. The emphasis of this figure falls on the great truth that Christ and His church are together the “temple,” in which God Himself dwells in covenant fellowship with His people as He did in the Old Testament temple. The temple is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus as the cornerstone and with every saint in his own place in that beautiful temple.

Add to this the fact that in this life here on earth God prepares every saint for his own personal and unique place in the temple. When in the history of this earth a saint is born, the circumstances of his birth, the parents to whom he is born and the country or race to which he belongs are important preparations for that saint’s unique place in the temple. All his experiences in life, without exception, are part of the moulding, the shaping, the cutting and the chipping that are necessary to prepare a saint for his own place. His calling and responsibilities, and his place in his family, in society and in his nation, are all part of the preparation for his place in the temple.

He is, apart from God’s grace, a useless, dirty and ugly rock hewn out of the ground. He must be shaped and fitted for a place in the heavenly temple of God. Far more important, he must be transformed from a shovelful of dirt or a useless stone into a glowing and translucent block of marble. This transformation can only take place through regeneration, calling, faith, justification and sanctification, with all the blessings of that common salvation which a saint needs in order to prepare him in his own unique life with all its experiences for his own unique place in glory. Each saint has his own salvation but he has that salvation as part of the salvation that all the saints have in common.

Working Out One’s Own Salvation

The admonition to “work out” that salvation is crucially important. Erroneous and dangerous ideas have appeared in the church concerning this admonition and other such admonitions in Scripture. Some have claimed that this admonition is necessary because it is a condition of our salvation. The idea is that we must keep this admonition *if* we are to be saved. This is characteristic teaching of all Arminianism, for Arminians rest their salvation on what they do,

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not on what God does. They may commit this sin in devious and different ways, and piously insist that, after all, salvation is of God but such a claim becomes mere hypocrisy. Paul himself says, “You are saved! Work out the salvation that you already possess!”

Others, going to the opposite extreme, argue that, because salvation is by grace alone, it is completely God’s work, so that we need do nothing at all. We are as stocks or blocks in whom God does everything. We need keep no admonition. Indeed, so they argue, we cannot keep any admonition and God does not command us to keep His admonitions. Worse yet, they argue that to impose these admonitions threatens the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. There are those who even go so far as to encourage us to continue in sin so that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). Such men were present in Paul’s day and they are always present in the church.

Admonitions in Scripture are serious. We must obey them. Not to obey them is to deny that we are saved. We must do good works. This admonition is urgent, pressing upon us and necessary for us to enjoy the blessedness of salvation in Christ.

What does the admonition mean?

In general, it means that we must live our entire life in every circumstance of life as those saved by grace. We must live as those who serve God, love Him, glorify Him and express our profound gratitude to Him for saving us, who are worthless sinners apart from His redeeming grace. We are children of God; we must live as such. We are made the light of the world; we must shine as lights. We are saved as undeserving sinners; we must give glory to Him who has saved us.

More specifically, we are called in this urgent admonition to live in every aspect of our lives in obedience to God. Our own salvation is uniquely ours. We are often inclined to try to work out other people’s salvation. We criticize how they bring up their children, how they spend their money, how they fill their leisure hours, how they conduct themselves in church and how they work out their calling as office-bearers. This is wrong. We have an urgent calling to work out *our* salvation, not some one else’s salvation.

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A child or young person of God's covenant must live in such a way to prepare for his place in the church. A redeemed father must rule his family in the name of Christ, teaching each member his responsibilities and calling in life. A godly mother who is loved by Christ must care for her family, considering it to be an honour without shame to change nappies or diapers, bandage hurt knees, comfort crying babies and do the work given her to make her home a covenant home. An elder must rule in his own congregation; a deacon must care for the poor; a minister must preach the gospel; a man or woman in the pew must seek the welfare of the church and, in love towards the saints, bear the burdens of others, in keeping with the salvation given to him or her; an invalid must work out his salvation by testifying of the grace of God that sustains him in his trials. An aged saint must not say, "I have no purpose any more in this life," but he must work out his own salvation as one who nears the end of his pilgrimage with the purpose that God gives him in the church.

All this implies that each saint in his own circumstances and calling must bring forth good works.

With Fear and Trembling

The manner in which each must work out his salvation is described in the two words "fear" and "trembling."

The apostle Paul undoubtedly has in mind our sinful and self-seeking inclination to brag about our accomplishments, think highly of our good deeds and boast of what we have done. We are proud, apart from God's grace, and we seek ourselves in every way possible. When we seek to accumulate praise to ourselves, we are no longer working out our salvation, but we are bent on promoting the devilish notion that the salvation we are called to work out is the result of our contribution to it and of our noble role in acquiring it. We imagine that our inherent goodness is sufficient for us to make ourselves worthy of receiving His blessings.

The terms "fear" and "trembling" are nearly synonymous. "Fear" here is not "terror." There are times in Scripture when "fear" does mean "terror." This is the case in I John 4:18: "There is no fear in love;

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but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” Therefore, we must not work out our salvation with terror in our souls because we are afraid that the God who calls us to this task is a tyrant and a brutal master who will do dire things to us if we slip up in our calling.

Yet one could wish that in the hearts of profane people there were a little terror, for that would be a worthwhile thing. Religious leaders speak to God and of God as if He were a neighbour with whom they chat across the backyard fence. There is no fear in such men: no respect, no honour, no realization of who God is; no awe at the thought of His majesty and holiness; no consciousness of the wonder of salvation.

Perhaps the English word that comes closest to the biblical meaning of fear is “awe.”

I can think of no time that I came closer to learning what awe really was than when as a child I saw for the first time a beautiful display of the northern lights. It was a summer day and we were playing with friends outside after dark while our parents were inside entertaining visitors. The sky was suddenly lit up from horizon to horizon with a brilliant display of waving colours, constantly changing but always moving toward a meeting in the apex of the heaven. I was unaware of such a phenomenon and was startled at its newness. We were stunned and afraid, and ran into the house to call my father. He explained to us, after seeing it, that God was causing these waves of colour to glow in the heavens and that we must stand in awe of such a great work of God. We were afraid but we were also filled with awe at such a great and majestic work of God. Our one thought was: How great God is when He can fill the heavens with such brilliant colours!

We are to work out our own salvation with fear because we marvel at the astounding work of God in giving us poor sinners such a wonderful salvation. He alone is sovereign and determines to save us, not because of what we have done or because of who we are but simply for His own name’s sake. Not only do we have deliverance from sin and death, but also we have the prospect of endless glory in covenant fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. The price that had to be

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paid to achieve such salvation was the dreadful humiliation and suffering of God's own beloved Son. We are filled with awe both because of the salvation granted us and because the only reason for our salvation is God's eternal and unchangeable love. Why me? I cannot tell! It is of the Lord alone through the death of His Son!

Trembling arises out of the consciousness that now, being saved by the power of Christ's humiliation and exaltation, we stand before the calling to work out that salvation. Christ is our Lord. We serve Him and represent His cause in the world. We are called to reveal in our whole life that our king is not power, not sinful pleasure, not sports, but Christ. We are called to shout this loudly so that all who worship the idols of modern civilization may know that we serve the Lord Christ, exalted at God's right hand before whom some day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He alone is Lord.

It is a noble calling, than which there is none greater. It is a blessed calling that defies all earthly pleasures. It is a privilege to be called to such a calling. We, who are weak and sinful, tremble at the thought.

God's Working in Us and Through Us

There is a little word used in the text which must not be overlooked. It is the word "for," "For it is God that worketh in you ..."

It is well to pause for a moment to grasp the sense of that little word. The text does not read, "*And* God will work in you." Surely, if the apostle had wanted to say that we work with God, give Him a hand, so to speak, or willingly cooperate with what He is doing, he could easily have said that. But he did not.

The apostle does not say, "*If* only you work out your salvation, God will work in you." Why do men cling desperately to Arminian error when Scripture is so quick and eager to condemn it?

The word "for" means "because." We are to work out our salvation *because* God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Our fear and trembling might turn to terror if we were left to ourselves to do this great work to which we are called. Especially, if we

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know (as we should) our own weakness and inability to do what is right, the urgency of the calling would paralyze us at the thought of such a momentous task and such an impossible obligation.

Paul's words in this latter part of the text are intended to give us courage to do what God requires of us. After all, the text means exactly this: You *can* do what you are called to do because God does it all. He makes you willing to want to do it, so that you consider it a joy, a blessing and a most pleasant task. But even then He does not simply make us willing and then say to us, "I have made you willing. You are now on your own to do it." The text goes beyond that. God also works in us in such a way that He Himself does what we are called to do. That is the meaning of "worketh in you both to will and to do." That is the whole of the good work. God does it all, although in us and through us.

The question arises: How can a single good work be both our work and God's work at the same time? How can what God does in us be so much our work that we are even told that we will be rewarded for our works, yet it remains God's work? This fact, although completely true, is very mysterious and wonderful.

Even the fathers at Dordrecht were amazed at it when they wrote and adopted *Canons* III/IV:12-14. These fathers call this work "powerful ... most delightful, astonishing, mysterious and ineffable" (III/IV:12). When they speak of faith as indispensably important to work out our salvation, they say,

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also (*Canons* III/IV:14).

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There is an earthly activity that God has created in His world that resembles this work in some respects. I refer to the horticultural work of grafting. One who grows fruit knows that it is possible to take a branch from a tree that grows Golden Delicious apples, for example, and graft it into a tree that grows Gala apples. The branch that is grafted into another tree truly becomes a part of another tree. If it is left by itself, it will die. It receives all its life from its new tree (John 15). Grafted into the Gala tree, it will bear fruit. However, it will not bear Gala apples but Golden Delicious apples. It will continue to bear its own kind of fruit, even though all its power to bear fruit comes from the tree into which it is grafted.

So we are, by faith, grafted into Christ and become one with Him. We receive all our life from Him. Apart from Him we are dead, but grafted into Him we are alive with His life, and are able to and do perform good works. Thus we work out our own salvation. But these good works are our works, although they are Christ's work in us and through us. So we do not become careless and profane, saying to ourselves (and others) that we need not struggle to fulfil our calling, for Christ will do it if He wants to do it. We do not say, Christ does all my good works for me; I need do nothing.

The truth of the matter is that this Word of God gives us encouragement and a powerful incentive to do what we are called to do, exactly because Christ, the great agent of the Triune God, works in us both to will and to do of His "good pleasure." That guarantees for us the ability to fulfil our calling.

God's Good Pleasure

This is a crucially important addition to the text. God's "good pleasure" is His own eternal counsel in which He eternally determines to achieve the highest revelation of His glory through the work of Christ and, in Christ, the salvation of the church. God saves us through Christ that we may "shew forth the praises of him" who has saved us (I Pet. 2:9). A church saved in Christ by grace alone is a church that reveals in the highest possible way the grace, mercy, love, power and sovereignty of Almighty God. That church shows forth all

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God's glorious attributes only because we are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" for the purpose of "good works" (Eph. 2:10). These good works are earned for us in the cross of Christ, for they are a part of our salvation. They are worked in us and we do them, for God has "ordained that we should walk in them," according to Ephesians 2:10. Thus salvation is of grace alone and never of works, lest anyone should boast and rob God of His glory (Eph. 2:8-9).

It is a privilege and blessing to be called to work out our own salvation. It is our calling. We must do this, for by God's grace the "must" of good works becomes the "will" and the "can." God comes to us His people with the urgent calling, "Do what I have enabled you to do. Become what I have made you. Give glory to me by revealing your salvation in all of your life. And let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord." Amen.

Part 3: Chapter 9

Zealous for Good Works

Martyn McGeown

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

Do you have a passion or a goal that consumes you?

Is there something to which you devote your energy, your time, your money and your life?

We all have something that drives us, which gets us out of bed in the morning or for which we live. There are some who are driven by a desire for wealth; others are driven by a desire for fame and popularity; others have a lust for power—they will spend and be spent for those things. Others with less grandiose ambitions perhaps, live for their family.

What is the goal or passion of the Christian?

Is it to be healthy? Is our top priority in life our physical well-being? Is it our family, our spouse or our children? Does their welfare come first? Or is it our church? While those things are important, none of them is the correct answer.

We are, we must be and Christ has made us to be, a people zealous *for good works*.

Some two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul, writing to a young missionary pastor on the island of Crete, reminded him what the Christian's passion is: good works.

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In Titus 2:14, we read that God’s people are “zealous of good works.” Zeal is a hot, ardent, burning passion—do you have such a zeal for good works?

Christ has died to make us a people zealous of, and passionate for, those good works.

In the Old Testament, Jehovah is called the “*jealous* God” (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). That phrase could also be translated the “*zealous* God,” that is, the God who is passionate about His own glory and the God who will not tolerate rivals to that glory. In the New Testament, Jehovah in the flesh, Jesus Christ, is zealous. When He in great indignation cast out the money changers from the temple, the explanation is given: “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (John 2:17; cf. Ps. 69:9). Jesus was zealous, jealous, on fire or passionate about the glory of God and the purity of God’s house.

“Zealous of good works”—that is both the goal (or purpose) and the effect (or result) of Christ’s death on the cross. We do not merely occasionally perform a few good works, maybe half-heartedly or reluctantly. Not at all! We have a passionate commitment to good works. We cannot get enough of good works. We are never satisfied with the amount of good works or the quality of good works that we do. We hunger and thirst to perform more good works. We are as passionate about good works as one running for the White House is passionate to win the US presidency or we are as passionate about good works as a competing team is passionate to win the World Cup, the Super Bowl or some other sporting trophy.

Does that describe you, dear reader?

That is—I trust—why you have decided to read this book. We want to hear about holiness, about sanctification, not so we can know about it merely, not so we can merely define the word properly, not so we can argue about it in theological debate, but because we personally want to be holy. We are passionate, zealous, on fire for holiness—our *own* holiness.

Paul’s letter to Titus beautifully illustrates the truth that godly living flows out of sound doctrine. You cannot have godly living without a

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belief of the truth. You *will* get moralistic self-righteousness but not good works. Belief of the truth will and must produce godly living.

Consider the following passages from the epistle to Titus:

... and the acknowledging of the truth which is after [i.e., according to or in harmony with] godliness (1:1).

But speak thou the things which become [i.e., fit with] sound doctrine (2:1).

Put them in mind ... to be ready to every good work (3:1).

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (3:8).

And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful (3:14).

Paul's epistle to Titus powerfully refutes the slander that the Reformed faith discourages good works or that it makes men careless, profane and inactive in good works. What a travesty! No one is more passionate about good works than the Christian saved by grace alone. No one!

The reason many of us feel frightened and even discouraged by a text like this is that we have a false understanding of good works. Good works are works performed in obedience to God's law, works performed out of faith and works performed to the glory of God. This is the Reformed, biblical definition of the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

[Good works are] only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men (A. 91).

But there is more.

There is a modern tendency in the church to disparage "ordinary" works. Good works, say modern Christians, need to be spectacular.

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We need to be out there doing great things for God; we need to be helping the poor on a grand scale; we need to be fighting injustice; we need to be promoting social causes. If these things are the good works of Titus 2:14, then many (if not most) of us are not included in our text.

Perhaps you say, “But I have little time for good works. I am busy at my job; when I get home, I am tired. I am a busy mother, run ragged from looking after my children and keeping the house free of disorder. I am busy at school or university, so that I barely have time outside of my studies to do good works.” But are *they* not good works?

Is faithfully working to provide for your family and to support the church not *a good work*? Is a father’s leading his wife and children—even after a long day on the job—not *a good work*? Is a mother’s care for her children—feeding them, educating them, comforting them, cleaning up after them, disciplining them—not *a good work*? Is study—respecting the teacher, getting the homework assignments done on time, being kind to the other students—not *a good work*? Is living in the church—diligently attending the worship services, preparing and sending your children to catechism, enjoying fellowship with the other saints—not *a good work*? Are being kind to your younger or older siblings, honouring and obeying your parents and being helpful around the house not *good works*?

These are the good works of the context. Sober-minded behaviour for the aged men, holy living for the aged women, faithfulness and love in the younger women, sobriety in the young men, diligence and exemplary behaviour in the pastor, obedience in the slaves (or employees) and, according to Titus 3:13-14, hospitality—these are the ordinary, unglamorous good works required of us.

Are we zealous for these? If we are not faithful in these, we will not be faithful in the showier works! In fact, we will do our good works with the motive of a Pharisee and thus they will not be good at all (Matt. 6:1-18).

Besides that, we are called to be zealously *opposed to evil works*. Christ’s zeal for His Father’s house not only made Him diligent in

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His attendance at worship but also red hot in his zeal against the corruption of His Father's worship.

We are to be zealously opposed to *our own evil works*! One who is zealous for good works is zealous in repentance from sin. He detests his own sins and laments his own sinful nature—*long before he is zealously opposed to the evil works of others!*

But Paul does not expect that we Christians are naturally zealous of good works, nor does he tell us just to get on with it. Neither does he make us guilty if we do not accomplish enough good works nor threaten us if we perform too few good works.

Instead, Paul explains how and why we do good works, and why we are zealous for many good works.

Our zeal for good works is a fruit of the cross. This is what moralistic preaching neglects and denies. Good works are impossible without the grace of God; and good works are the necessary, inevitable, infallible fruit of the grace of God, as that grace comes to us through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Titus 2, the grace of God brings salvation (v. 11), the grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and to live a godly life (v. 12), the grace of God teaches us to look eagerly for Christ's return (v. 13), and the grace of God redeems and purifies us—making us a people zealous of good works (v. 14).

So zealous is Christ for God's glory, so zealous is He for our doing good works and so zealous is He that we should be zealous in doing those good works, that He gave Himself to the cross for that very goal.

Paul explains Christ's death in terms of three things.

First, Christ's death was a self-giving sacrifice ("who gave himself for us").

Second, Christ's death was the payment of a redemption price ("that he might redeem us").

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Third, Christ's death was a sanctifying work ("to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works").

First, we see Christ's motivation—it was love. Love means that Christ has a deep affection for and delight in us, that He determines to do us good and that He seeks to make us His own. We see that love in the way in which verse 14 describes us—"a peculiar people."

A "peculiar people" is not a strange, weird or odd people. The ungodly world views us as peculiar in that sense. The phrase means peculiarly belonging to God as His treasured possession. In Exodus 19:5, Jehovah declares, "ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." In Deuteronomy 7:6, Jehovah declares, "the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself." In the New Testament, both Paul (in our text) and Peter call the church the peculiar people, the peculiar treasure of God in Jesus Christ: "But ye are ... a peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9).

To make us His peculiar people, Christ gave Himself for us.

Second, Christ's act of giving Himself was redemption. To redeem is to liberate a captive prisoner or slave by the payment of a price. In Roman times a slave could redeem himself or another could redeem him, if an appropriate price was paid. The price which Jesus paid to redeem us was Himself—"who gave *Himself*." There is *no* higher price than that!

We needed to be redeemed because we were enslaved. The worst slavery is bondage to sin. Sin controls a man and he cannot—and he will not—say "no" to the demands of sin, even though he knows that sin will ultimately destroy him. From that tyrant of sin, Jesus redeems us.

Notice what Paul says in verse 14: "that he might redeem us from all iniquity."

Some people want to be redeemed so that they can enjoy iniquity without a guilty conscience and without the judgment of God. But Jesus redeems us *from* iniquity, from *all* iniquity.

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Iniquity means in verse 14 “lawlessness,” which is an opposition to God’s moral law.

So far is it true that the gospel makes us antinomian—those who are against God’s law—that the cross of Jesus actually redeems us *from* antinomianism, from *all* antinomianism.

Third, Christ’s purpose in the cross is to sanctify us, to make us holy, or, as Paul expresses it in verse 14, to “purify unto himself a peculiar people.” If redemption from all iniquity is the negative of holiness, to purify unto Himself is the positive of holiness, for holiness is devotion to God in Jesus Christ and that devotion is seen in a zeal, or a hot, burning, ardent desire, for good works.

When we served sin, we were zealous for sin. We greedily followed sin. We took our fill of sin (Eph. 4:19). We devoted body and soul to sin (Rom. 6:19). Christ has liberated us from that old way of life, which is a way that leads to death and a life that brings no satisfaction. Now we have a new Master, a Master who loves us, a Master who desires our good and a Master who gave Himself for us, Christ Jesus the Lord.

This is how we thank Him—we live for Him. This is how we live for Him—we obey Him by keeping His commandments. This is the fruit of such obedience—we do good works; we do many good works; we are zealous for good works.

There is no shortage of good works to do. We can show consideration for one another, we can encourage one another, we can serve one another and we can esteem others *better* than ourselves. We will be excited, passionate and zealous in those works. Men will see and they will glorify our Father who is in heaven, who has given us the power to do these good works.

There is no greater motivation for doing good works—the grace of God, the redemption of Jesus and the coming of Christ in glory!

That is why He died—that we might live *zealously* serving Him!

Part 3: Chapter 10

A Scottish Classic on Sanctification: James Fraser of Alness’s “Explication” of Romans 6:1-8:4

Angus Stewart

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

Introduction

At the biennial British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference, it is customary to have a special lecture. Typically, this speech either relates to the place of the conference or it ties in with its subject. By this reckoning, the 2014 BRF Conference had a *very* special lecture because it concerned both the conference location (Scotland) and its theme: “Be Ye Holy: The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification.” Thus this chapter is entitled “A *Scottish* Classic on *Sanctification*: James Fraser of Alness’s ‘Explication’ of Romans 6:1-8:4.”

At this point, three obvious questions may be forming in your mind. First, who is James Fraser? I never heard tell of him! Second, where is Alness? Third, what is James Fraser of Alness’s “Explication” of Romans 6:1-8:4?

Let us start with the question that is easiest to answer: Where is Alness? Alness is a town in Ross-shire in the north of Scotland. It is 15 miles as the crow flies north of Inverness. It is 175 miles by road north of Gartmore House, the venue of the 2014 BRF Conference.

Moving from the place to the man, James Fraser was a Scottish Presbyterian minister. His dates are 1700 (a nice round number that is

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easy to remember) to 1769. This means that our author was born ten years after the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland (1690) and he died seven years before the American Declaration of Independence (1776). So James Fraser lived between the Battle of the Boyne and the Declaration of Independence. In order to help place him, it may also be helpful to mention two of his well-known contemporaries: Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the American theologian in New England, and John Wesley (1703-1791), the Arminian revivalist in old England.

The connection between the man, James Fraser, and the town of Alness (and particularly one house in it) is very strong. James Fraser was a son of the manse. In American terminology, he was a PK, a preacher's kid. To be more precise, he was a son of the Church of Scotland manse in Alness. In that Church of Scotland manse in Alness, James Fraser spent the first eleven years of his life. In that same house his father, John, died in 1711, whereupon he left that manse. Fifteen years later, our author returned to that very house in which he spent his first eleven years. This time, it was not as a son of the manse but as the minister in the manse.

James Fraser's 1726 ordination appears to us to have been a very strange affair. He was inducted in a corner of the graveyard because the church doors were locked and, for good measure, guarded. The local laird disapproved of this evangelical and confessional Presbyterian man, so he set his retainers and tenants to bar the young ordinand's way into the building. The congregation had to make do with the church graveyard for James Fraser's ordination. I assume—the records do not tell us—that the weather was dry.

In that Church of Scotland manse, James Fraser spent the remaining 43 years of his life, for the whole of his ministry was spent in his one charge in Alness. Thus, in two periods of residency, 54 of James Fraser's 69 years were spent in the same house.

It was in that Alness Presbyterian manse, a few months before he died, that Rev. Fraser completed the manuscript of his famous work, *A Treatise on Sanctification: An Explication of Romans Chapters 6, 7 & 8:1-4*.¹ This is the way it is entitled in my modern edition of the

¹ James Fraser, *A Treatise on Sanctification: An Explication of Romans Chapters*

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book but its original name was much longer.² James Fraser's handwritten document contained "scarcely an error, and seldom even an erasure can be found" (xxiv). Extremely little proofreading and editing were needed. This is an amazing thing. I made more emendations in writing the manuscript for my speech, and even more changes for this chapter, than James Fraser needed in the writing of a fine 500-page book!

Classic Book

Having said a little bit about the place (Alness) and the man (James Fraser) and their connection, what about the book? Why should we be concerned with a book that was written about 250 years ago? Well, listen to some weighty commendations of James Fraser's volume on sanctification.

Donald Sage declares it "one of the profoundest theological treatises ever written on 'Sanctification.'"³ John McPherson refers to it as "a masterpiece in its own department" (vii). C. H. Spurgeon, citing Dr. John Brown with approval, states that it is "well worth studying."⁴ A. W. Pink, in his work on sanctification, quotes James Fraser's book favourably twice.⁵ The invaluable *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* calls it "widely influential."⁶

6, 7 & 8:1-4 (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1992). Hereafter the page numbers of this book will appear in parentheses.

² This is its first and full title: *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification; being a critical explanation and paraphrase of the sixth and seventh chapters of the Epistle to the Romans and the four first verses of the eighth chapter. Wherein the true scope and sense of that most important and much disputed context is cleared and asserted, against the false interpretations of Grotius, Hammond, Locke, Whitby, Taylor, Alexander, &c. With a Large Appendix wherein the Apostle's Doctrine, Principles, and Reasoning, are applied to the Purposes of Holy Practice, and of Evangelical Preaching* (1774).

³ Quoted in Hugh M. Cartwright, "James Fraser of Alness: 2. His *Magnum Opus*," *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 115, no. 6 (June, 2010), p. 170.

⁴ Quoted in Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries: A Reference Guide to the Best Bible Study Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, rev. 1988), p. 158.

⁵ Arthur W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification* (Choteau, MT: Gospel Missions, no date), pp. 175-176, 184.

⁶ A. P. F. Sell, "Fraser, James," in Nigel M. de S. Cameron (organizing ed.),

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Here are some longer endorsements. Sinclair B. Ferguson, who provided the foreword to the attractive, recent edition, refers to it as “a valuable work by a remarkable man,” adding,

[James Fraser’s] grasp of Paul’s teaching is an impressive advance on that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries in the reformed tradition. Dare one say that he is both clearer and more satisfactory than even Calvin? (iii, iv).

Better than John Calvin, “Dare one say?” High praise indeed!

This is the glowing tribute of the doughty John Kennedy of Dingwall:

[James Fraser’s] work on sanctification gives the most satisfactory explanation of that difficult portion of Scripture expounded in it, which has yet been produced. For exact analysis, polemical skill, and wise practical application of the truth, there are very few works which excel it.⁷

The best exposition of Romans 6:1-8:4 in the first eighteen centuries since those inspired words were penned by the apostle Paul! A lofty claim!

In his masterful *Scottish Theology*, John MacLeod writes,

In the 18th century the northern counties [of Scotland] produced an outstanding divine in the person of James Fraser of Alness, whose work on Sanctification is one of the classics of our Scottish Theology. It is a very thorough discussion of the teaching of Paul in Romans vi. to viii. 4 ... in his positive Exegesis he shows himself a very solid and sensitive interpreter and in his statement of doctrine a judicious and masterly divine.⁸

Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), p. 335.

⁷ John Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* (Inverness: “Northern Chronicle” Office/Edinburgh: Norman MacLeod, rev. 1897), p. 38.

⁸ John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland, 1943), pp. 329-330.

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John MacLeod's phrase, "one of the classics of our Scottish Theology," led me to title this chapter, "A Scottish *Classic* on Sanctification: James Fraser of Alness's 'Explication' of Romans 6:1-8:4."

Book's Contents

The treatise apparently originated "in the form of sermons or lectures" James Fraser gave on Romans (xxvi). His material on Romans 6:1-8:4 was later re-worked into a book. Though a doctrinal work, this theological treatise is also eminently practical; these are among Fraser's closing words:

It becomes [*Christians*], who, by being justified through faith, and brought under grace [in sanctification], are made free ... to have continual recourse to the Lord, and to the promises of the new covenant, for renewed influences of grace, to enable them to hold on in their course of faith and holiness; and to encourage their hearts, and support their hope with this comfortable consideration, that sin shall not have dominion over them, as not being under the law, but under grace (493).

In the last sentence of his treatise, our author turns from God's people to their pastors:

It becomes *ministers* to labour in leading persons to know themselves and to know Christ, to mark out to them by the light of God's word the way in which they ought to walk, and to enforce holy practice by evangelical principles, arguments, and motives, which alone will have effect (493; italics mine).

As to the form of the book, it is basically a commentary on Romans 6:1-8:4. The treatise contains introductions to two chapters in Romans, chapters 6 and 7, the only two chapters that are covered in their entirety in the commentary. After the introductions to chapters 6 and 7, we have the "explication."⁹ Explication is interpretation, explanation, exposition or exegesis.

⁹ This word, though strange to us, is used by James Fraser throughout his book

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After each verse is explicated, that is to say, expounded or explained, James Fraser gives a paraphrase of it. This paraphrasing of Scripture was a very common and accepted method in his day, though not so much in ours (xxvii). In paraphrasing, Rev. Fraser gives the sense of each verse in his own words. This is significant because the liberals of his day paraphrased too. They, however, would deceitfully insert their own ideas into their paraphrases. In rebutting them, James Fraser also wrote paraphrases, but faithful and helpful ones!

In appropriate places after the explications and the paraphrases, there are two “essays,” which today we would probably call excursions. Fraser has an “Essay on Penal Sanction of the Law,” which explains that the law punishes with the extreme sanction of death, over against the erroneous view of learned men of his day (187-214), and an “Essay on Promise under Old Testament,” proving that spiritual blessings and eternal life were promised and enjoyed in the Old Testament, contrary to the Dutchman, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), and the liberals (223-242).

There is also a “dissertation” on the scope of Romans 7:14-25 (254-352), about which I will say more later. The book concludes with a lengthy “appendix,” consisting of four sections and covering almost one hundred pages (397-493).

Literary Opponents: English Arminians

Who were James Fraser’s chief literary opponents in his book on sanctification, since, according to the old adage, a man is known by his enemies? The man whom James Fraser most opposes, and whom he even mentions in his very first page, is John Locke (1632-1704). His will be a new name to some readers; even for some of those for whom his is not a new name, his mention here may be a surprise.

John Locke is considered to be “Probably the greatest, and certainly the most influential, English philosopher.”¹⁰ At birth, according to

and in its modern title, and so is likewise used in the title of this article and throughout it.

¹⁰ “Locke, John,” in Jennifer Speake (ed.), *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London:

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Locke, the mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate—an idea hard to fit with the truth of original sin or the reality of our conscience. Locke was an empiricist, holding that all knowledge is determined only by experience which is derived from the five senses. Locke was also a political philosopher, who taught a form of the social contract theory which held that, if the ruler oversteps the bounds, he can legitimately be deposed and even ought to be deposed.

Here are three interesting facts about John Locke. First, John Locke spent five years in the Netherlands (1683-1688), where he “came into close contact with the Remonstrants’ movement [i.e., the Arminians], whose theological views were very similar to his own.”¹¹ Second, John Locke accompanied Mary II, the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, and the wife of William III of Orange, Britain’s only Dutch king, back from the Netherlands to England in 1688. Third, over the next century, Locke’s political ideas crossed the Atlantic and influenced America’s Founding Fathers, including especially Thomas Jefferson, and the Declaration of Independence which is largely Jefferson’s work. There is a part in that document which refers to a “long train of abuses” allegedly perpetrated by the British King George III, with that phrase, a “long train of abuses,” being lifted verbatim from John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1689).

What especially concerns us now is a religious work by John Locke, for the English philosopher also wrote about theology. This religious book was published posthumously in 1707, which, incidentally, was the year of the union between the English and Scottish Parliaments. It was a commentary on some of Paul’s epistles, the first five as they are arranged in our English Bibles: Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians. The title tells us the form of his commentary: *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*. Note the word “Paraphrase.”

John Locke’s peculiar views of Romans 5, 6 and 7 are very interesting in the history of exegesis. According to Locke, Romans 5 is *not*

Pan Books, 1984), p. 204.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

about the justification of believing Jews and Gentiles, and the original sin of all Jews and Gentiles. It is about the heathen state from which Gentile (not Jewish) Christians were delivered. For the English philosopher, Romans 6-7 do *not* treat the sanctification of believing Jews and Gentiles. For Locke, Romans 6 treats the heathen state from which Gentile (not Jewish) Christians were saved and Romans 7 concerns the bondage to the ceremonial law (not the moral law) from which Jewish (not Gentile) Christians are liberated.

What we need to understand is that Locke's view represents a radical rethink of Romans in the eighteenth century which is not unlike another radical rethink of Romans in our own day, that of the New Perspective on Paul and N. T. Wright. Locke was saying in his day, like the New Perspective and N. T. Wright in ours, that almost everybody else got it wrong and that he was going to tell the world what Romans really means.¹²

Three other major opponents of James Fraser in his great work on sanctification bear noting. All three were English and all three were enemies of God's sovereign grace, like Locke himself. Henry Hammond (1605-1660), influenced by Arminianism, especially through Hugo Grotius, wrote *Paraphrase and Annotations on the New Testament* (1653). Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), who was refuted by Jonathan Edwards in his work *The Freedom of the Will* (1754), wrote *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (1700). Unlike Hammond and Whitby, Dr. John Taylor of Norwich (1694-1761) was not an Anglican but a dissenter or nonconformist. Dr. Taylor wrote *A Paraphrase With Notes on the Epistle to the Romans* (1745) and he was opposed by Jonathan Edwards in *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758).¹³

¹² Contrary to the Federal Vision, which leans heavily upon the New Perspective on Paul and N. T. Wright, James Fraser states that justifying faith does not include "evangelical obedience and good works," nor does "its virtue and effect in justifying ... arise from its certain connection with subsequent holiness and good works" (37; cf. 357-358).

¹³ James Fraser explains that his theological lineage is that of "the great Augustine, in his book *De Spiritu et Litera*" (487) and Martin Luther in "his own excellent treatise, *Concerning the Enslaved Will (de Servo Arbitrio)*" (1525) against

Ecclesiastical Opponents: Scottish Moderates

Leaving the English authors opposed by our theologian, we head north to consider James Fraser's eighteenth-century Church of Scotland bedevilled by a group called the Moderates. What were the characteristics of the Moderate party in the established Scottish church?¹⁴ For them, religious earnestness and zeal were deplored as "enthusiasm," a most detestable abuse of religion. The key thing for a Moderate was intellectual and social respectability.

Preaching is to be restricted to learned discourses on moral themes. Biblical doctrine is too deep; you have to be moderate! The *Westminster Standards*, for these pseudo-Presbyterian Moderates in Scotland, are to be studiously ignored as much as possible; if ever you do mention them, it is to be with a sneer, as if no respectable modern man could ever believe them. Reformed confessionism is too much; you have to be moderate! As regards church discipline, if anyone is so much as suspected of heresy or immorality, such a person must be shielded, supported and encouraged because church discipline is over-strict, for you have to be moderate! If the state infringes on the crown rights of King Jesus in His church, the church must compromise and go the way of least resistance because there is no point risking conflict, for you have to be moderate! You will recognize in this brief description of the spirit of Moderatism that it is very like liberalism in our own day.

How did Moderatism in the eighteenth-century Scottish kirk react to the great truths and themes in the doctrinal part of Romans, namely chapters 1-11? I am referring here to man's total depravity and original sin (Rom. 1; 2; 3; 5), the lostness of the unevangelized heathen and the necessity of missionary work (Rom. 1; 2; 3; 10; 11), justifica-

Erasmus (485). Our Scottish author castigates free will as "that impotent idol, that hath been set up against the glories of divine grace" (484).

¹⁴ John MacLeod has an accessible and helpful treatment of Moderatism (*Scottish Theology*, pp. 198-212), including several of the satirical maxims of John Witherspoon (1723-1794) (pp. 205-206), who would become the sixth president (1768-1794) of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), following Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Davies, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

tion by faith alone (Rom. 3; 4; 5; 8; 9; 10), and election and reprobation (Rom. 8; 9; 11). The Scottish Moderates either ignored these great doctrines or questioned them or watered them down or simply denied them, as did the English Arminians.¹⁵ Again, they were very like the liberals of our day because they too cannot cope with the powerful theological section of the key doctrinal book of the Bible (Rom. 1-11).

To this list of the chief doctrines in Romans 1-11, another must be added: sanctification (Rom. 6; 7; 8), the theme of this chapter and this book. Instead of gospel sanctification, the Moderates substituted man's reason and common sense, and thus moralism, legalism, social duties and outward decency. They held to works righteousness in the form of salvation by character and conduct.¹⁶

Underlying the Moderates' view of holiness, and providing its intellectual basis and defence, stood Locke, Whitby, Hammond and Taylor (and others) with their free-willism and paraphrase commentaries on Romans 6-8. In the decree of God and according to James Fraser's wisdom and inclination, he chose to write on sanctification. While other men dealt with their Arminian attacks on the bondage of the will, original sin, justification, etc., our author decided to address the issue by way of an exposition of Romans 6:1-8:4, the key passage in all the Bible on sanctification. James Fraser did this by means of a commentary which included paraphrases so that, whereas the liberals put Paul's inspired words in their own deceptive formulations to introduce their own ideas, he expressed the apostle's teaching in his own words to explain what Paul is truly saying and not put false

¹⁵ E.g., John Taylor declared, "Virtuous heathens shall be eternally saved" (325).

¹⁶ Yet, as John MacLeod observes of the Moderates, "Their profession of moderation had worked its way to such a pitch that they satisfied themselves with being moderate not only in their faith but in their love to God and moderate in their obedience to His will, while they inclined to be immoderate in the licence they allowed themselves and their allies. For it was notorious that as they indulged their liberties they went beyond bounds in disregard to the law of God. Those liberties showed themselves in the excesses of intemperance at which they winked or in which they indulged, and in the easy way in which they turned a blind eye to what they excused as the amiable or good-humoured vices or peccadilloes of their boon companions" (*Scottish Theology*, pp. 201-202).

doctrine in his mouth. Thus James Fraser wrote what the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* calls “an anti-Arminian doctrinal exposition of Rom. 6:1-8:4,” which is both a defence of the faith and a call to real Christian godliness.¹⁷

Explication

So how does James Fraser begin his explication? Exactly the same way that the apostle does in Romans 6! First, he points out that there can be no sanctification without justification by faith alone: “there can indeed be no true sanctification of a sinner, but by means, and in consequence of grace abounding in justification by faith, and not by works” (36). Contra the Moderates, Fraser taught that we need to be justified by faith alone in Christ alone before we can ever live a holy life to God’s glory.

Second, Fraser declares, as does Paul, that the only way to be holy is to be dead to sin. Being dead to sin is not merely an obligation, something that we *ought* to do (38-41, 48); it is “*actual—We ARE dead to sin,*” according to Romans 6:2 (38; emphases Fraser’s). The Scottish theologian explains that our death to sin is not merely our external baptism with water (44-45, 47-48) or our membership in an instituted church (53-55), the view of the Moderates. Our death to sin is not merely something we do or something we have done or something we ought to do (73). Our being dead to sin, which is the principle thing in sanctification, is something that God does to and in us. It is a real spiritual death to (the dominion of) sin. The Moderates were outraged: “What is that man talking about? That’s too deep. The people of God don’t need that; they just need moral instruction!”

This means that two great blessings of our salvation were purchased by Jesus Christ on the cross. He died for our sins (justification) and we died to sin when we died in Him (sanctification). By the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ, we are “free from the reign and dominion of sin” (42), though not altogether free in this life from sin’s presence and power. Fraser is teaching that faith looks to the cross of our Saviour, both for justification and sanctification. Faith looks to

¹⁷ Sell, “Fraser, James,” p. 335.

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the cross for justification because the Lord died on the cross for our transgressions, and faith looks to the cross for sanctification because in His death on the cross we died to the reign and dominion of sin. The Moderates were appalled: “You can’t preach mysteries like that to the common people in the pews! You need to be moderate!”

In his explication of Romans 6:12, Fraser encourages the child of God with the truth and calling of sanctification:

The apostle now proceeds to exhort the believers against sin, and to the practice of holiness; and insists to that purpose to the end of the chapter. Having represented the privilege, advantage, and blessedness of the state of the believer, of the sincere Christian; what he had brought forth on that subject gave him great advantage with regard to the exhortation he now enters on; and suggests the strongest arguments and motives imaginable to enforce it. The grace that hath made believers free from the reign of sin, hath put them under the greatest obligation to avoid, resist, and mortify it; under the greatest obligation to all duty, and to the practice of holiness (77).¹⁸

This is of great practical importance to God’s people, as Pastor Fraser observes,

For it will be often found that the children of God have no greater trial of faith, or greater difficulty in exercising it, than in what concerneth their comfort in reference to sin that dwelleth in them, and their hope of deliverance from it (308).

James Fraser notes that sanctification is presented in Romans 6 with regard to sin and in Romans 7 with regard to the law. The unregenerate are “under” the law, just as much as they are “under” sin. The unregenerate are under the dominion of the law, just as much as they are under the dominion of sin. The unregenerate are in bondage to the law, just as much as they are in bondage to sin. The unregener-

¹⁸ Thus our theologian taught the “more and more” of sanctification (296; cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 70, 76, 81, 89, 115, 123).

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ate are slaves to the law, just as much as they are slaves to sin. Fraser declares,

Sinners under the law, and in the flesh, are under the dominion of sin, its servants and slaves (chap. vi. 14, 17, 20), unable by any powers of their own to deliver themselves from that slavery, or from under that dominion. The notion of dominion and slavery imports no less (399).

It is only those who are dead to sin through the death of Jesus Christ and who are dead to the law because they are married to Jesus Christ, who can “bring forth” good works as “fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4). A godly life is a blessed reality only for those free from spiritual slavery, contrary to all Moderatism.

As a solid Protestant theologian, James Fraser believed that “the true conversion [and sanctification] of man” consists of “two parts,” both “the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 88). The saint is not only transferred from the bondage of sin; he is also made the willing slave of the living God in Jesus Christ:

The servant of God is absolutely his as to his person, and that by the original right of creation and sovereignty, and by the superadded right of grace and redemption. Yea, the servant of God hath freely and fully, by his own choice, given himself up to the Lord, to be his, as a man’s bond-servant is his, being bought with his money, or born in his house. So the Psalmist acknowledges (Ps. cxvi. 16), *I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid*. But there is otherwise great odds, with regard to the liberty of mind and spirit, the confidence, consolation, and hope, very opposite to a state of slavery or bondage, which the Christian hath in the service of his natural and rightful Lord; whom he is, at the same time, to consider as his Father, and himself as a son by the adoption of grace, and an heir. On these accounts, though the Christian is the absolute property of his Lord, and absolutely subject to his sovereignty and will, yet his state is not that of slavery and bondage. To him the law, which expresses his Master’s will and is

the rule of his service, is *the perfect law of liberty* (James i. 25) (103; italics Fraser's).

James Fraser's Enslaved Father and Slave-Owning Grandson

At this point, it is worth bringing in an interesting piece of biography regarding James Fraser's father, John (xiv-xvii). Our author's father was arrested with others for attending a nonconformist conventicle or religious meeting in London "in the beginning of 1685" (xiv). James II, who was the United Kingdom's last Roman Catholic monarch, acceded to the throne on 6 February, 1685, so it may well have been in the early days of his reign that John Fraser and these other nonconformists were arrested. From London, James Fraser's father was imprisoned in Dunnotar Castle, which is south of Stonehaven, which is south of Aberdeen.¹⁹

John Fraser was sentenced by the law and sold to unscrupulous men, who traded him and others as slaves to labour in the American colony of New Jersey. The New Jersey Court annulled their slavery on the grounds that they had not voluntarily accepted their servitude nor had they boarded the ship to America of their own volition. So James Fraser's father was under the law, condemned by the law, in bondage, sold into slavery and released from the bondage of slavery. These are the issues dealt with by his son in a spiritual and expository way in his commentary on Romans 6:1-8:4, and the experiences of the father may have prompted the pen of the son.

After his release, James Fraser's father moved north from New Jersey to Connecticut, where he was licensed to preach. Later, on hearing that the Dutchman William of Orange had replaced the Romanist James II on the British throne, John Fraser deemed it safe to return to his native Scotland. He ministered in Glencorse (1691-1695). In 1696, John was inducted into the Church of Scotland congregation in Alness. In four years, his son James Fraser would be born, to be brought up in the Alness manse.

¹⁹ One of the two BRF Conference day trips in 2014 included the Magdalen Chapel in Edinburgh which contains a picture of Dunnotar Castle, with a list of those who were imprisoned there, including John Fraser, our author's father.

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Having gone back a generation to our author's father, we now go forward two generations to James Fraser's grandson, also called James Fraser, who owned a plantation in South America which was served by African slaves. Then it was a Dutch colony (1627-1815). At the end of the Napoleonic wars, it became a British colony (1815 onwards) and the area in which James Fraser's grandson worked is now a part of Guyana. That same grandson, known as James Fraser of Pitcalzean, who ran a plantation served by slaves, drowned in a shipwreck off the Irish coast, early in 1801.²⁰ Thus James Fraser, who wrote so powerfully of spiritual slavery and liberation from it in sanctification, had a father who experienced both the bondage of physical slavery and freedom from it, and a grandson who owned slaves.

Romans 7:14-25

Returning to James Fraser's commentary, we come to Romans 7:14-25, which has, for over one and a half millennia, been a fierce theological battleground. There are basically two views of the person in this passage. One is that he is a regenerate man struggling with indwelling sin. This is the position presented forcibly by the great Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Ambrose of Milan (337-397), an earlier church father, held the same view (254). This is also the position of the Reformed and James Fraser himself (xxx). The other view is that the man in the second half of Roman 7 is unregenerate. This is the teaching of that heretic Arminius (1560-1609), in which he was preceded by the Socinians and long before that by the Pelagians. This is also the view of Whitby, Taylor and the Scottish Moderates.

James Fraser has a dissertation on this very topic of almost one hundred pages (254-352) followed by five pages of paraphrases (352-356). He introduces the subject and its doctrinal importance (254-259). Who is Paul talking about? Is this the struggle within the believer or is this a battle of an unregenerate person? Our author notes several general considerations (259-270). He proves that nothing in the passage is inconsistent with the state of grace (270-281). He demonstrates that much in the passage is inconsistent with an

²⁰ Cf. "James Fraser of Pitcalzean" (www.spanglefish.com/slavesandhighlanders/index.asp?pageid=389436).

unregenerate state (281-331). Then he answers various objections (331-345) and gives practical uses (345-352).

This is John McPherson's evaluation of this part of James Fraser of Alness's great treatise: "I certainly do not know where, in all the range of Biblical literature, there is to be found anything like this dissertation as an acute and thoroughly satisfactory demonstration" that Romans 7:14-25 speaks of a regenerate person (xxix). Thus McPherson refers to this section as "perhaps the gem of the whole work" (xxviii).

Here are three other commendations of our author's thorough treatment of this highly significant and controversial passage. Robert Haldane (1764-1842), who hailed from Gleneagles in Scotland, refers to James Fraser's "excellent exposition of this [seventh] chapter [of Romans]" and quotes Fraser twice.²¹ John Murray, another Scot, who laboured in America for much of his life, called this "One of the ablest and most thorough treatments of the question and of the considerations in support of the view that Paul is describing his experience in a state of grace."²² Of the twenty-three works listed by the American commentator, William Hendriksen, in defence of the Reformed interpretation of Romans 7:14-25, James Fraser gives far and away the longest discussion of this key passage.²³

Eight Benefits

Moving now to one section of his appendix, James Fraser lists eight benefits or advantages arising from being "under grace," in sanctification, and not being under sin or under the law (401-413). I am going to paraphrase Fraser's points to make them shorter and simpler.

First, being under grace opens to us all the treasures of heavenly blessings (401-402). By nature, fallen man, being under the dominion of sin and the law, is under the curse. But if God is for us, in jus-

²¹ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Banner, repr. 1958), pp. 295-296.

²² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 1, p. 257, n. 22.

²³ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 229-230.

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tification and sanctification, all the divine blessings are ours because we are in Christ and under grace (Eph. 1:3).

Second, in the way of “holy living and practice” (402), we have the comfort of the indwelling Spirit (402-403).

Third, being under grace, we have the right and ability to approach God in public and private worship (Heb. 9:14), unlike those who are under sin and under the law (403-404).

Fourth, since we are under grace, we have the Word of God to sanctify, illumine, instruct, guide, correct, reprove, warn, promise, comfort, strengthen and quicken us (405).

Fifth, being justified and sanctified, “all providential dispensations” will strengthen us “in the Lord’s ways,” whether they are “favourable” or even if we “have the cross to bear” (406). As our theologian put it,

The grace which God’s people, freely justified, are under, will direct everything in an effectual tendency to their sanctification and furtherance in holiness ... How different the case of men of the world, who, though under an external dispensation of grace, yet are not under grace as to the real state of their souls! (405, 407).

Sixth, being under grace, the great coming day of the Lord is a comforting thought, which stirs us up to do good works (407-408). By such a hope, we purify ourselves, even as our Saviour is pure (I John 3:3) (408). But for those who are under sin, the law and condemnation, Christ’s return brings thoughts of “terror,” “alarm and confusion” (407).

Seventh, being justified and sanctified, we are assured that the Lord Jesus will preserve us so that we persevere in holiness by His grace (408-410). Thus sanctification includes the perseverance of the saints (Eph. 5:26-27).

What do you think receives the last and longest treatment of the eight benefits or advantages of being under grace in our Scottish theologian’s appendix? The covenant (410-413)! The grace that we are under is “the grace of the new covenant” (410). What is James Fraser’s

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favourite text regarding the covenant in his magnum opus? Jeremiah 32:40. He refers to it three times in his appendix (410, 411, 412) and cites it frequently throughout the book: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, [so] that they shall not depart from me.”²⁴ In the covenant, God puts His fear in us *so that* we will walk in His ways and never apostatize. To express it slightly differently, in the covenant, God so works in us that we *will* follow Him in the way of a holy life as friends and slaves of Jesus Christ.

Fraser writes of God’s unconditional covenant with His people:

If the tenor of the covenant were thus: I will not cease to do them good, *on condition that* they cleave to me, obey me, and not depart from me; if, I say, the covenant amounted to no more than this, it would be a law-covenant, even if there should be some abatement in the condition, in condescension to human infirmity. Whereas the covenant of grace is a covenant of promise, that gives security, by mere grace, on all hands, with regard to the sanctification of God’s people, and their preservation in a state and course of holiness, to their final salvation. The right inheritance is not by the law, or by works (411; italics mine).

Then he quotes Romans 4:14, 16:

For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by GRACE, to the end the PROMISE might be SURE to all the seed (411; emphases Fraser’s).

When our theologian speaks of “all the seed,” he means all the elect seed, those for whom Christ died, those who believe in Jesus (e.g., 74-75, 91-92, 159, 161, 175, 180, 235, 398, 456, 482).²⁵

²⁴ Jeremiah 32:40 is perhaps the most cited text in James Fraser’s *A Treatise on Sanctification* (e.g., 92, 316, 410, 411, 412, 460, 478), excepting verses from Romans 6:1-8:4, of course.

²⁵ James Fraser declares that “the common doctrine of the Scriptures [is] that the covenant is, in the first place, made with Jesus Christ the second Adam; and hence God is called the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore

Pastor Fraser concludes,

Concerning holiness, this is evidently the issue of our whole discussion, viz. that the grace of the new covenant hath provided for the advancement of holiness and good works, and for the sanctification of God's people, in a manner and degree much beyond what the sentiments of the adversaries of grace [including the English Arminians and the Scottish Moderates] will allow them to admit (484).

James Fraser's Own Sanctification

James Fraser practised what he preached and wrote:

[He] was a man of singular wisdom and great integrity, and steady friendship. He was a faithful counsellor; while his courteous behaviour as a gentleman, his piety as a Christian, and his great learning and knowledge as a divine, made him highly acceptable to all ranks.²⁶

I end with two biographical points which helped James Fraser in his own sanctification. Both are striking instances of God's use of providence in making him personally holy and both involve women.

First, in Alness Church of Scotland, there was a monthly Tuesday morning question session with the ladies (xix-xx). These women came "with a great variety and wealth of difficult questions in what might be called casuistic divinity" (xx). James Fraser soberly considered this to be "the most serious and trying part of his work as a minister" (xx). In parting from the elders after the monthly session meeting, he would ask them to pray earnestly for him for divine grace in performing the hardest part of his labours: answering the

the promises and blessings of the covenant descend through Christ, and, in his right, to those who believe in him" (229-230; cf. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 31). A lot more could be said regarding James Fraser's teaching on the covenant (e.g., 74-75, 91-92, 136-137, 182-183, 226-230, 315-316, 320, 410-413, 460, 478-479, 484, 493).

²⁶ Quoted in Kennedy, *Days of the Fathers*, p. 37, n. 1.

hard questions put to him by the ladies of the church! This greatly assisted his sanctification in promoting humility and prayerful study of Scripture.

Second, James Fraser tells us that his wife was a great aid in his sanctification. But this was not in the way you might think! According to John Kennedy of Dingwall, his wife was a “cold, unfeeling, bold, unheeding, worldly woman.”²⁷ She did not even feed him properly. The congregation got to hear of this, so “A godly acquaintance arranged with him to leave a supply of food in a certain place beside his usual walk, of which he might avail himself when starved at home.”²⁸ John Kennedy further describes this sorry marriage: “Even light and fire in his study were denied to him on the long, cold winter evenings.” Remember, James Fraser lived in the chilly north of Scotland! Since “his study was the only place of refuge from the cruel scourge of his wife’s tongue and temper, there, shivering and in the dark, he used to spend his winter evenings at home.”²⁹ What a pitiable sight!

To continue, in the words of John Kennedy of Dingwall,

But the godly husband had learned to thank the Lord for the discipline of this trial. Being once at a Presbytery dinner alone, amidst a group of moderates, one of them proposed, as a toast, the health of their wives, and, turning to Mr Fraser, said, as he winked at his companions, “You, of course, will cordially join in drinking to this toast.” “So I will and so I ought,” Mr Fraser said, “for mine has been a better wife to me than any one of yours has been to you.” “How so?” they all exclaimed. “She has sent me,” was the reply, “seven times a day to my knees when I would not otherwise have gone, and that is more than any of you can say of yours.”³⁰

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41. Hugh M. Cartwright refers to her as “an unfeeling person whose lack of sympathy with her husband was one of the great trials of his life” (“James Fraser of Alness: 1. The Man,” *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 115, no. 5 [May, 2010], p. 137). One wonders how he ever came to marry such a lass!

²⁸ Kennedy, *Days of the Fathers*, p. 41.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

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 biannual biblical and theological journal, the *British Reformed Journal (BRJ)*. Subscription rates, as of 2016, 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 around 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, The Work of the Holy Spirit, The Word of God for Our Generation, Ye Are My Witnesses and (of course) Be Ye Holy: The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification. Why not consider joining us for a relaxing week’s fellowship around God’s Word?

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