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# Lift Up Your Hearts!

*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul (Ps 25:1).*

Where do you turn or seek refuge when the stresses of life pile up too high to bear? Friends? Activities? Quiet times? Does public worship come to mind? If not, maybe a reminder of what worship is will give you reason to find your delight and rest there.

Public worship is the saints' delight and repose in this life. Amidst the day to day spiritual war and against our deadly enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, worship is the transcendence, the beauty, and the "joyful noise" (Ps. 100:1; ESV) of Biblical liturgy that stays our souls. The great Church

Father, Gregory of Nanzianzus, wrote in a poem to his deceased father that at the end of his father's life, in all his pain and sorrow, it was the liturgy that sustained his soul.

## David's Experience

David was one such saint whose soul was tormented day and night by his sin and his enemies, but at the same time, who was consoled in the mending arms of the Lord: "To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul."

It is both fascinating and providential that Psalm 25 follows a public

liturgy for the entrance of the ark of the covenant into the tabernacle of meeting. We can picture the priests calling out, "Who is this King of glory," to which the assembly replied, "The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory!" (Ps. 24:10). On the heels of these words, when the LORD had ascended the Mount and was enthroned as King of Israel, David lifts up his heart and soul to the Lord in Psalm 25:1. His faith and soul now had an objective and tangible place to which it could be directed: the mountain of the LORD.

## Our Experience

And so do we. Now that the substance of the Law's types and shadows has come in the Person of our Savior, we have the very image to which those types pointed to! It is



Volume 52, No. 8 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon' (Judges 7:20).

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He who was qualified to ascend that holy hill of Golgotha. As John's Gospel proclaims, it was in His humiliation upon the cross that He was truly glorified: "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). It is He who trod that hill with "clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:4) having actively obeyed the Law in our place "all the time He lived on earth" (HC 37). It is He who therefore "presented Himself in our place before His Father" (BC 21), dying on account of our sins, rising and ascending on account of His righteous merit. Now we, through faith alone, can lift up our souls amidst our sins, doubts, temptations, and struggles and access the throne of grace in the heavenly Jerusalem.

### **Lifting Up Our Hearts in Worship**

Our experiences are played out in the heavenly drama of the book of Revelation. In chapters 2-3 we see the struggling Church on earth. The weaknesses of the seven Churches are our weaknesses. But immediately after describing this, John, in chapter 4, is lifted up into heaven to behold the Church in heaven as its worships around the throne of the Father and of the Lamb. But this scene is not just of those who have died in the Lord – no – it also describes the worship we join when we assemble on the Lord's Day.

We have the privilege of ascending the hill of the LORD and into the heavenly throne room not just three times a year as the Israelites were commanded under the Old Covenant, but *weekly*. In my congregation, after the call to worship, I pro-

claim to the congregation, "Lift up your hearts!" And the people respond, "We lift them up to the Lord!"

David's words in Psalm 25:1 have come down to us in the liturgy of the Christian Church in the words of the *sursum corda* (Latin, "lift up your hearts"). We may not all know it in this form, but we all know it from the Eucharistic liturgy of Petrus Dathenus:

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*David's words in  
Psalm 25:1 have  
come down to us in  
the liturgy of the  
Christian Church in  
the words of the  
sursum corda.*

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That we, then, may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts unto the external bread and wine but lift them up on high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is, our Advocate, at the right hand of His heavenly Father.

### **The Teaching of the 'Sursum Corda'**

As we weekly lift up our hearts and souls to the Lord in worship, of what are we reminded?

*First*, it reminds us *that worship is a heavenly experience*. Public worship is not mundane, not trite, not laborious, but it is a transcendent communion with He "who was dead, and behold, [is] alive forever-

more" (Rev. 1:18). After a week of labor, stress, and anxiety in this world which is in bondage to decay, time stops as we enter the incorruptible place of eternity – or better yet – as eternity comes to us!

The ancient Church, Father Cyril of Jerusalem, explained the *sursum corda* to new converts in this way:

Then the celebrant cries: 'Lift up your hearts.' For truly it is right in that most awful hour to have one's heart on high with God, not below, occupied with earth and the things of earth. In effect, then, the bishop commands everyone to banish worldly thoughts and workaday cares and to have their hearts in heaven with the good God. Assenting, you answer, 'We have them lifted up to the Lord.' Let no one present be so disposed that while his lips form the words, 'We have them lifted up to the Lord,' in his mind his attention is engaged by worldly thoughts. At all times we should commemorate God, but at least, if this is not possible to human weakness, we must aspire to it in that hour.

On the Lord's Day we are called to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth; we are called to remember and participate in our new life that has already been raised with Christ

*Second*, the *sursum corda* reminds us *that worship is an act of humiliation*. St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) says in *Sermon 261*, "The Resurrection of our Lord is our hope; the Ascension of the Lord

is our exaltation...though we ascend, let us not be lifted up. Indeed, we ought to have our hearts lifted up, but to the Lord.” Here is the irony! As we lift our hearts up to the Lord, we are being cast down. As we ascend, we worship *and* bow down. As we lay down our lives as living sacrifices we offer “the sacrifices of...a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart” (Ps. 51:17); for “the LORD is near to those who have a broken heart” (Ps. 34:18).

*Third, we are reminded that worship is a participation in the Gospel, which is outside of ourselves. As St. Augustine says in Sermon 227, it is a reminder to us “lest you*

should attribute to your own strength, your own merits, and your own labors the fact that you have your hearts thus lifted up to the Lord.”

We hear the Law read to us to bring us out of the idolatry of trying to be righteous in ourselves. We confess our sins in acknowledgment that we, like Paul, come to Christ “not having my own righteousness, which is from the law,” but only “that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:9). We receive absolution from our minister because the Gospel comes from Christ. We lift up our hearts before the Eucharist because

in it, like in the Gospel, Christ is only received by faith (BC 35).

So as you cry out in this life, “How long, O Lord?” (Rev 6:10), in the face of overwhelming sin, the onslaught of the world’s pressures, and the temptations of the Devil in the form of sinful seduction and false philosophies, may you find your only comfort in the public gatherings of the Church, saying: “To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul!”

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## Bible Study

### A Spiritual Must

As the fall season approaches, we are challenged to renewed efforts in regard to personal and group Bible study. We are daily confronted with the need for such renewed effort. The society in which we live is an increasingly secular one.

Gallup studies have revealed that 58% of Americans believe religion’s impact on American life is decreasing. That’s why so many Americans could take the attitude they did in regard to the moral lapses in the life of a recent former president. They reasoned that what a man does in his private life has nothing to do with his performance as a public official. Even among those who call themselves born-again Christians there is often an

abysmal lack of understanding of Biblical truths.

Forty-six percent of all Americans call themselves born-again Christians. These are people who believe that the Bible is the actual Word of God and who claim to have experienced personal conviction. Although such a large percentage of Americans call themselves born-again Christians, three fourths of Americans think more than one religion offers a true path to God. Just one in six (sixteen percent) think their religion is the best path to God. The author reporting these statistics concludes, “These statistics indicate a large number of Christians are confused about major doctrinal issues.”

It was recently reported in our area

that one hundred twenty members of a local church of Reformed persuasion left their church to become members of a megachurch of non-undenominational status. A seasoned pastor and former seminary professor stated that such things happen because many people no longer have any grounding in the Reformed faith.

These and similar situations confront us with the need for added Bible study such as awaits us in the season just ahead.

#### Bible Study Requirements

Bible study requires determination. When Joshua, the man of God was preparing to assume his responsibilities as the leader of God’s people, the Lord appeared to him and said, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

Arthur Besteman



For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8). Although God appeared to Joshua and spoke directly to him, Joshua is instructed to turn to the Word of God, to study it, to absorb it and to live according to it. That requires effort, life-long effort.

During the years of my ministry it has been an encouragement to me to observe men and women who have passed the three score and ten mark and even the fourscore mark who still faithfully attend Bible Studies. They recognize their need to grow in their knowledge of God’s Word.

As effort is required so also time is demanded. It takes time to have regular personal devotions. Whether that be at the beginning of the day, at midday, or at the close of the day, there has to be a concerted effort to devote a certain time of the day to the reading and meditating upon God’s Word. Many Christians report the regular practice of getting up in sufficient time in the morning before leaving for the day’s work so that there is time to spend with God’s Word. Such people are also likely to set aside time for group Bible study. And they, of course, are richer spiritually because of their effort.

### **Bible Study Helps**

I would like to suggest the importance of the use of books in our Bible study. There was a time when it was common to find a book case in the living rooms of most of the homes of our people. The book case usually contained a Bible Commentary, some books on theology and perhaps a devotional book or two.

I am grateful that in my own library I have commentaries, a Bible encyclopedia and sets of Edersheim and Josephus which belonged to my father whom I was never privileged to know. As I use these books and read the notes in the margins, I am reminded that my father was a student of the Word. I am grateful that my son has indicated a desire to someday own these books.

Well-used books should be a part of the heritage which we pass on to

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### ***Men ought to set the example in the church for interest in the study of God’s Word.***

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our children that they may know the importance of Bible study in our lives and may hopefully follow in our footsteps. As I lead Men’s Bible study from year to year and see father-son pairs in attendance, I think what a satisfaction it must be for those fathers to see their sons joining them in Bible study. Many a faithful member of Men’s Society has born testimony to the influence of their fathers, whose example of faithfully attending Men’s Society week after week they remember well.

So I take advantage of the opportunity to encourage especially men to develop the discipline of attending a Men’s Bible Study. In most of our churches the women’s Bible study groups continue to prosper. Unfor-

tunately, in a number of churches the Men’s Society or Men’s Bible Study group had disbanded and where they continue the attendance is often sparse. Such ought not to be! Men ought to set the example in the church for interest in the study of God’s Word.

### **Bible Study Benefits**

The importance of this is seen in the benefits which are derived from it. The apostle Paul, in writing to his spiritual son, Timothy, declares, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16,17).

Bible study will increase our fellowship with God. The Psalmist declares, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” and “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:103,105). As we study the Word we come to know the Giver of the Word better. It is through a study of the Word that we come to know the will of God for our lives better and may be more and more conformed by His Spirit to the image of His Son.

In a recent essay, Dr. John Bolt wrote, “There are secularists today who in the name of tolerance truly believe that any explicitly religious witness in the public square is an act of intolerance. Thus, public affirmation of Christian sexual morality is judged to be homophobic hate speech that must be silenced. Remarkably this posture is taken in the name of tolerance! Intolerance of Christianity is thus judged to be

an act of tolerance. Examples of such politically correct intolerance abound today.” Such intolerance, I believe, points to the fact that the Christian witness is going to become increasingly difficult to bear and will expose us to various forms of persecution. Therefore, the Christian must be strengthened in the faith and become increasingly adept in the use of “the sword of the Spirit.” One of the best means to accomplish this is Bible study.

Those who are faithful in Bible study will be better equipped to serve in the Kingdom of God and to fulfill their responsibilities as faithful members of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed are those children who over the years have shared with me their memories of coming downstairs to breakfast and finding their

father at the kitchen table with his Bible open before him in study or sitting in his favorite chair with his Bible in his lap as he meditated upon the Word of God. Such children have an example which cannot be purchased with money nor will it be quickly forgotten.

### The Need

Finally, I would remind you of the need to prepare ourselves to be better witnesses to the world in which we live. It was significant that following the terrorist attack on 9/11 both the Tonight Show and the Late Night Show were silenced. They had nothing to say in the light of the great tragedy that had taken place. Church attendance in the weeks immediately following 9/11 increased dramatically and then soon fell off again. The sale of Bibles in the week following the terrorists

attack increased 80%. People were searching for answers. They were looking for peace and security at a time of great insecurity. You and I know the peace for which millions are seeking. We must increasingly “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (I Peter 3:15). As this new season begins, let us with renewed zeal and dedication turn to a study of God’s Word to better equip ourselves “to redeem the times for the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16.)

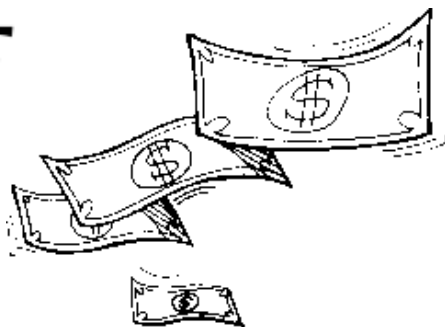
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**Dave Vander Meer**

## TEEN SCENE

### BUY WHAT?!

*Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding.*



Did you know that teens are one of the most sought after groups when it comes to advertising? Yes, teens are the ones that marketers want to make their pitch to. Whether it is Abercrombie & Fitch, Vanilla Coke, Old Navy, MTV, GAP, Mountain Dew, X Box, Eminem, Star Wars, Creed, Play Station, Get A Dell Dude or whatever you watch, listen to, wear or buy the focus is on teens. The reason that

teens are getting so many messages to buy different products is that studies have shown that teens spend 100 billion dollars a year and parents will spend another fifty billion on their teens.

That all this may or may not shock you is not the point. The culture we live in is telling you to buy, buy, buy. The question is what are you buying? Most of the products or en-

tertainment choices above are selling more than just a pop (soda), a shirt or a computer. They are selling an image, Old Navy - the “In Crowd”, Mountain Dew - “X-treme sports”, and so on. They are also selling the fact that you think that the stuff you buy is cool so you will want it; not because what you are buying is right, good, or true. They sell it because they want your money.



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God has created this world and Jesus is now Lord and King over this world. He also rules over this culture that we live in. It is His. That does not mean He is glad with a lot that goes on but it does mean some things are good. There is nothing wrong with clothes, or pop, or music or entertainment by themselves. What people do with each according to God and His word determines if something is good or evil.

If you remember the last Teen Scene we talked about the spiritual battle that we are in every day. This battle is with sin, Satan, and the world. To fight that battle we need to be prepared each day but with the right equipment. The proper equipment allows a person to work properly with the best results and in the shortest amount of time. A soldier who goes to fight in Afghanistan doesn't go with a BB gun. He needs the right equipment. So also we need to prepare ourselves with the right equipment. The equipment that we need can be found in Ephesians 6:10-20. For this time we are going to focus on the belt.

### **The Belt of Truth**

The devil charges and attacks so the armor needs to be put in the proper place and tied together in such a way that there is no vulnerable place left unprotected. The belt of truth is the starting point for the Christian in putting his armor together. It is the piece that is at the center. It keeps things in their proper place so that you are not hindered by other equipment while in battle. It supports you and gives you comfort and it makes you ready for action. Your arms are

freed up to fight because everything is being held up by the belt. The sword and breastplate, rest upon this belt as does the sword when not in use. Today a soldier has a lot more equipment strapped to this belt.

The belt is mentioned first because it is an important part of armor of a soldier. It is the basic ingredient in the spiritual war we are now engaged in. The ingredient is truth. While all the other pieces of armor are needed, truth runs through each. Truth allows us to stand firm in the struggle.

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***While all the other  
pieces of armor are  
needed, truth runs  
through each.***

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We know from God's word that we need to get truth. We need to buy it instead of the images or the ideas behind many of the products mentioned earlier. These products may be good but they are selling something else: an image. The image is what sells, so the world tries to influence us to buy the image.

### **A Lasting Image**

God tells us to buy truth, not an image. The truth of God is never changing. It is here today, tomorrow, and forever. The image of the world is here today and gone tomorrow and then a new image appears. God's truth you don't want to sell because it has lasting value.

The image of the world is "use it up and throw it out." It has no long term value. Once the image is bought it becomes useless. The truth of God is sincere, it will never mislead. You will not be tricked, because God's truth is real.

The image of the world is fake. It tries to tell you that you're something that you are not. The image is phony, the world is always putting on new and different masks to hide behind but its true self is ugly. The truth of God is pure. It is 100%, 100% of the time. It never diminishes or fades. The image of the world fades in the sun, rusts in the snow, breaks in the wind, and disappears when used up. The truth of God cleanses; the mind of man is renewed and the heart of a man is changed.

The result of truth is that others become important. The mind of the world can only think of itself and how it can gain at another's expense. It stinks like a sewer hole and is filled with envy, deceit, greed, jealousy, and above all hatred. The truth of God is a blessing to the godly person and those he comes in contact with. The image of the world is a curse because it doesn't follow God and hurts those who come following after it.

So what are you going to buy, an image of the world or the truth of God that readies us for battle? One helps us to stand firm in times of trial and hardship. The other knocks down and only disappoints. One is there at all times comforting you, supporting you, and preparing you. The other leaves you to yourself and is only concerned about itself. I pray that the Lord moves

you to buy truth and prepares you to use it in the spiritual battle that we are in.

### A Study of Truth

- Write down what you think truth is?
- Does the truth change, or does it always stay the same?
- Is scientific truth different from religious truth?
- Would you rather be around a person who tells the truth or one who doesn't?

#### Read

*Duet 32:4 - God is...?*

*John 1:14; John 14:6 - Christ is...?*

*John 14:7 - The Holy Spirit is...?*

*John 17:13 -19 - The Word of God is...*

- What should we think on and keep in our hearts? *Phil. 4:8, Prov. 3:3, Psalm 51:6*
- Who is the master of falsehood and how does he corrupt? *John 8:42-47*
- Who brought us the truth? *John 1:17, 18:37*
- How do we know the truth? *John 16:13-15*

**Mr. Dave Vander Meer** is the Youth Director of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

# Work: Curse or Calling?

## The Need for a Renewed Vision

A song title—"Working for the Weekend." A restaurant sign—"T.G.I. Friday's." An employer's lament—"It's so hard to find good help these days." What do they have in common? Each in its own disturbing way tells us something about the way our world approaches work.

For so many, work is just a necessary evil, the only means of obtaining the resources necessary to purchase satisfaction and security. But it's a sad way to live, if only considering the number of hours an average person works in a lifetime. It's a sadder way to live when one assesses the quality of the pleasures and protection that money can buy. But it's even sadder when we recognize that God's blessed institution of work is scorned. Its goodness is denied by those too blind to see it.

We should be very happy, then, that we've been saved from the world's view of work. Much more than just working for the weekend, we have the high privilege of working for the Lord. Far superior to the spurious gratitude expressed for one day (Friday), we can offer genuine thanksgiving for everyday (even Monday).

But these are realities that we often forget, aren't they? Which one of

us would deny it? As we sink into the ruts of our weekly work routines, our vision often becomes short-sighted. Soon, the complaints of our lips betray a perspective that is not too different from our unbelieving coworkers. When this happens, we dishonor our God and Savior, we rob ourselves of joy, and we squander the opportunity to win our neighbor for Christ.

What we need from time to time is a renewed vision. I don't mean the renewed vision that the CEO would create, as he gathers his company's employees to discuss profit goals and stock options at the monthly pep rally. I'm thinking, rather, of the restored perspective that comes from slowing down long enough to see our work in light of God's Word. To be sure, a company manager has a certain vision of work, but it is very limited. God's Word, however, gives us a point of reference outside of this world. Reading this Word is like having access to a satellite camera, or like standing on the moon to peer down upon earth. From that vantage point we can absorb the broadest picture, and then zoom in and out on our office cubicle, our tractor cab, our kitchen counter, our school classroom, our church nursery, our community's needs, seeing all the work God has given us from the perspective of heaven.

*Much more than just working for the weekend, we have the high privilege of working for the Lord.*





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As we open God's Word to have our vision refocused, we find that it is has much more to say about work than we had remembered. Beyond that, there are so many verses that one could camp on for weeks, for years, indeed, for a lifetime. What shall we do? Well, more than anything, we must see the whole of the Bible, the whole of history. Consider the theme of work along the timeline of *creation, fall, redemption, consummation*.

### **Backing up to the Beginning**

Looking at creation before the fall into sin, one of the most important things we observe about work is also one of the most obvious: we see that work was there. Back in the early chapters of Genesis, before sin, before thorns and thistles, before frustration, pain, complaints, and feelings of emptiness, work was there. Back at the beginning, in a creation that God pronounced good and a world in which man and woman found constant satisfaction and joy at all times, there was work.

As obvious as this reality is, it must be repeated and absorbed. In a culture where work is often despised and scorned as an evil we cannot do without, we need to be reminded that the curse which came later was not *work*. Work itself is a good, God-assigned task; it is a glorious calling from the Creator. "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Even marriage, instituted by God, was related to the work calling. The woman was created as a helper suitable for the man (Gen. 2:18). United together, man and woman were partners not just for

love, but for labor: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it....'" (Gen. 1:28). They were mandated to cultivate the creation by exercising dominion within it. God had invested them with minds and muscles, and attached the reward of fruit to their

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***Back at the  
beginning, in a  
creation that God  
pronounced good and  
a world in which man  
and woman found  
constant satisfaction  
and joy at all times,  
there was work.***

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work.

The plain truth that work was part of the good creation is an important truth, but it's not the greatest one. Another obvious fact too easily passed over is discovered by asking this question, Who is the first person we find working in the Bible? The answer is not Adam: "And on the seventh day *God* ended his work...." (Gen. 2:2). We learn that work is not only ordained by God, it is divine. Closely connected to God's intention to make man in His image (Gen. 1:26a) was God's intention to have man labor in ruling over creation (Gen. 1:26b). In other words, God not only made man God-like, He also gave him a God-like task.

When we are tempted to despise work, we should remember that work is not only a duty, but a great privilege and blessing. Anyone who has endured a hospital bed for a week will confirm this. But we have testimony far greater than a restless spirit or bedsores, we have God's own Word in which He reveals Himself as a God who loves to work and takes pleasure in His work. And to His highly honored creature, His image-bearer, God gives the glorious responsibility of laboring in creation.

In this delightful task of cultivating creation man must have had great pleasure. We can be sure that in the time before sin entered the world Adam and Eve never thought their work was empty, pointless, or boring. No, they were made like God, and happy in their God-like task. They had work to do which was filled by God with meaning. In this work, performed for the Lord, they saw the glory of labor.

But why does an institution of such magnificent heights lie today in the depths of derision? Why do few people think of work as enjoyable, satisfying, dignified, glorious?

### **The Plunge that Hurt Work**

The beautiful story of creation is rudely interrupted by mankind's fall into sin. This rebellion would have enormous consequences for man and the creation. The Lord responded to disobedience, in part, with curses. God pronounced sentences aimed at man and woman's distinctive and primary spheres of labor. The area where the woman was to experience great fulfillment, childbearing, would be disturbed with pain and anguish (Gen. 3:16).

The realm in which man was to enjoy satisfaction in providing sustenance for Himself and His family, would be disrupted by uncooperative soil (Gen. 3:17-19).

The Lord's mercy is clearly evident here. His punishments would not make the woman childless or the ground infertile. No, life would be preserved. But work would now be difficult and tedious, plagued with pain, sorrow, and frustration. Even the marriage partnership so important for labor would be adversely affected (Gen. 3:16). Taking all this into account, it's clear that the "hard day at work" has a long history.

But sin affected not just the realm of labor, it affected the laborers themselves. Our difficulties with work extend beyond hard ground; hard hearts were also a product of man's rebellion. When those two meet—obstinate man and stubborn soil—a dangerous combination is stirred. The poisonous gas that arises takes two different forms: surrender and pride.

When rebellious man encounters the cursed soil, one of his responses to the tedious struggle is surrender. Man quickly discovers that creation won't hand over its fruit without a fight. He shakes the tree of creation with all the strength he has but the harvest it yields is small. He wonders if it worth the trouble. Tired of exerting himself, aggravated by the resistance he encounters, he finally admits defeat. He lies down under the tree and gives up. His surrender doesn't take the form of a white flag, but it is just as striking: "I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of un-

derstanding; and there it was, all overgrown with nettles; its stone wall was broken down" (Prov. 24:30-31).

The presence of such surrender today is apparent. Nearly any employer can tell you about bored, apathetic, and slothful employees. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune to these diseases. In his *Principles of Conduct*, John Murray observes this point in his

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***Man quickly  
discovers that  
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chapter on labor: "The principle that too often dictates our practice is not the maximum of toil but the minimum necessary to escape public censure and preserve our decency."

Murray doesn't stop there. He makes this charge, "so far has our thinking diverged from the biblical patterns of thought on the divine institution of labour, and to such an extent has the concern for ease and entertainment come to prepossess us, that sloth and lassitude have invaded the most sacred vocations." (And for those who want specifics, Murray obliges. He goes on to take aim at slothful ministers with overly refined tastes, calling them "parasites" on the church.)

This surrender is only one response to the difficulty of work. Not everyone retreats; some charge for-

ward in their own strength. This second reaction, which also ignores the Creator, is one of pride. Here, sinful man attacks the unyielding creation with self-confidence. He raises his battle flag and yells, "I will overcome," and pushes forward. Although employers may welcome such ambition, and business magazines may salute such drive, God is not pleased.

In God's perfect providence the wicked often prosper. It appears as if their strength and determination have won. "Therefore pride serves as their necklace...their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish...they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth" (Psalm 73:6-9). Through the Psalmist's experience, we believers have learned that this apparent success is definitely short-term—destruction is their final destiny (Ps. 73:18). It's odd, then, that at times we still envy the wealthy wicked and try to follow in the footprints of their success. We, too, often engage in the struggle of work with hope in our own human might. While this response is not subject to the same public shame as laziness, again, it is no less offensive to God.

There is hope, however. Relief from the bipolar disorder of laziness and arrogance comes through the blood of the cross.

**Restored to Our Glorious  
Calling**

Into the disordered world, God sent His Son to *work*. Jesus Christ came to fulfill the task that the Fa-



ther had assigned Him. Avoiding the pitfalls of sloth and pride while enduring pain and resistance beyond our comprehension, He worked with His eyes set steadily on His Father above. Finally, He could pray, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John. 17:4).

For our Savior “blood, sweat, and tears” was not an expression of speech, it was a way of life. Through His struggle, the Suffering Servant redeemed us and restored us.

That second item—restoration—is one that deserves more attention than it sometimes receives. Redemption does not come with a brand new set of blueprints for life. God’s salvation does not abolish work, it restores us to work.

Remade in God’s image, we are fit to labor again for our God in meaningful ways. As Ephesians 2:10 puts it, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Delivered by Christ’s death and resurrection, we are no longer enslaved to the sloth that assumes all work is vanity, nor are we imprisoned by the pride that boasts of overcoming by our own strength. Instead, we labor in humble gratitude and firm reliance on the God who calls us to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

“In the Lord”—those are the words that must govern our toil. The New

Testament Scriptures repeatedly insist that the motivation and direction of all our efforts must be Godward. And nowhere is this emphasis more pronounced than in the apostle Paul’s words to servants:

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and

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### ***Redemption does not come with a brand new set of blueprints for life.***

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not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:22-24).

Nothing is more liberating, more encouraging, and more glorious, than to know that we labor for the Lord. Are you paralyzed by the fear of men? Are you tempted to give up because your work seems meaningless, fruitless, unbearable, or unappreciated? Look up to the heavens! You labor *coram Deo*, that is, before the face of God!

We must give thanks to God for the rediscovery of this reality during the Protestant Reformation. The true Protestant work ethic was a firm understanding of divine vocation or calling. The Reformers

stressed that each believer has a calling, a task or station appointed by the Lord. This emphasis was transforming, for nothing adds more dignity to our toil or instills a greater sense of responsibility than knowing that God Himself has assigned us our work, whatever it is.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin writes, “the Lord’s calling is in everything the beginning and foundation of well-doing.” He soon explains what this means in the midst of hardship:

[E]ach man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God. From this will arise also a singular consolation: that no task will be so sordid or base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God’s sight. (III.x.6)

### **The End of our Work**

We are further encouraged in our calling when we consider our work in light of future glory. We must learn that the value the Lord attaches to our labors never evaporates.

I recall hearing of a survey years ago in which people toward the end of their lives were asked what they wished they would have done differently. Among the top three answers was this confession, “I wish I would have done more things that will last after I die.” Most people sense the fading quality of their achievements.

The good news for Christians, as we already heard from 1 Corinthians 15:58, is that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. This truth bears repeating, especially when we realize that its firm basis is the victory of Jesus Christ over death. The resurrection context of these words, “your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58), means that our labors performed in Christ are not emptied by death. Indeed, Revelation 14:13 pronounces just such a benediction on those who have stood firm in the Lord under trial: “‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” It seems that our prayer, “establish the work of our hands for us” (Ps 90.17), is answered more fully than we could have dreamed. The Lord remembers the works of His people forever.

### Looking at Ourselves

Our renewed vision brings great en-

couragement and motivation. It should also lead to self-examination. As we labor before our God, the cross, and the glory to come, we may want to ask ourselves some searching questions.

Am I living a life worthy of the gospel in the way I labor? Am I conscious of God’s presence when my boss is absent, or when my teacher isn’t assigning a grade? Can I sincerely say that I work heartily as to the Lord?

Does my attitude toward work provoke unbelievers to ask me for a reason of the hope that is in me? Or, is my approach so similar to theirs, my complaints so ordinary, that they rarely detect a difference?

Do I work for recreation as the world does? Or, do I enjoy recreation in its proper place in order to help me work?

Is there anything uniquely Christian about the way I live after age 65? Do I recognize the dangerous possibility of making myself unserviceable to Christ’s church and kingdom by assuming the world’s view of retirement? How does the Bible’s teaching about calling invest this stage of life with real purpose and real pleasure?

When, by God’s grace, we live in the light of His Word, we enjoy the blessings of bringing honor to our God, of finding satisfaction in our toil, and of making the most of every opportunity to win our neighbor for Christ.

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# Educating our Children

## *Part Two*

We have been considering the assertion that State or Public schools ought not to be an option for Reformed parents when sending their children to school. We contended last time that the goal or purpose of State education is wrong. It stands opposed to Christianity since it insists on a “religion of humanity.” Using outcome based education, public education places its stress on secular humanism. That may not be the goal of some individual teachers. That may not always even be the goal of a few schools them-

selves. But it is the goal of government who determines by its appointed educators the course of State education.

### Who Should Educate

But there is a second reason that public education of covenant children by the State is not an option. It is not the duty or the calling of the State either to provide education or determine the content of the education of children. We certainly can understand well why the State has assumed this task to itself. In fact,

the reason is a noble one. Government has seen the neglect of this important matter, i.e., the education of children, by parents. The government has taken this task upon itself in order to avoid a nation of ignoramuses. Far too many parents would fail to instruct their children in the essentials of life. The State therefore rightfully requires of all parents to see to it that their children receive an education. The Scripture is clear in Romans 13 and other passages that it belongs to the authority of the State to make and uphold laws that will care for and protect its citizens even in the area of education. But the government oversteps its

**Wilbur Bruinsma**



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bounds when it takes upon itself the actual education itself.

Although we certainly can be thankful that, at this time, the State does not demand we use its education, nevertheless that it assumes as its task the actual education of our children does not lie within its sphere of authority. The Bible clearly teaches that all instruction of children is given into hands of parents. Parents are duty bound to teach their children. And certainly if they are unable to do so, as is true of most of us, they must be in complete control of their children's education. The instruction of their children ought not be subject to the control of the State.

That this duty belongs to parents and not State is simple to find in Scripture. We read in Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up." We read in Ephesians 6:4, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." We read in Psalm 78:5,6, "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel; which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born: who should arise and declare them to their children."

It is on the basis of Scripture that the Church Order of Dordrecht in-

cludes Article 21, "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant." The duty to instruct our children belongs to parents. It is a demand of the covenant. Neither is this duty limited only to the religious life of our children. All instruction, even in the academics of life, may never be divorced from faith or the objective

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***All instruction, even  
in the academics of  
life, may never be  
divorced from faith  
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of the Scriptures.***

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rule of the Scriptures. Math, history, geography, music, English all need to be taught from a Scriptural perspective. And the parent is called by God to teach their children all of these things from that perspective. That is why we wrote last month of the fact that the Bible really teaches us of two spheres where learning must take place. These coupled together make our instruction strong: the church and the home.

But the point is here: public schooling is principally not an option. It does not belong to the State to see to it our children are educated and instructed even in things academic. This is a duty that belongs to the home. It is a calling that belongs to parents. Parents therefore must have the say-so in what is taught

their children. And in these last days in which we live, this principle certainly is bearing itself out. We must be convicted of the need of parental instruction of our children. They are children of the covenant and of the church of Christ in this world. They are not wards of the State.

### **Why We Have Schools**

But how do we make the jump from the need for parents to instruct their children in these things to the fact that we are having a school do this for us? First of all, consider who runs the Reformed Christian day school. Parents do. Not the teachers. Not even the school board ultimately runs the school. The parents of those children who attend the school are in control of the education in Reformed Christian schools. Parents teach their children by means of a school board and by means of our teachers, but the Reformed Christian school is a parental school.

Most of us as parents do not have the time or the stamina to instruct our children in academics. In fact, we might as well admit it: most of us do not have the ability to teach our children in these academics. Some of us do, of course. But what is true of a few certainly is not true of most parents. Dr. H. Bouwman in his book *Scholen* (translated into the English: *Schools*) describes the origin of schools:

And according as humanity broadened out, and the need of intellectual development arose, the parents felt that they could not fulfill the task of rearing and instructing by themselves, and they looked

for help. Before long, the parents formed an association in order jointly to appoint one to rear and instruct and - with this the school was born.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, our Christian schools arose out the desire of Christian parents to keep their children abreast of the academics.

And surely there is a need for that. The rate that knowledge is increasing in so many different areas of life is something with which I, as a parent, cannot keep up. So Reformed parents find teachers who believe the same way they do and who are willing to teach their covenant children in these areas. We do not simply find any teacher who comes along to teach our children the academics of life. We find Christian teachers to do this. We realize that these subjects must be taught from the perspective of the Scriptures. It is for that reason that we establish Christian schools and not simply parental schools. As fellow Christians we band together because we share in common our Christianity. Our school boards therefore are made up of men who are followers of Christ together with us. Our teachers are followers of Christ who themselves seek to walk in His footsteps. And we together take great care to teach our children to be followers of Christ in everything that they do.

### **Reformed and Christian Schools**

Yet, there is something more involved in establishing a school than simply a "generic" Christian school. There are lots of Christian schools available. But a Reformed

believer must choose to send, if at all possible, his children to a Christian school which teaches them through the eyes of the Reformed faith. Why? Because they are Reformed believers! These parents maintain that the Reformed faith as set forth in the Reformed Confessions are the truth of the Scripture. That, in turn, means two things as far as the education of their children is concerned.

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***A Reformed parent desires that his children look at math, reading, history, or whatever the subject might be through Reformed spectacles.***

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It means, first of all, that the instruction Reformed parents desire for their children in the Christian school is taught from a distinctively Reformed perspective. The doctrines of the Reformed faith sharply distinguish that school from those schools which teach the free-will of fallen man, the general love of God for every man, and the universal atonement of Christ for every person.

A Reformed parent desires that his children look at math, reading, history, or whatever the subject might be through Reformed spectacles. He wants them to see and understand the sovereignty of God in creation, in history, and in God's

work in His church. He wants his children to see things from a biblical perspective - that means through the glasses of the Reformed faith. That is what sets apart a Reformed Christian school from others.

That means, in the second place, that a Reformed believer desires to have his children taught as covenant children. It is not only State run schools that have certain perspectives on education. There are different perspectives in Christian education as well. Some Christian schools are established for the purpose of converting children. All the classes are geared toward converting children - as if children of believing parents are all unbelievers who need to accept Christ.

Reformed believers maintain that God normally regenerates and calls children of believers in infancy and therefore there is no need to try and persuade children to accept Christ by means of their education. Reformed parents cling to covenant promises of God and maintain that the children God has given them are therefore children of the covenant and ought to be treated as such. And for that reason a Reformed parent, when given the opportunity, seeks out a school that is both Christian, but more specifically, Reformed and Christian in its perspective.

### **The Challenge**

Just a question yet: call it a challenge, if you will. How convicted are you of Reformed Christian education? Do you send your children to a Reformed school because you simply prefer it? Is it to you just a nice school, it has good teachers,



the education received in it is academically excellent, or because it is in the neighborhood?

Certainly we cannot convict those who are not convicted. But it was indeed that conviction, I believe, which motivated solidly Reformed fathers and mothers in the past and in the present to establish the schools that we have. If it were not for that conviction, these schools would have failed. The Reformed Christian schools of today need people who are spiritually convicted.

As for this believing parent a Christian school of this sort is not a preference! To send my children to a public school when given this blessed option, would be wrong. My children and their souls are too precious to me. I take my calling as a parent that seriously! I refuse to play games with their spiritual lives for any reason. I thank God that He has in His grace worked the faith and courage in the hearts of believing parents to establish Reformed schools where I can send my children. What a tremen-

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dous blessing!

1. David J. Engelsma, "Reformed Education," (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Assoc., 1977): 6,7

# Introducing the 'New Perspective on Paul'

While a graduate student in the late 1970's at Princeton Theological Seminary, I frequently joined students in the departments of theology and biblical studies in a debate regarding the merits of our respective fields of study. Our discussions often turned to the perception of a wide chasm between the interests of the academy and of the pew. Those of us who were in the department of theology were especially critical of the discipline of biblical studies as irrelevant to the life and ministry of the church. Did the church or the pulpit, we asked, really need another lengthy article on some arcane feature of the biblical text? And, if the biblical texts were as hopelessly diverse and inconsistent in their teaching as the biblical students maintained, then what difference would it make what the text taught? After all, one text is as good as any other, and if they do not agree with each other, who is to say "my text is not better than yours"?

To complicate matters further, there was the rather daunting problem of the historical distance between "then" and "now." Even if we were able to determine what these "ancient texts" were saying, there was the additional problem of bridging the divide between what people in ancient times believed

and what people believe today.

So far as we would-be systematic theologians were concerned, it was rather unlikely that any help for the church's proclamation of the gospel would be forthcoming from the field of biblical studies. Needless to say, the students of biblical studies were no more hopeful regarding the discipline of theology. Whatever the challenges facing students of the biblical texts, at least they were busy with actual texts! Better to confront the challenges of understanding the Bible than to ignore, as they accused the theology students of doing, the texts altogether.

When I consider the development in recent decades of what is known as the "new perspective on Paul," I am newly reminded of those graduate school conversations. One of the more striking illustrations of the gap between contemporary biblical scholarship and the pulpit or pew is the emergence in biblical studies, particularly studies of the epistles of the apostle Paul, of this new view. Whereas in most Protestant churches, especially Lutheran and Reformed churches whose adherence to their confessions is more than a matter of lip service, the teaching of justification by faith alone remains a matter of spe-

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*"...in most Protestant churches...the teaching of justification by faith alone remains a matter of special emphasis."*

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cial emphasis.

Pauline scholars in the last several decades have engaged in a process of thorough-going deconstruction of the doctrine. Indeed, so widespread and influential is this new reading of Paul, which calls into question the Reformation's understanding of the gospel, that it might be regarded as something of a consensus opinion among contemporary Bible scholars. Articles and books, which address one or another feature of this new perspective, are being produced in such abundance that it has become virtually impossible for the non-expert to keep up with the subject.

Though there are some signs that the new perspective on Paul is making itself felt more widely in non-scholarly circles, so far it has largely been the subject of discussion among biblical scholars. However, whatever the gap between academy and pulpit, lectern and pew, this new approach to the interpretation of Paul is so revolutionary and far-reaching in its implications, it seems unlikely that it will not, sooner or later, have a profound affect upon the life and ministry of the church. If the Reformation misunderstood the gospel, as the new view intimates, things cannot go on as before. Not only must this be reflected in a new way of preaching the gospel, but it also has rather obvious implications for the historic division between Protestantism and Catholicism. It will also challenge directly churches whose confessions are the product of, and give summary expression to, the gospel as it was understood at the time of the Reformation.

Consequently, though many read-

ers of *The Outlook* may be happily unaware of the new perspective on Paul, it is not a development that can be safely or responsibly ignored. Whatever the gap between academy and pew, ideas tend to have legs (or to change the image, tentacles) that will eventually take them into the church. Seminary students who are taught by professors sympathetic to the new perspective will likely allow the seeds to germinate and produce their fruit in their own ministries. Churches

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and church members who are uninformed about the new perspective could be easily caught unawares. Furthermore, since the new perspective deals with things as basic as the meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christian believers have the duty to assess its claims by the standard of the Word of God in Scripture.

For these reasons, I am beginning in this and in subsequent articles a somewhat extended introduction to and evaluation of this new perspective. Admittedly, this is a rather hazardous, if not foolhardy, undertaking on my part. I can claim no particular expertise in this area. Worse yet, I am a doctrinal theologian so that, to take up this subject, is to enter territory already occupied by those who are experts in

biblical, and especially Pauline, studies. And if those who are experts in biblical studies confess their inability to keep pace with the literature on the subject, how much less can I pretend to have kept pace with developments in this area. However, despite the risks attendant upon my entering this field, the subject is too important to ignore. If this subject has to do with our understanding of the gospel, then it is incumbent upon us to venture into this territory, however cautiously.

In order to get started in this exploration of the new perspective, I will begin in this article with a brief statement of the contrast between the older, Reformation understanding of the gospel and the new perspective. In subsequent articles, we will consider the background and history of the development of the new perspective, including a summary of the arguments of some of its key representatives. After that we will conclude with an evaluation of the new perspective in the light of Scripture and the confessions.

**The Reformation  
Understanding of the Gospel**

The classic Reformation understanding of the gospel is well known. It is an understanding that has shaped the preaching of the Protestant church since the time of the Reformation. It is enshrined in the confessions and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Reformation view of the gospel, which sharply opposed the medieval Roman Catholic view, occasioned the most far-reaching division within the Christian church in her history. For the





Reformers, so serious was the corruption of the gospel in the Roman Catholic Church that they were compelled to regard it as no longer a true expression of the church of Jesus Christ on earth.

Though there were differences between Luther and Calvin in their understanding of the gospel, on the primary themes they largely agreed. For Luther and the Lutheran churches, the central point of the gospel is the free justification of sinners through the grace of Christ received by faith alone, apart from works done in obedience to the law. This doctrine of justification is the “article of the standing or the falling of the church” (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*).<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Calvin maintained in his *Institutes* that the teaching of free justification is the “main hinge of the Christian religion.”<sup>2</sup> Though for Calvin justification was not the whole of the gospel—Calvin insisted that justified sinners were simultaneously sanctified by the grace of Christ’s Spirit—it was no doubt the most pivotal feature of the good news of God’s salvation in Christ.

In their understanding of the gospel of free justification, Luther and Calvin insisted upon several key points.

**First**, the medieval Roman Catholic doctrine of justification compromised the gospel by emphasizing obedience to the law as a partial, meritorious basis for our justification. Though the Roman Catholic Church acknowledged the priority of God’s grace and mercy in Christ, it insisted that the be-

liever must cooperate with God’s grace by obeying the commandments of God and in so doing merit further or increased justification. In this understanding of the gospel, believers are saved, not by grace alone through the work of Christ alone received by faith alone, but by grace *plus works*.<sup>3</sup> The righteousness that makes believers acceptable to God is not exclusively the righteousness of Christ, but in-

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*Though there were differences between Luther and Calvin in their understanding of the gospel, on the primary themes they largely agreed.*

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cludes the good works of believers.

**Second**, Luther especially emphasized the essential similarity between the Roman Catholic teaching of salvation by meritorious good works and the Pharasaical or Judaizing teaching of salvation by obedience to the commandments of God. In Luther and Calvin’s polemics with the Medieval church, the charge was often made that the Roman Catholic Church was making the same error as had earlier characterized the religion of the Pharisees and Judaism at the time of the writing of the New Testament. Just as the Pharisees trusted in their own righteousness before God as the basis for their claim upon his favor and mercy, so the Roman Catholic doctrine of justifi-

cation by grace plus works encouraged a similar trust in one’s own righteousness. The apostle Paul’s arguments with the Judaizers in Romans and Galatians, therefore, anticipated the Reformers’ opposition to the Catholic doctrine of righteousness by works.<sup>4</sup>

**Third**, in Luther and Calvin’s understanding of the believer’s justification or acceptance with God, a sharp contrast is drawn between the law and the gospel. The law, at least in its first or theological use, is a mirror that teaches the believer to know his or her sinfulness before God. The law in this use can only condemn and expose the unrighteousness of sinners before God.

In the first and second tables of the law, we are commanded to live a life of perfect love for God and neighbor. However, there is no one who is righteous by this standard, who is able to keep the requirements of the law perfectly and on that account stand before God justified. Only Christ, who obeyed the law perfectly and suffered its penalty in the place of his people, can obtain for sinners the righteousness by which they are acceptable to God. The contrast between the law and the gospel, therefore, is the contrast between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith. Either we are saved (partly or wholly) by our obedience to the law or we are saved by Christ’s obedience for us. More than Luther, Calvin also insisted upon the law’s use in the Christian life and a rule of gratitude. However, with Luther he maintained that the law has no role to play in the believer’s justification before God.

**Fourth**, parallel to the contrast between the law and the gospel, Luther and Calvin insisted that we receive the gift of God's grace and righteousness in Christ by the hand of faith alone. God grants and imputes to believers the perfect righteousness and obedience of Christ, which is received by faith only. Though the faith that receives God's grace in Christ is an active and fruitful faith, it is *not on account of* its fruit-bearing that faith justifies. What distinguishes faith as the appropriate instrument by which to receive God's grace is that it looks outside of itself to Christ alone as the only and perfect Savior. Faith receives the righteousness of Christ freely imputed to believers by God.<sup>5</sup>

In this Reformation understanding of the gospel, the religious issue that takes precedence over all others is the issue of the sinner's standing before God. How can sinners, who have disobeyed the law of God and are worthy of its curse and condemnation, find favor with a holy and righteous God? The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ answers this question. God has provided for the sinner's need through the provision of Christ as Mediator. By means of his perfect life of obedience and substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin, Christ has obtained or merited righteousness, favor and life for his people. All the demands of the law have been met for believers in Christ. Salvation is, accordingly, a free gift to be received by faith alone.

#### **The New Perspective on Paul**

The Reformation understanding of the gospel is not difficult to identify. However, matters are not as

simple when it comes to the new perspective on Paul. As we shall see in subsequent articles, there are considerable differences of emphasis and position among writers who, broadly speaking, are identified with the new perspective.<sup>6</sup> Some writers whom others have identified as advocates of this new approach are reluctant to regard themselves as advocates of the new perspective, since this seems to belittle the real differences between their views and others. Despite this difficulty, however, it is

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***[T]he new perspective insists that the problem within Judaism was not the law as such, but Israel's claim to be the exclusive community of God's people.***

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possible to identify several features of the new perspective on Paul that are generally present, to one degree or another, among writers associated with the new approach.

**First**, the new perspective is based upon a comprehensive re-evaluation and assessment of the patterns of religious belief among the Pharisees and the Jewish community contemporaneous with the writing of the New Testament. Contrary to the Reformation's claim that the Pharisees in particular, and Judaism in general, were representative of a "works righteousness" religious practice, the new perspective

maintains that "second temple" Judaism emphasized God's gracious election and initiative in embracing his people, Israel. Judaism never taught that those who belonged to the covenant community were members by virtue of their own good works and acts of obedience to the law (Torah) of God. Rather, Judaism was a religion of grace in which believers were brought into covenant relationship with God by the initiative of His electing grace. To be sure, those who were members of the covenant community were obligated to obey the law of God in order to maintain their position in the community. But this obedience to the law was not the ground upon which Israel was embraced within God's favor. The Reformation's claim, therefore, that Judaism was a legalistic religion, which anticipated the legalism of the Roman Catholic church, is untenable.

**Second**, the Reformation's insistence upon a sharp distinction between law and gospel in the believer's justification is likewise based upon a misreading of the gospel and of Paul's experience. Whereas the Reformers viewed the law as exposing human (whether Jewish or Gentile) sinfulness before God, the new perspective insists that the problem within Judaism was not the law as such, but Israel's claim to be the exclusive community of God's people. The boasting that the apostle Paul opposes in his epistles is not the claim to find favor with God on the basis of obedience to the law. Rather, it is the boasting in those "works of the law" that *distinguish* Jews from Gentiles, and mark off the former as the exclusive objects of God's



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favor and mercy. According to the new perspective, the problem the apostle Paul opposed in his epistles was not the problem of a self-righteous boasting before God, which assumes that our standing with God is based upon meritorious good works. The problem Paul opposed was the exclusivistic claims of many Jews who maintained that they alone were numbered among the people of God by virtue of their keeping certain requirements of the law (circumcision, feast day observances, dietary laws) that distinguished or separated them from the Gentiles.

**Third,** the new perspective argues that Paul's doctrine of justification, accordingly, was not the central theme of his gospel, nor was it addressed to the problem of legalism. Justification is a doctrine that addresses the specific problem of *who is included within the covenant community, particularly whether Gentiles also are included*. When Paul speaks, therefore, of justification by grace through faith, apart from the works of the law, he is teaching that all become members of the covenant community through faith in Christ, not by submitting to the requirements for inclusion among the Jews as a distinct people. This means that the problem with Judaism was not that it was legalistic and self-righteous. The problem with Judaism was that it was not Christianity. It did not recognize the new reality of God's saving presence in Jesus Christ whereby all, Jew and Gentile alike, are brought into the number of God's covenant people.

**Fourth,** contrary to the Refor-

mation's claim that the gospel is the solution to the plight of human sinfulness (and therefore the gospel is really about how sinners can be saved), the new perspective suggests that Paul's gospel moves from "solution" to "plight." Paul starts with the conviction that faith in Christ is the one way to inclusion among the covenant people of God. From that conviction the apostle Paul develops his particular view of the law, not as an instrument whereby our sinfulness is aggravated, but as an instrument

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***Justification is a doctrine that addresses the specific problem of who is included within the covenant community...***

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whereby Israel sought to oppose the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God. The problem with Judaism was not that the law was viewed as a means of self-justification before God, but that the law was misused as a means of excluding the Gentiles rather than of including them.

**Fifth,** the new perspective, as should be evident from the points mentioned thus far, believes that the older reading of Paul paid insufficient attention to the historical background and context for Paul's presentation of the Christian gospel. In order to understand Paul's epistles, and for that matter the

New Testament Scriptures, it is necessary to begin with a careful study and analysis of the Judaic background of Paul's gospel. When Paul was converted, he did not cease to be who he was previously within Judaism. Instead, he discovered in the gospel of God's work in Christ the fulfillment and realization of all that was true within Judaism. According to proponents of the new perspective, the error of the Reformation's reading of the apostle Paul stemmed from its failure to read his letters in their first century context. Due to the Reformation's pre-occupation with the teaching of Medieval Roman Catholicism on the doctrine of justification, it neglected to read Paul against the background of the history of Judaism. Rather than viewing Judaism in its historical setting, the Reformation tended to view Judaism as a kind of proto-type of the legalism of Catholic teaching about salvation.

**And sixth,** the new perspective maintains that the Reformation's zeal to exclude good works altogether from playing any role in the believer's justification was inordinate. Just as Judaism taught that God's people are admitted into the covenant by grace, but kept in the covenant by a life of faithful covenant keeping, so the apostle Paul taught a kind of initial justification (or inclusion among the covenant people) by grace and a further or final justification by works. The new perspective maintains that the Reformation's understanding of justification failed to recognize that Paul developed the doctrine in relation to the specific problem of Judaizers who refused to include the Gentiles within the covenant

people of God. It also failed to realize that, once a believer is included among the people of God, works done in obedience to the law play a legitimate role in “maintaining” the covenant relationship. Indeed, when Paul says that “only doers of the law will be justified” (Rom. 2:13), he is speaking of the final (or eschatological) justification in which the believer’s works will play an important role. The answer, therefore, to the apparent problem of the Reformation’s doctrine of justification (if we are saved by grace alone, then what becomes of the necessity of our good works?) is the recognition that justification has both an initial and a final reference. Believers enjoy their initial justification or inclusion among God’s covenant people by grace alone, but their final justification is based in part upon their continuance in the way of obedience.

### Conclusion

Though these summaries of the Reformation and new perspectives on Paul are rather general and open-ended, they are sufficient to illustrate the importance of the new perspective for an understanding of the gospel. If the new perspective more adequately reads Paul than the Reformation, a substantially new view of the gospel must prevail. No longer is the gospel about what God has done in Christ to save unworthy sinners. Nor is it about the way sinners, who are under the condemnation and curse of the law, can find acceptance with God through the saving work of Christ, the Mediator. Christ did not come to solve the problem of human sinfulness by keeping the law’s demand (active obedience) and suffering its penalty (passive obedience). Rather, the

gospel is about who ought to be numbered among the covenant people of God. The gospel has more to do with reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles than it has to do with reconciliation between sinners and a holy God. The gospel, in other words, is not about calling sinners to find salvation through faith in Christ. The gospel, according to the new perspective, has to do with God’s work in Christ to tear down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, to bring the promises of the covenant to all peoples through faith in Christ.

For those familiar with the three-part division of the Heidelberg Catechism, the new perspective amounts to the suggestion that a new catechism should be written. This new catechism would not begin with the knowledge of our sin and misery. The first part of the new catechism would teach that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, who believe in Jesus Christ are included among God’s covenant people. The second part would expose as sinful any attempt to set forth additional requirements, including any ceremonial provisions of the law (e.g. circumcision, feast day observances), other than faith in Christ as necessary to inclusion among God’s covenant people. The third part would then spell out the requirements of obedience that are necessary to “stay in” the covenant. This third part would emphasize that, though we are admitted into the number of God’s people by grace (initial justification), our final justification or vindication awaits the final judgment, which will be based upon faith and its fruit in a life of good works.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Though this language is often attributed to Luther, it actually reflects the language of the *Smalcald Articles* (1537), an early Lutheran statement of faith that was later included among the Lutheran confessional documents with the *Formula of Concord* (1576). Article II.1 states, “Christ alone is our salvation, all stands or falls with this major article.” Luther, however, used similar language in his *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians* (ed. P. S. Watson; Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1972 [reprint]), p. 143: “[justification is] the principal article of all Christian doctrine, which makes true Christians indeed.”

<sup>2</sup> *Institutes* III.xi.1 (ed. John T. McNeill; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). Calvin uses language similar to Luther’s and the Lutheran tradition in a sermon on Luke 1:5-10: “[justification is] the principle of the whole doctrine of salvation and the foundation of all religion” (as cited by F. Wendel, *Calvin* [London: Collins, 1974], p. 256).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, Decree on Justification, Chap. XVI (quoted from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II: *The Greek and Latin Creeds* [Harper & Row, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985], p. 107), “And, for this cause, life eternal is to be proposed to those working well *unto the end*, and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ, and as a reward which is according to the promise of God himself, to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits.”

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, for example, in his commentary on Philippians 3:8, spoke of the Roman Catholics of his time as “present-day Pharisees” who uphold “their own merits against Christ.” See *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance



and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism expresses clearly this understanding of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Q. & A. 61: "Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith? Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only." Faith alone justifies because it serves as the exclusive instrument by which to receive the imputed righteousness of Christ as a free gift.

<sup>6</sup> For surveys of the history and development of the new perspective, see Douglas Moo, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1986): 287-307; Frank Thielman, *A Contextual Approach to Paul & the Law* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994), pp. 9-47; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 13-31; Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); and Gerhard H. Visscher, "New Views Regarding Legalism and Exclusivism in Judaism: Is there a need to reinterpret Paul?," *Koinonia* 18/2 (1999): 15-42.

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# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1965*

### January 1965

"Conservatism is conserving to-day what was progressivism a quarter of a century ago."

*A Choice, Not an Echo*  
Edwin H. Palmer

"...basic to sound child training, to missions, to educational theory and practice, yes to all of life, is sound theology."

*Hypostatic Thinking*  
Edward Heerema

"It cannot be said of North American evangelical Christians that they have exerted themselves very actively in the public areas of national life."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Among Christians criticism must be possible for we all subject ourselves to the one Word which is our first and final guide in charting our path through the jungle of problems we face."

*Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*  
Bernard Zylstra

"...when believers of the infallible Word exchange ideas amongst each other about evolution they cannot seriously discuss whether man has descended from animals."

*What About Evolution*  
Russell W. Maatman

### February 1965

"The present trend of countless church musicians to use and condone a style of music no longer unique in its style and mood and which flaunts tradition can only

bring musical chaos."

*Our Utmost for His Highest*  
James De Jonge

"Never should we send up theological "trial balloons," thereby leading others down a road the end of which we ourselves have not thoroughly examined. Let us encourage theological study; but beware of theological drifting."

*Covenantal Awareness*  
George Gritter

### March 1965

"Struggle is one of the chief characteristics of the church of all ages. This is not so much the struggle for survival, since we have the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." It is rather a struggle for purity of doctrine and life within the church."

*Our Call to Freedom in a Time of Crisis*  
August De Berdt

"All the good showered on this world, dispensed by Christ in the exercise of His exalted lordship, is related to the death of Christ and accrues to man in one way or another from the death of Christ. If so, it was designed to accrue from the death of Christ. Since many of these blessings fall short of salvation and are enjoyed by many who never become possessors of salvation, we must say that the design of Christ's death is more inclusive than the blessings that belong specifically to the atonement."

\* \* \* \* \*

"The benefit was only temporary

and greater guilt devolves upon the person from the fact that he participated in it and then came to count the blood by which it was conveyed an unholy thing.”

*The Free Offer of the Gospel and the Extent of the Atonement*

John Murray

“There can be no intellectual reason for rejecting the record of the Bible. The matter is basically spiritual. One can humbly bow before God and place faith in Him who created the universe and is absolutely qualified to give us answers, or one can sinfully resist Him and place faith in man by listening to those who are unregenerate sinners, who hate God, and who refuse to give Him a place in their scientific methodology and therefore have no foothold but their own prejudiced minds.”

*Does Science Contradict the Scriptures*

Davis A. Young

#### April 1965

“There is the danger of ‘suspicionism’ if I may coin a word. It is the attitude of finding, or at least looking for a heretic behind every shrub in the ecclesiastical garden and of placing the worst possible construction on every sound that issues from a suspect.

*An Aroused Laity*

R. B. Kuiper

#### May - June 1965

“There is much to say for the separation of church and state, but nothing to say for the separation of the state from God.”

*Duality and Ethics*

Carl F. H. Henry

#### July - August 1965

“Strange as it may seem to the outsider, the believing community finds itself repeatedly rent with contradictory convictions and conduct. Some argue vehemently that we can be faithful to Christ in matters political and social only by adopting the conservative platform. Others are equally insistent that obedience to God demands the liberal response. The former appeal to God’s leadings in history that have provided patterns for a kind of stability, justice and order so sorely needed in an apostate world. The latter urge us to open our eyes to the painful reality that every human response stands under God’s judgment and requires ongoing reformation.

*Where the Lines Should Be*

*Drawn*

Peter Y. De Jong

#### October 1965

“As reformed people we hate the very idea of separation. It is the duty of every church member to stay in his church as long as he can, but on one condition only: he has to be constantly engaged in the task of reforming his church. He has to fight the good fight of faith in his church, without hesitation and without compromise. If the church refuses to listen to him but forces the one compromise after the other upon him, the time will come when a child of God must leave his church. This is not ‘separatism.’ In itself it has nothing to do with ‘pride, intolerance and personal aggressiveness.’ It is simply a matter of obedience and duty.”

*Ecumenicity and Separation*

Klaas Runia

#### November 1965

“The world’s greatest need is a Redeemer, not a better philosophy. The world doesn’t need a new morality nearly as much as a new life. Our greatest need is not reformation but regeneration.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“It seems to me that one reason the church has been so ineffective in dealing with the plight of men is that she, herself, has lost faith in the redeeming power of Christ.”

*Rise Up, Ye Men of God!*

John Engbers

#### December 1965

“I fear very much that a good deal of our religion is of custom, form, and superstition. I fear very much that we are motivated by something other than a desire to be saved and to be made like Jesus Christ in worship and life.

*“The Desire of All Nations”*

John R. De Witt

“A faith that is content to be a mere subjective feeling will not likely see the need for holding to orthodox positions.”

*“He That Cometh”*

Martin H. Woudstra





# Book Reviews

**Knoop, Hermanus. *A Theatre in Dachau*. Translated from the Dutch by A. Petter and Roelof A. Janssen. Neerlandia, AB / Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2001. 143 pp; \$14.95 CN, \$12.90 US. paperback.**

After reading this book it is hard to believe that anyone would want to deny the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Those dreadful years of Nazi oppression in the Netherlands are catalogued here in an amazing way. Not only Jews – but faithful ministers of God’s Word were touched, too. And from the caldron of torture the Lord received some of His servants to Himself: Revs. Kapteyn, Sietsma, and Tunderman. Others came through it, refined in God’s crucible.

Rev. Hermanus Knoop, the author, was serving as Minister of the Word of the Reformed (Gereformeerde) Church at Rotterdam-Delfshaven in 1940. Because he would pray for the legitimate government and the Queen of the Netherlands, the Gestapo took him. He wrote; “I was in the clutch of the Beast for the Word of God and for the Testimony of Jesus Christ. And this was to no other purpose than that I should become a theatre to the world and to angels and to men”(p. 19). In his preface to this book, Dr. Klaas Schilder explains that the term “theatre” is a “spectacle.” He became a spectacle for Christ!

Rev. Knoop outlines the background leading up to his imprisonment, his imprisonment at Scheveningen, and then his removal to Dachau in April 1942.

For a year and a half he remained there until his sudden discharge. The time there was filled with torture and pain. Oh, how God’s own suffered! He wrote, “Very few understood that I was carrying on a struggle of principles, and that my resistance was one of faith for the sake of my church, country, and people” (p. 59). Toward the end of the book where Knoop is writing about the Holy Spirit’s work at Dachau, and after explaining something of Dachau’s torture, he wrote:

all the horrors that I have pictured for you—and I have not told all, but only a snatch here and there—you may forget. But that which I am about to narrate now may not be surrendered to oblivion. For these are “the praises of the LORD and His strength, and His wonderful works that He has done”. . . I must tell them so “that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their

fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Ps. 78:4b-8) (p. 127).

Then he adds:

Indeed, in Dachau the God of grace did wonders of grace by His Word and Spirit every day. Oh, it was indeed a dreadful time for me that I spent there, and yet it is not at all a hollow phrase when I say that I would for no amount of money have missed this time of my life, since it was so unspeakably rich in grace. I saw God there. The LORD was in this place. It was a house of God and a Gate of heaven (p. 127).

Of course, we ask how these things could happen, and where was the church in these days? He writes that Christians complained about the pro-German spirit alive among the church leaders and in the church periodicals. Then he gives this assessment:

The Reformed (Gereformeerde) Churches do not stand out among the Christian churches for courageous and tenacious resistance for the faith. Later a highly placed Gestapo testified that the Reformed Gereformeerde) Churches were the most pliable...*This grief was for the corruption rooted at the centre of the institution* (p. 71).

A sad commentary, indeed!

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(continued from page 23)

The beauty of this book is found in the constant Christian testimony found in it. It is more than an account of atrocity; it is his personal reactions as a firmly founded believer to whom the Holy Spirit continued to apply God's marvelous Word.

Every believer should read this little volume. This reviewer could hardly put it down because it is so moving.

You may purchase a copy of this book at a Christian Bookstore or through Inheritance Publications, Box, 154, Neerlandia, AB, Canada TOG 1R0, or Box 366, Pella, IA 50219. Phone or fax is toll free: 1-800-552-2524.

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