

# References

HOEKSEMA

# REFORMED DOGMATICS

Second Edition Volume 2

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# THE FOURTH LOCUS Soteriology

#### Chapter 23

# **Introduction: Approaches to Soteriology**

Soteriology is the locus of dogmatics that treats the work of God through Christ whereby he realizes his covenant in the hearts of the elect by making them partakers of all the benefits of that covenant as Jesus Christ our Lord has merited them. It is necessary to emphasize from the outset that soteriology is theology and must be *theologically* conceived. It is necessary to emphasize this over against all forms of Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, synergism, and Arminianism.

#### Pelagianism

Pelagianism really has no room for any doctrine of grace and salvation. It denies the necessity of grace and of the Holy Spirit as the author of salvation. It holds that the will of man is free, the essence of this freedom being his capability of choosing either for the good or for the evil. The guilt of Adam cannot be and is not imputed to the human race, nor is the human nature corrupted by the sin of our first father. There is no original guilt and original corruption or pollution. Man is still capable by nature of obeying the law and of entering into eternal life by so doing. Grace is not necessary unto life eternal. As far as Pelagius speaks of grace, it is merely to facilitate man's obeying the law. It is evident that in this system there is no room at all for soteriology.

#### Semi-Pelagianism

Especially Augustine emphasized predestination and the total depravity of the natural man and, therefore, the complete dependence of the sinner on sovereign grace. But these truths of absolute and unconditional predestination and of the total depravity of the natural man and of his inability to work anything towards his own salvation soon met with opposition. Although many still adhered to the Augustinian view, semi-Pelagianism arose within the church—witness the opposition to and the condemnation of Gottschalk in the ninth century. Most of the scholastics, such as Thomas Aquinas and Anselm, maintained the Augustinian conception of predestination. Thomas Aquinas emphasized that predestination is not conditioned by anything in man:

It is impossible that the total effect of predestination should in any degree be caused from our side; because whatever is in man disposing him to salvation is altogether comprehended under the effect of predestination, including even the preparation itself for grace.[1]

Others departed from the Augustianian conception of predestination. Alexander of Hales evidently was disposed to deny the unconditional character of predestination:

Predestination expresses not alone the will of God, but the will together with the foreknowledge that they [the elect] will make a good use of his gift. He occupies the same attitude toward all, but not all occupy the same attitude toward him; and accordingly predestination is not of all, because predestination is conditioned upon the foreknowledge that he [who is its object] will make a good use through free will of divine gifts.[2]

The same may be said of Bonaventura and Duns Scotus. In fact, after the death of Duns Scotus there was a widespread defection from the Augustinian doctrine, according to the English theologian

Bradwardine, who said, "Almost the whole world had fallen into the errors of Pelagianism."[3]

#### **Romanism**

The Romish Church, although apparently condemning semi-Pelagianism, in reality fundamentally agrees with it. First, it places the church between the sinner and God, as the author of salvation, and teaches that regeneration takes place through baptism. Further, in regard to those who are not baptized in infancy, Rome teaches a *gratia sufficiens* (*sufficient grace*), which consists in the illumination of the mind and a strengthening of the will by the Holy Spirit. Man is able either to reject or to accept this grace. Should man reject this grace, he receives *gratia adjuvans* or *cooperans* (*assisting* or *cooperating grace*) and thus cooperates to prepare himself for the *gratia infusa* (*infused grace*), which in the Roman Catholic mind is the same as the grace of justification:

The Synod furthermore declares, that, in adults, the beginning of the said Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God [praeveniente gratia summendum esse], through Jesus Christ, that is to say, from his vocation, whereby, without any merits existing on their parts, they are called; that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through his quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace [eidem gratiae libere assentiendo et cooperando]: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly inactive while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it.[4]

#### Lutheranism

The Lutherans generally are synergistic. Luther at first adhered to the truth of absolute predestination and personally never repudiated it completely, although he weakened in his later life because he was afraid of the abuse that might be made of this doctrine. But Melanchthon, under whose influence Luther stood, and who had a strong effect upon the development of Lutheranism, would have nothing of this truth. He believed in the possibility of salvation for all and taught that the will of man cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation.

It is true that in the Formula of Concord a certain form of predestination is taught; but that this predestination is absolutely sovereign and unconditional is certainly not maintained:

But the predestination or eternal election of God extends only to the good and beloved children of God, and this is the cause of their salvation. For it procures their salvation, and appoints those things which pertain to it. Upon this predestination of God our salvation is so founded that the gates of hell can not prevail against it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

But Christ calls all sinners to him, and promises to give them rest. And he earnestly wishes that all men may come to him, and suffer themselves to be cared for and succored. To these he offers himself in the Word as a Redeemer, and wishes that the Word may be heard, and that their ears may not be hardened, nor the Word be neglected and contemned. And he promises that he will bestow the virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit and divine aid, to the end that we may abide steadfast in the faith and attain eternal life.

But as to the declaration (Matt. 22:14), "Many are called, but few are chosen," it is not to be so understood as if God were unwilling that all should be saved, but the cause of the damnation of the ungodly is that they either do not hear the Word of God at all, but contumaciously contemn it, stop their ears, and harden their hearts, and in this way foreclose to the Spirit of God his ordinary way, so that he can not accomplish his work in them, or at least when they have heard the Word, make it of no account, and cast it away. Neither God nor his election, but their own wickedness, is to blame if they perish (2 Peter 2:1ff.; Luke 2:49, 52; Heb. 12:25ff.).[5]

The Saxon Visitation Articles of 1592, under the heading "On Predestination and the Eternal Providence of God," declare:

That Christ died for all men, and, as the Lamb of God, took away the sins of the whole world.

That God created no man for condemnation; but wills that all men should be saved and arrive at the knowledge of the truth. He therefore commands all to hear Christ, his Son, in the gospel; and promises, by his hearing, the virtue and operation of the Holy Ghost for conversion and salvation.

That many men, by their own fault, perish: some, who will not hear the gospel concerning Christ; some, who again fall from grace, either by fundamental error, or by sins against conscience.[6]

This denial of unconditional election and absolute reprobation is characteristic of Lutheran theology throughout. Thus Gerhard writes:

God wills, and seriously wills the life of the sinner; yet he wills also the conversion of the sinner through the Holy Spirit and Word; but if the sinner repels that Word and resists the Holy Spirit and so is not converted, he wills the just damnation of the sinner.[7]

#### Again:

We say that many have been reprobated from eternity, not however from any absolute hatred or decree of God, but because God foresaw that they would abide in their unbelief and impenitence.[8]

Yet, although Lutheranism rejects unconditional predestination, it tries to hold on to the doctrine of sovereign grace and the incapability of the natural man to work anything toward his salvation:

We believe, teach, and confess, moreover, that the yet unregenerate will of man is not only averse from God, but has become even hostile to God, so that it only wishes and desires those things, and is delighted with them, which are evil and opposite to the divine will. For it is written (Gen. 8:21): "For the imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth." Also (Rom. 8:7): "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be."

Therefore we believe that by how much it is impossible that a dead body should vivify itself and restore corporal life to itself, even so impossible is it that man, who by reason of sin is spiritually dead, should have any faculty of recalling himself into spiritual life; as it is written (Eph. 2:5): "Even when we were dead in sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ." (2 Cor. 3:5): "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing good as of ourselves; but that we are sufficient is itself of God." [9]

The Lutherans also repudiate "the false dogma of the Semi-Pelagians, who teach that man by his own powers can commence his conversion, but can not fully accomplish it without the grace of the Holy Spirit."[10]

They also repudiate the errors of those who teach that

although unregenerate man, in respect of free-will, is indeed, antecedently to his regeneration, too infirm to make a beginning of his own conversion, and by his own powers to convert himself to God, and obey the law of God with all his heart; yet if the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the word, shall have made a beginning, and offered his grace in the word to man, that then man, by his own proper and natural powers, can, as it were, give some assistance and co-operation, though it be but slight, infirm, and languid, towards his conversion, and can apply and prepare himself unto grace, apprehend it, embrace it, and believe the gospel. [11]

In spite of these expressions, it cannot be denied that Lutheran theologians are generally synergistic, as is to be expected from their denial of unconditional predestination. A modern theologian of the Lutheran church comments on the incongruity between the denial of any assistance of man towards his salvation and the denial of unconditional predestination:

The proposition that the rejection of salvation has its ground in man, neutralizes not only the conception of predestination, but also the conception of grace contained in the Formula of Concord. This proposition demands, according to invincible logic, that the man who can refuse salvation be not passive in laying hold of the same. For he who can oppose and does not oppose, wills not to oppose. And he who wills to oppose, just wills to receive. [12]

Bavinck writes about this Lutheran theology as follows:

In later Lutheran theology this was usually presented, as though God grants to all who live under the gospel, in baptism or through the preaching of the word, a sufficient grace (inevitably and irresistibly working good), by which the will of man is so set free and renewed, that if only he does not resist the working of God's grace in him toward regeneration and conversion and remains completely passive, he can be converted, or more positively, even cooperate with that grace.

Under the influence of this veiled or open synergism, the order of salvation, when enlarged upon later by others such as Hollaz, was presented (with reference to Acts 26:17–18) as: illumination, conversion, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. The Lutherans explained it thus: Christian children, while they are still too young to resist, receive in baptismal regeneration the gift of faith; others are first called later in life with a sufficient calling, which is for all alike. All are provided with illumination of the understanding, and ability of will which is in itself enough to enable them not to resist the working of God's grace. In the case of those who do not resist, they are through the preaching of the law brought to repentance (penitence, or conversion in the narrow sense) and then regenerated and endowed with the faith that is the fruit of regeneration. By faith they are then justified, receive the forgiveness of sins and after that adoption, mystical union, sanctification and glorification. But in actuality the development of the Christian life is not so smooth, because the beginning of grace and its outcome and end depend on the will, though that is supernaturally strengthened by God's power. Grace is always resistible and therefore to one's dying hour can be lost and again regained, not once but repeatedly. The root of the order of salvation, therefore, is in man. Though it is strongly stated that God alone regenerates and converts, it still depends upon the resistance or non-resistance of man, whether God will regenerate and convert. Man has the decisive factor in his hands. He can by resisting put the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to nought, and he holds that decisive factor in his hands until death. [13]

In passing, we remark that this doctrine of a *gratia sufficiens* (*sufficient grace*), which can be either resisted or accepted, occupies a prominent place in Heynsian theology. He teaches that the essence of the covenant is the promise of God and that this promise is for all the children of the flesh who live under the dispensation of the covenant. According to him, within the covenant all the children of the flesh receive sufficient grace either to accept or to reject their covenant obligations and even the grace of regeneration. [14]

#### **Arminianism**

In modern times the doctrine of the Arminians has exerted a most profound and widespread influence upon the doctrine of God and the doctrine of salvation. They denied the doctrine of unconditional predestination and held that God elected those whom he foresaw would believe in Christ. They held that Christ died for all and emphatically denied particular atonement. In this "Christ-for-all" lies the possibility of salvation for all. As far as soteriology is concerned, they held that grace is indeed indispensable unto the salvation of man. They even emphasized in their articles that man of himself can do nothing unto his salvation. But at the same time, by stating that grace is resistible, they overthrew all they taught concerning the impotence of man, so that whether man will receive that grace or not depends upon man and not upon God. So saving grace may be lost. To the very end the salvation of man depends not upon the sovereign grace of God, but upon the will and choice of man.

#### **Calvinism**

Over against the Arminian heresy the fathers of Dordt maintained five points of truth: first, the decree of predestination, unconditional and sovereign; second, particular atonement, the doctrine that Christ died not for all, but only for the elect; third, man is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil and wholly incapable, too, of working anything toward his own salvation; fourth, the grace of God is sovereign and irresistible; fifth, this grace can never be lost, but God preserves

his own elect unto final salvation.

It is plain, therefore, that in opposition to all forms of Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism, Reformed dogmatics must maintain that soteriology is strictly *theology*. The emphasis must not be laid on man, but on the work of God. Soteriology emphasizes not the acceptance, but the reception of salvation, or rather, the application of salvation by the Holy Spirit. God through Christ by the Holy Spirit applies to the elect all the benefits merited by Christ.

We must proceed from the basis of Romans 8:29–30:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

In this text we have at least the suggestion of a certain *ordo salutis* (*order of salvation*). We must beware that we do not understand the foreknowledge of this text in the Arminian sense. God does not foreknow in the temporal sense, but only in the causal sense. In that divine and causal sense he predestinates, calls, justifies, and glorifies the elect.

We must also take our point of departure in Ephesians 1:3–4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.

In these verses emphasis is laid on the truth that all of the spiritual benefits that are mentioned in soteriology are derived and received only from Jesus Christ and in communion with him. The fact is that God has blessed Jesus Christ as the head of his church, his body, and that through this blessing of Christ God also blesses and enriches his people with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. God blessed Christ; he pronounced the word of his blessing  $(\epsilon \dot{\nu} \lambda o \gamma i \alpha)$  over him. Upon the ground of his complete and perfect obedience and his deep humiliation, God has exalted him. God raised Christ from the dead and clothed and filled him with a new and eternal and glorious life.

God has exalted Christ at his own right hand in heavenly places and has given him power over all creatures in heaven and on earth:

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places (vv. 19–20).

All the blessings of salvation that Christ merited for his people are actually in him. But there is more. The same power, the "exceeding greatness of his power," through which God raised Christ and exalted him at his right hand, God also wrought in him ("Which he wrought in Christ") so that the same living power now also works in Christ Jesus as the head of his church. God accomplished this when, after having exalted Christ at his right hand, he also filled him with the Spirit of grace as the head of his church so that he became the quickening Spirit.

Through that Spirit, Christ as the mediator and head of his church receives continually the quickening and exalting divine energy whereby he can in turn bless his church with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Along the entire line of the application of salvation, from regeneration to final glorification, the work of salvation never proceeds from man, but always from the living God through Jesus Christ the Lord. The Savior imparts these blessings of salvation only to those whom the Father has given him. That Christ by his exaltation has so received the Spirit of God as mediator and head of his church is plainly taught in Acts 2:33: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted,

and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." The connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit is so strong that the scriptures even identify Christ and his Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:17: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Through this blessing of Christ by God the Father, all the spiritual benefits of salvation are objectively present in Christ himself. This is true because of the fact that the church was chosen in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world. According to the divine good pleasure, Christ and the church are inseparably united forever. The blessings bestowed upon the head are also the blessings of the body, even though it is true that they are not fully and perfectly imparted to the body. In our experience we do not receive the blessings of salvation piecemeal, but by faith we embrace Christ and all his benefits.

Ephesians 1:4 points to the deepest source and cause of this union of Christ and his church and of this application of all his benefits unto his body: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." This "before the foundation of the world" cannot be understood in a temporal sense for the simple reason that eternity is not time, but rather must be understood in the logical sense. In God's eternal counsel Christ is first, and the elect are given to him even before the counsel of creation. The whole work of salvation, therefore, rests in and flows out of God's eternal good pleasure. Before the foundation of the world it was the good pleasure of God finally to unite all things in Christ Jesus as the head of his church and as the head of all creation: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (v. 10).

In the counsel of God, not Adam, but Christ is "the firstborn of every creature," both as "the head of the body" and as "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:15, 18). In him all things must be perfected and glorified. In him the eternal covenant of God must be established and perfected. And in him all creatures must be united into one glorious, heavenly kingdom. To that divine purpose everything is subordinated in the counsel of God, and in time all things must serve that final purpose. The fall and sin, the devil, the ungodly, and all the powers of darkness are not excluded as means unto this final realization of the purpose of God. In the fullness of time, the firstborn of every creature comes into the world, suffers and dies, and by his perfect obedience as the head of the covenant of God realizes all the spiritual blessings of salvation that he bestows by his Spirit upon all the elect. Only in this way can we understand that soteriology is *theology*.

It is true that in the work of salvation man remains a rational and moral creature. Never does he become a stock and block. When God through Jesus Christ by his Holy Spirit realizes his covenant with man, it becomes man's solemn responsibility to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, and mind; to serve him with all his power; to forsake the world; and to walk in a new and holy life. But God's part is always first, and man's part is always the fruit of the operation of God. Soteriology is *theology* in the deepest sense.

#### Chapter 24

## The Order of Salvation (Ordo Salutis)

#### The Ordo Salutis Defined

By the ordo salutis we understand the arrangement or the order in which the various benefits of salvation in Christ are applied to the elect sinner.

This order must not be understood in a purely temporal sense, as if the benefits of salvation were granted to the elect sinner in a definite order of time; for when the sinner is united with Christ, he receives Christ in all his fullness and, therefore, receives in principle all the benefits of salvation. Besides, the various benefits that the sinner receives from Christ cannot be distinguished in a mere order of time.

Strictly speaking, justification precedes sanctification. Nevertheless, the sinner who receives justification by faith is already sanctified in principle, and he cannot be justified subjectively unless he is also sanctified. Yet it is also true that God does not grant the fullness of salvation in Christ to the sinner in a single act. God treats us as rational, moral creatures, and he desires us to become fully conscious of the blessings of salvation that he bestows upon his people. Besides, the process of salvation continues throughout the whole life of the elect sinner; in the sound sense there is growth in grace until the very moment of his departure from this tabernacle. However, when we speak of the *ordo salutis*, we must understand this order in a logical rather than a temporal sense.

#### Different Presentations of the Ordo Salutis

There has always been a good deal of difference of opinion with regard to the order in which the benefits of salvation are bestowed upon the people of God in time. The difference exists not only between Reformed theologians and theologians of different persuasions, but also among Reformed theologians mutually. Very different methods are followed, and different orders or arrangements are suggested by different theologians. Only in recent times has more stability and unity been reached, although even now it cannot be said that all difference of opinion with regard to the *ordo salutis* has been eliminated.

#### John Calvin

Calvin is not very definite regarding the *ordo salutis*. He starts out with an elaborate discussion and treatment of saving faith.[1] Under faith he also treats the calling as well as the preaching of the gospel through which Christ is presented and is embraced by a true and saving faith. Then Calvin treats regeneration, but he conceives of this benefit of salvation in a very broad sense, so that under this heading he also treats conversion, a life in sanctification, and the battle of faith. In this broad sense, according to him, regeneration is through faith, and faith is out of hearing.[2] Then follows the treatment of justification by faith, in connection with and in comparison with good works.[3] Thereupon he treats predestination, including election and reprobation.[4] Finally, he has a chapter about the resurrection unto eternal life.[5]

In Calvin's *Institutes* we therefore have this order: faith and calling, regeneration and conversion,

sanctification, justification, predestination, and resurrection. It would seem that in this order of treating the benefits of salvation there is not much unity and stability. The trouble is that Calvin does not make distinction between the work of God in our inmost being, our subconsciousness, and the work of God in our consciousness; therefore, he does not distinguish between regeneration in the narrower sense and conversion. For that reason he presents all the benefits of salvation as coming out of conscious faith, which, in turn, is out of hearing. Again, it seems to us that he does not sufficiently distinguish between the objective work of God for us in Christ and the subjective work of God through the Holy Spirit within us. This lack of distinction would explain Calvin's apparently strange order in which sanctification precedes justification.

#### Petrus van Mastricht and Wilhelmus à Brakel

Already in van Mastricht we meet with a more definite treatment of the *ordo salutis*. Under the heading *Toepassinge der Rantsoen-Verlossinge* (*Application of the Ransom-Redemption*), he offers, first, a chapter on *De Nature der Toepassinge* (*The Nature of the Application*). Then he treats the following steps in the *ordo salutis*: calling, regeneration, conversion, union with Christ, justification, adoption unto children, sanctification, and the glorification of those who are to be redeemed. [6] We may note here that regeneration follows the calling. The cause of this is to be found in the fact that van Mastricht does not make any distinction between the external preaching of the word and the internal calling. It lies in the very nature of the case that where this distinction is made, regeneration cannot follow upon the calling, but precedes it.

The same order we also find in à Brakel. He notes the following steps in the *ordo salutis*: calling, regeneration, faith, justification, adoption unto children, peace, and sanctification.[7] Also with à Brakel this order of calling and regeneration follows from the fact that he does not make distinction between that which the Holy Spirit works immediately in the very depth of our being and that which he works through the means of the preaching of the word in our consciousness. If we fail to make this distinction, it stands to reason that the calling is strictly first in the *ordo salutis*.

#### Geerhardus Vos

Dr. Vos elaborately calls attention to the differences of opinion among Reformed theologians regarding the *ordo salutis*:

Some identify regeneration and conversion, which others try to avoid by distinguishing between potential or passive conversion (regeneration) and active or real conversion (our conversion). Many identify internal conversion and calling. Some conceive of regeneration in the sense of continual renewal (sanctification), e.g., Calvin. There is difference of opinion concerning the concept calling. The question is whether emphasis must be placed on the internal or immediate or on external and mediate calling. Besides, the words for conversion are used in different senses: sometimes it denotes something that takes place only once, sometimes it denotes something that is continually repeated.[8]

#### Vos wants to distinguish:

Between the juridical acts of God and the recreating acts of God. The first point to the state of man, the second to his condition. (cf. justification and regeneration).

Between what takes place *under* and what *for* or *in* the consciousness of man (cf. regeneration and conversion).

Between what refers to the mortification of the old man and the vivification of the new man (cf. righteousness and faith).

Between what takes place suddenly and at once and what takes place gradually (cf. regeneration and sanctification).[9]

Vos presents the following order in the application of the benefits of salvation in Christ: regeneration, calling, conversion, faith, justification, and sanctification.

#### **Foppe Martin Ten Hoor**

Professor Ten Hoor very emphatically defends the order of calling-regeneration over against regeneration-calling.[10] But we must not forget that he defines the calling as "the act of God, by which he invites the sinner to accept salvation in Christ."[11] His definition emphasizes the external calling through the preaching of the gospel as well as the act of man whereby he accepts the invitation of the gospel. This definition certainly does not proceed from a theological conception of soteriology.

#### Herman Bavinck

Like Ten Hoor, Dr. Bavinck emphasizes that the calling is first in the *ordo salutis*:

... the Holy Spirit imparts all these benefits of Christ in a distinct order, so that they are not a loose collection of blessings, but are mutually and organically connected. He who believes shall be blessed. Regeneration is necessary in order to enter the kingdom of God. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Without sanctification no man shall see God. Whoever perseveres to the end shall be saved. One cannot obtain the following blessings without having received the preceding ones. Therefore the calling through the preaching of the gospel precedes all other benefits, for the Holy Spirit normally limits himself to the means of the word. [12]

At the end of his discussion of the *ordo salutis*, he distinguishes four different groups of benefits that Christ bestows upon his church:

. . . there are, then, all together four groups of blessings in the order of salvation which must be treated: calling (with regeneration in the narrower sense); faith and conversion; justification; sanctification and glorification. Although glorification is usually the first thing treated at the end of dogmatics, in the doctrine of the last things, yet it does belong to the order of salvation, and stands inseparably related to the preceding blessings. The four groups correspond to what Paul says of Christ in 1 Cor. 1:30, that he of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. In Romans 8:30 the apostle mentions three blessings by which God's foreknowledge is realized, namely, calling, justification, and glorification. All these blessings occur in time. However, the glorification does not refer, at least not exclusively, to the glorification which the believer waits for after death or after the day of judgment, but as is clear from the agrist tense, it refers to the glorification which believers already partake of on earth through the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2, 10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16) and which is fully revealed with their resurrection in the last day (1 Cor. 15:53; Phil 3:21). The glorification (in Romans 8:30), therefore, embraces both sanctification and glorification. And so there are here also four chief groups of blessings, which Christ obtains for his own and imparts to them. The work of the Holy Spirit and the working of grace harmonize with this. In the calling the Holy Spirit exercises especially his proving and teaching office, and grants us preparatory, preceding and working grace. In justification we see his office as comforter, and illuminating grace is on the foreground. In sanctification the Holy Spirit performs his sanctifying office and renews us from day to day by cooperating grace. In glorification, which begins already in this life (2 Cor. 3:18), he exercises his sealing office and restores us completely through conserving and perfecting grace to the image of Christ so that he is the firstborn among many brethren.[13]

Bavinck, therefore, considers four distinct groups in the *ordo salutis*: the calling, including regeneration in the narrower sense; faith and conversion; justification, which stands by itself as a separate group; sanctification and glorification. As we said, he conceives of the calling as preceding all of the other benefits of Christ.

#### Abraham Kuyper

In Kuyper we find a peculiar treatment of the *ordo salutis*, namely, justification, regeneration, calling, conversion, faith, and sanctification. [14] Kuyper begins with the benefit of justification. He proceeds from the self-evident truth that all the benefits of salvation are based on righteousness, so that justification must be the ground for all the other blessings of salvation. Yet we cannot recommend or accept this *ordo salutis* of Kuyper, chiefly because it confuses the objective with the subjective. In soteriology we face the question of the order in which the different benefits of salvation come into the active possession of the elect sinner. Although it is true that in the objective sense justification is the juridical ground for regeneration, the fact is that justification is not the first blessing of salvation that is subjectively bestowed upon the sinner.

#### The Correct Conception of the Ordo Salutis

In order to attain to a correct conception of the *ordo salutis*, we must keep in mind various distinctions. It is true that in a certain sense justification can be treated under the heading of theology in connection with the decrees of God, for in the decrees we are justified from eternity, according to Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The "now" in this text must not be understood as a temporal modifier, but in the logical sense. There never was, there is not, and there never will be any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Justification can also be treated in connection with the work of Christ in his humiliation and exaltation, because the suffering and death of Christ is the meritorious ground of our justification, while in his resurrection God sets his seal upon our justification, according to Romans 4:25: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (ος παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν). Note that in both phrases of this text διά (for) with the accusative case must be translated "on account of." Christ is delivered on account of our transgressions, and he is raised on account of our justification. Nevertheless, in soteriology the issue concerns the application of this benefit of justification to the heart of the elect sinner. It follows in order upon saving faith; we are, after all, justified out of faith: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). We must keep to the subjective line of the application of the benefits of salvation in Christ. It is also necessary to distinguish between what is wrought in the subconsciousness and what is wrought in the consciousness of the sinner.

We can certainly speak of and distinguish between regeneration in the narrower sense and in the broader sense. In the broader sense regeneration includes calling and even conversion. In the narrower sense no one can even see the kingdom of God without being born again: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). We can also speak of a regeneration through the word of God: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18). Through the calling in the fullest sense, the regenerated sinner is translated before his consciousness from darkness into the marvelous light of God. Through the same calling he attains to a conscious faith, to the consciousness of his justification, to the adoption of children, and to peace with God. And through the same calling by the word, he is also sanctified and enabled to bear fruit unto good works. Bearing all this in mind, we reach the following conclusion regarding the sequence of the *ordo salutis*: regeneration, calling, faith, conversion, justification, sanctification, preservation and perseverance, and glorification.

#### **Chapter 25**

# Regeneration

#### The Necessity of Regeneration

The whole of scripture testifies that a man must be born again to enter the kingdom of God; indeed, he must be regenerated even to see that kingdom. This follows from man's natural condition, namely, "that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The "imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). As man is by nature, he does not have any place in the kingdom of God; he does not have even a remote conception of the things of that kingdom; his heart does not go out to those things. With all his heart, mind, will, and strength natural man lives in the sphere of another kingdom, the kingdom of the prince of darkness.

David confesses, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). By virtue of his first birth, man cannot have a place in the kingdom of heaven. That kingdom is spiritual, ethical, and heavenly in essence and nature. It is not of the world, but it is of the Father; it is not from below, but it is from above (John 8:23). For that reason anyone that is born according to the flesh cannot see that kingdom of heaven, for all that "is born of the flesh is flesh," and minds nothing else than "the things of the flesh," which are death (John 3:3, 6; Rom. 8:5–8). As long as a man is born of blood or of the will of the flesh, he can have no power to become a son of God (John 1:12–13).

The natural man is from below; Christ is from above. Whoever is born of the flesh is of the world, but Christ and his kingdom are not of the world (John 8:23). The world loves its own, but hates those who are chosen out of the world (John 15:19). The world, therefore, cannot receive the Spirit of truth, for it neither sees nor knows him (John 14:17). Those who are from below seek the glory of men, but despise the glory of God. Therefore, they can never believe in him who always aimed at the glory of God, nor can they enter into his kingdom (John 6:44). They are of their father the devil and desire to do the lusts of their father, who did not abide in the truth, and in whom is no truth. When he speaks of himself, he speaks the lie, for he is a liar and the father of the lie (John 8:44). Those from below are dead through trespasses and sins, in which they walk "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience," and they fulfill the "desires of the flesh and of the mind" so that they are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1–3).

By virtue of our first birth, we come into the world as children of wrath by nature. Not one man is righteous, no, not one. None understands. No one seeks after God. All are gone out of the way. We are altogether become unprofitable. There is no one that does any good, no, not one. Our throat is an open sepulchre. With our tongues we have used deceit. The poison of asps is under our lips, and our mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Destruction and misery are in our ways. The way of peace we have not known. There is no fear of God before our eyes. Such is the judgment of scripture upon the natural man (Rom. 3:10–18). Hence scripture emphasizes that in order for a man to enter into the kingdom of God he must be born again, and he must be born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:3, 5).

The truth of man's hopeless condition implies that this rebirth or regeneration cannot be established by any work of man or by the power of man's will. This impossibility is already implied in the term *rebirth* or *regeneration*. No more than any man can be the efficient cause of his own natural birth out of the flesh can he be the efficient cause of his own spiritual, second birth and conception. Man cannot renew himself.

This also is implied in man's natural condition. When he loves the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19), he certainly will not make any attempt to come to the light. He will rather avoid, despise, and hate the light. When by nature he is in such a condition that he cannot hear the speech of Christ, by his very deafness he is certainly excluded from all influences from without that could induce him to enter into the kingdom of God. When the minding of the flesh, of which man is born by nature, is always enmity against God, so that he is not subject to the law of God, yea, cannot be subject to that law (Rom. 8:5–7), it is plain that his very heart is closed against the influence of the love of God in Christ Jesus. For the natural man there is no hope of improvement or reformation in the way of education, in the way of a better example, or in the way of exercising himself in the discipline of external virtue. In that way he will never enter into the kingdom of God.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ . . . And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:4–6).

What is impossible with men is possible with God (Luke 18:27). He is able to create in man a clean heart and renew in him a right spirit (Ps. 51:10). He is able to circumcise the hearts of his people and their seed in order that they should love the Lord their God with all their existence and life (Deut. 30:6). He is capable and willing to give them a heart to know the Lord; they then will be his people, and he will be their God. They will turn to him with their whole heart (Jer. 24:7).

He is willing to give them one heart and put a new spirit within them. He will take the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh so that they may walk in his statutes and keep his ordinances to do them. So they will be his people, and he will be their God (Ezek. 11:19–20). He will sprinkle upon them clean water so that they shall be clean from all their filthiness and from all their idols. He will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them. He will take away the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh. Thus they shall walk in his statutes and keep his judgments to do them (Ezek. 36:25–27).

Against this background the apostles preached the gospel of the kingdom in a world of darkness, emphasizing the necessity of this radical change through which man is translated first in the very depth of his inward existence and, then, also in his entire conscious life and public walk in the world. Sometimes the apostles refer to this radical change in men as *rebirth* or *regeneration*:

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:18).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

This rebirth or regeneration, therefore, is the work of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He accomplishes this work according to his great mercy, a mercy which delivers his people out of the misery of sin and death, and which is called "great" because it does not simply deliver from that misery in order to cause his people to return to their original state and condition, but exalts them far above that state to make them participants of a new, heavenly, and glorious life.

Hence that regeneration is mediated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for not

only is that resurrection of Christ the juridical ground for regeneration and the certainty of their salvation, but it is also the principle of the regeneration of all believers. Even as Christ in his resurrection certainly did not return to the earth, but was clothed with a higher, heavenly life, so the children of God receive in their rebirth the beginning of a new life, the same life with which Christ appeared from the grave. Because it is founded on Christ's resurrection, this regeneration is also the principle of a living hope and stretches itself in hope unto the future realization and revelation of the complete salvation. The reborn elect have become strangers on the earth, for they have received the principle of a heavenly life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. By virtue of that principle, they seek not the things that are below, but the things that are above where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1–2).

#### **Regeneration in 1 Peter 1:23**

The apostle Peter speaks about regeneration as the fount and cause of the purifying of the souls of believers, whereby they obey the truth and are able and called to love one another with unfeigned love: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

Those who emphasize the doctrine of a mediate regeneration and who understand the rebirth to be preceded by the calling appeal to this word of the apostle Peter as a ground for their view, but unjustly so. They emphasize that the apostle here clearly teaches that regeneration takes place through the everlasting and abiding Word of God, while in verse 25 he adds that this is the same Word that is being proclaimed among them. They conclude that regeneration occurs through the means of the preaching of the gospel. But for this interpretation of verse 23 there is no ground in the text itself.

It is true that here the apostle presents regeneration as taking place through the Word of God, which lives and abides forever, and also that he adds that this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto the church. But this does not imply at all that the apostle contends that regeneration occurs through the preaching of that living Word of God. The living and abiding Word of God and the proclamation of that Word are two different things. And when the apostle teaches here that regeneration takes place through the living Word himself, that is, through Christ, it certainly is not proper to replace this living Word simply by the preaching of the gospel.

It is true that the preaching of the word stands in connection with regeneration in the broader sense, because without the proclamation of the gospel it is impossible that regeneration will ever become conscious in the people of God. That the apostle here also speaks of this regeneration in the broader sense, as it concerns our conscious life, is clear from the context, as we hope to indicate presently. But this does not remove the fact that even in this broader sense regeneration does not take place through the preaching of the word, but through the living and abiding Word of God himself.

Further, it is evident that the apostle speaks of regeneration in the narrower sense, in its very first beginning, when he says that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible." Theologians who favor mediate regeneration have tried to avoid this difficulty by contending that in both expressions, "out of the seed" and "through the word," the same truth is meant and that the apostle in the first expression uses a figure, while in the second he speaks more literally. But this avails nothing to defend the view of mediate regeneration, since the Word and the proclamation of the word cannot be identified. Further, there is no ground in the text for the interpretation that identifies the seed of regeneration with the abiding and living Word of God.

The contrary is true. The apostle makes a very careful distinction here. This is especially plain

from the use of the different prepositions. We are born again, "not of  $[\dot{\epsilon}\kappa]$  corruptible seed, but of incorruptible," and we are born again "by  $[\delta\iota\dot{\alpha}]$  the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." By this distinction the apostle means to describe carefully the mode of regeneration. The seed of regeneration, that is, the principle of the new life, is implanted by the Holy Spirit in the heart. From that seed or principle sprouts forth the life of regeneration.

However, this sprouting of the seed of regeneration is not realized except through a working of the living and abiding Word of God, through which he calls the quickened sinner efficaciously, and gives him ears to hear and eyes to see. This, therefore, is the efficacious calling through the Word of God. This efficacious calling receives content for our consciousness through the fact that this living and abiding Word of God is also proclaimed among us. Although we will not deny that in a certain sense regeneration may be presented as taking place mediately through the word, nevertheless we maintain that the appeal to 1 Peter 1:23 contains no ground for this contention.

#### Regeneration in Paul's Epistles

The apostle Paul mentions the term *regeneration* in only one passage:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5).

Some find in these words an indication of or a reference to holy baptism. Baptism, according to this view, is the washing of regeneration. Although it is true that holy baptism can indeed be conceived as a washing of regeneration when regeneration is understood in the broader sense, yet it is not correct to say that the apostle here calls baptism a washing of regeneration.

There is no principle objection to calling baptism a washing or bath of regeneration. Scripture itself points us in that direction. In baptism we are buried with Christ into his death, and through baptism we rise with him in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). According to the presentation of some, the old man in principle is left behind in the bath of baptism. From that bath the new man in Christ arises, justified and sanctified, and therefore, regenerated. When, therefore, we conceive of regeneration in the broader sense, as changing and sanctifying our consciousness and recreating us in Christ Jesus as a new man, baptism in its essential significance is indeed the washing of regeneration. Nevertheless, the truth is that in Titus 3:5 the apostle probably refers very indirectly to baptism, since he does not speak of baptism, but only of regeneration. He does not call baptism a washing of regeneration. On the contrary, he calls regeneration a washing. Regeneration itself is conceived as a bath washing us from all iniquity.

Although the word *regeneration* occurs only once in the epistles of the apostle Paul, the fact of regeneration is referred to in many places. Paul teaches that he who is in Christ Jesus is a "new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). Old things are passed away, and all things are become new. We are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

When the apostle calls the believer a "new creature," and when he calls the work of grace whereby the sinner is changed and enabled to walk in all good works a "new creation," this is not to be understood as if the sinner becomes essentially another creature. Yet, according to Paul, it is plain that the spiritual, ethical change wrought by grace in the sinner is effected by nothing less than a creative, even though it be a re-creative, act of God.

The apostle Paul preferably speaks of the calling, in which the work of regeneration is implied and

included. By this calling of God, the apostle understands that creative and omnipotent act of God by which whatever he calls really comes into existence. He quickens the dead and calls those things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). Those whom he foreknew and ordained to be like unto the image of his Son, he also called (Rom. 8:29, 30). Those who are called are quickened with Christ, raised with him, and placed with him in heaven; they have entered into death with him through baptism in order to arise in newness of life (Rom. 6:3–11; Eph. 2:1, 5).

All believers may rejoice with Paul:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

The content of that almighty calling of God is, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14). The work of God that the apostle denotes by the term *calling*, therefore, is the same as regeneration.

#### Regeneration in John's Epistles

Even as in the apostle Paul's writings the calling stands on the foreground, so the apostle John preferably speaks of regeneration. The main thought in his first epistle is undoubtedly that believers are partakers of the life of God in the light. For that reason he constantly views believers from the standpoint that they are children of God ( $\tau \acute{\epsilon} \kappa \nu \alpha \tau o \~{\upsilon}$  Θεο $\~{\upsilon}$ ). Because they are born of God, they possess the life of God. Having communion with God through that life, they walk in the light:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1–2).

He who commits sin is of the devil.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (1 John 3:8–10).

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

This being born of God reveals itself in true faith: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." And in that faith he who "is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:1, 4). Thus throughout his epistle the apostle John emphasizes the true, spiritual, ethical sonship of God that is caused by the work of regeneration.

#### Repudiation of Regeneration

It lies in the nature of the case that all rationalists and Pelagians repudiate this radical and fundamental change in man that is called regeneration. According to them, man is not spiritually dead. He is not totally depraved, wholly incapable of doing any good, inclined to all evil; he is only sick. But his nature *per se* remains unchanged. His salvation, therefore, depends on his own free will and is effected by human words of persuasion and wisdom. One must work upon the will of man through appealing to his intellect. Man must be persuaded through word and example. This change in his

thinking and willing that is effected by human persuasion is really regeneration.

Although rationalists and Pelagians still speak of rebirth, they attach an entirely different significance to the term from what is meant by scripture and the orthodox confessions. For a regeneration that is effected by almighty grace, that takes place even below the consciousness of man in the very depth of his existence, and that consists in the sinner's receiving a new principle of life and the infusing of new spiritual powers into him—for such a regeneration they have no place, because by such a conception of regeneration every possibility that the sinner can cooperate with his own salvation is cut off.

Regeneration in the scriptural sense leaves the sinner wholly passive and attributes the work of salvation only to the absolutely sovereign grace of God, who is merciful to whom he will be merciful, and who hardens whom he will (Rom. 9:18).

#### **Regeneration in the Reformed Confessions**

The Reformed confessions emphasize this work of the new birth. The Belgic Confession mentions regeneration, but the reference is only to regeneration in the wider sense, as is evident from the fact that regeneration is mentioned only in the context of sanctification and good works:

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. [1]

It is evident, therefore, that the Belgic Confession does not speak of regeneration in its narrower sense, but only in the sense of sanctification.

However, the Canons of Dordt give a beautiful description of that divine work called the new birth:

But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit he pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that, like a good tree, it may bring forth fruits of good actions.

And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead; a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is nowise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation that, after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose hearts God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but, in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore, also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received. [2]

There always has been difference of opinion, and sometimes a rather heated controversy, among Reformed people and Reformed theologians about the question of the relation between regeneration and calling. In our opinion there is very little cause for such a heated controversy about this question, if only we distinguish correctly and accurately. In a certain sense it can indeed be maintained that calling precedes regeneration, if only it is clearly defined what is meant by the calling and what is meant by the rebirth. In another sense, however, it must very definitely be maintained that regeneration

is the very first work in the heart of the sinner, and that there can be no saving hearing of the word of God without this regeneration of the heart.

#### **Regeneration Defined**

In the deepest and narrowest sense, regeneration is the saving act of the triune God whereby through the Spirit of Christ he takes hold of the elect and in himself dead sinner, translates him in the very depth of his existence, and infuses into him the principle of the life of Christ Jesus, thus translating him in principle out of death into life and placing him in abiding communion with the body of Christ.

In this sense regeneration is the act of God whereby he implants the seed of the new life into the heart of the sinner. It consists in the granting and infusing of new spiritual qualities. It is the circumcision of the heart. It takes place not in the consciousness of the sinner, but in the very depth of his heart, in the center of his spiritual, ethical life, from which are the issues of life. It is the implanting of the seed of the new life as it is not yet sprouted into the consciousness of the sinner. It is a new creation, through which in principle the sinner becomes a new man in Christ Jesus; old things pass away, and all things become new. The holy scriptures speak of regeneration in this sense when they refer to an incorruptible seed out of which regeneration sprouts forth through the Word of God into the consciousness of man (1 Pet. 1:23). From the viewpoint of this principle of the new life in regeneration, the new man cannot sin, for his seed remains in him, and he is born of God.

Of this regeneration the Savior also speaks to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again [ἄνωθεν], he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). There is a difference of opinion with regard to the meaning of the word "again" (ἄνωθεν). According to some, the term means "from above," while according to others, it signifies the same as "again" (πάλιν). The fact is that ἄνω in the scriptures always means "above" and, therefore, the significance of the term ἄνωθεν as meaning "from above" cannot be excluded here. Nicodemus, however, evidently understands the word of the Lord as meaning "to be born once again." Therefore, also this meaning cannot be excluded from the text. Hence the meaning is that regeneration is an entirely new birth, a being born from the very beginning in such a way that through this second birth we receive the life from above. Through the first birth we are entirely from below: natural, earthy, children of darkness. Through the second birth, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we are born from above: spiritual, holy, heavenly. But it is clearly evident that the Lord speaks of this regeneration in the deepest sense as preceding even the possibility of seeing the kingdom of heaven.

To other passages of scripture we have already referred. In 1 Peter 1:3 we read that God has "begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Peter 1:23 speaks of being "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of  $[\dot{\epsilon}\kappa]$  incorruptible, by  $[\delta\iota\dot{\alpha}]$  the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." That we must clearly distinguish between the prepositions out of  $(\dot{\epsilon}\kappa)$  and by  $(\delta\iota\dot{\alpha})$  has already been explained. Significant also is 1 John 3:9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The seed can only refer to the seed of regeneration, according to the text itself. With Paul we find regeneration described in the terms "new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), being "quickened . . . together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5), and being "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" (v. 10).

Summarizing, we come to the following conclusions concerning the work of regeneration in the narrow sense:

First, regeneration is exclusively a work of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, through the Spirit of Christ.

Second, regeneration takes place in the very depth of man's existence. It is a new birth, a being born from the very start. It is a new creation, and the regenerated man is a new creature.

Third, regeneration precedes all mediate work of God, for without this work of regeneration one cannot even see the kingdom of God. It is an immediate work of God, without man and apart from his will, an act of the Spirit in man's heart, in which he is entirely passive.

Fourth, this new creation does not mean an essential change of man's nature. In regeneration he does not receive another soul in the essential sense. Regeneration has a spiritual, ethical character, whereby through this work of God the sinner is translated from death into life.

Fifth, regeneration consists of an infusing of a new life, an implanting of the principle of the life of God as it exists first in the exalted Christ, and from him flows through the Spirit of Christ into his church. It is implanted out of Christ into the heart of the sinner, the center of his existence from a spiritual, ethical point of view.

From all of this it is evident that regeneration is exclusively a work of God, wherein man is strictly passive in the sense that he does not and cannot cooperate in his own rebirth. In that deepest sense regeneration is not even a matter of man's own experience, since it does not take place within, but below the threshold of his consciousness. Regeneration is therefore independent of age and can take place in the youngest infants. We may even take for granted that in the sphere of the covenant of God he usually regenerates his elect children from infancy.

#### The Relation between Calling and Regeneration

In light of the foregoing, what is the relation between the calling and regeneration? In a certain sense it may be said that regeneration, even in the narrowest sense, understood as the implanting of the new life, is the fruit of the calling of God. Then it is necessary that we carefully define this calling. There is an immediate calling of God, which precedes all the being of the creature, and through which the creature comes into existence. So it is in creation. When God says, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), the light comes into existence through that efficacious and almighty calling. He calls the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17).

Thus it is also in re-creation, in the work of salvation and of regeneration. When reference is made to this almighty calling of God in the work of regeneration, we have no objection to saying that the calling precedes regeneration. However, the reference is usually to another calling, that is, to the calling through the preaching of the word. When one refers to this calling of the preaching, which is usually distinguished as inward and outward, the calling cannot be applied to regeneration in the narrower sense. Therefore, when we speak of regeneration as the work of God through which the very first principle of life is wrought in the heart of the sinner through the Spirit of Christ, regeneration precedes every work of salvation, including the calling.

This, however, does not alter the fact that on the basis of scripture we may also speak of regeneration in the broader sense, as including the sprouting out of the seed of the new life and as the first revelation of that new life in the consciousness of the sinner. In the teachings of the apostle Paul, both of these conceptions of regeneration are included in the term *calling*. Of regeneration in the narrower sense he speaks only once (Titus 3:5). Usually, he speaks of the calling of God through which the whole of regeneration is accomplished, also as it comes to manifestation in the consciousness of the sinner.

As we have emphasized, the apostle Peter speaks of regeneration in the narrower sense in 1 Peter 1:23, when he says that we are regenerated not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed, through the living and abiding Word of God. Then we are regenerated out of  $(\dot{\epsilon}\kappa)$  incorruptible seed, which God through the Spirit of Christ plants into the heart of the sinner. However, in the second part of this same text, Peter views regeneration as the sprouting forth of the seed in the consciousness of the sinner. This part of the work of regeneration is through  $(\delta\iota\dot{\alpha}_i)$  the word of God that is proclaimed among us.

The same idea we find in James 1:18: God begat us (ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς) through the word of truth (λόγ $\varphi$  ἀληθείας). This word undoubtedly refers to the conscious birth of the new life that always is connected with the preaching of the gospel. We may compare the first implanting of the seed of regeneration to natural generation and conception; and the first manifestation of this principle of the new life in the consciousness of the sinner we may compare to the birth of a child. If we conceive of regeneration in the sense in which James 1:18 speaks of it, as the manifestation of the rebirth in the consciousness and life of the sinner, then it is preceded by the calling, understanding that the calling is always conceived as the efficacious calling of God through the preaching of the gospel.

This is not the place to elaborate on the idea of the calling; this we must do in a later connection. Nevertheless, even now we must remember that the calling through which the life of regeneration sprouts forth in the consciousness of the sinner is distinguished as internal and external. This calling is not simply a human persuasion, but is the work of the Holy Spirit. This calling is an efficacious and irresistible operation of God through the Spirit of Christ whereby the regenerated sinner, also as far as his consciousness is concerned, is translated out of darkness into the marvelous light of God.

There is no need of a controversy about this question of the precedence of the calling or of regeneration. If we conceive of regeneration in the broader sense, it is preceded by the calling and is connected with the preaching of the gospel. Besides, if we also are mindful of the fact that our fathers spoke of regeneration in a still broader sense as including the continual process of sanctification, which arises out of faith and is realized by the word and Spirit,[3] it ought to be evident that a definite, clear, and careful distinction is necessary whenever we discuss this question of the relation between regeneration and calling. It ought also to be evident that the difference among Reformed theologians on this point, and the heated controversy in regard to this, was often the result of confusion of terms and conceptions. Whatever may be said about this question, all Reformed theologians are agreed that the application of the work of salvation is entirely a work of God and is wrought only through the sovereign and almighty grace of God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

#### **Chapter 26**

## The Calling

#### **Calling Defined**

The calling is that work of the triune God whereby through the Spirit of Christ he addresses the elect, regenerated sinner through the word of the gospel and so illuminates him that he is capable of understanding spiritual things spiritually. The result of this operation of God through the Spirit of Christ and the gospel is that the sinner is translated from darkness into the marvelous light of God.

#### Calling as a Divine Work

God is a calling God. He calls the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17). "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6, 9). God says, "Let there be light," and there is light (Gen. 1:3). He calls the firmament, and the blue expanse of the heavens stretches itself over the earth. He calls to the waters, and they gather together into one place, and the dry land appears. He calls to the earth, and it brings forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind. He calls the lights in the firmament to divide the day from the night and the stars to twinkle in the firmament of the heavens. He calls to the waters, and they bring forth abundantly the moving creature that has life and the fowls that fly above the earth in the open firmament of the heavens. He calls to the earth, and it brings forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind (vv. 6–25).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1, 3).

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Heb. 11:3).

Unbelief does not understand the things of the Spirit of God, and for that reason it can never find the origin of things. It judges all things in the light of and according to the standard of human wisdom, according to which things can be called only after they exist, and the thing can never precede its calling. Unbelief must naturally proceed from the principle that things that are seen are made from things which do appear. But faith that clings to God, the creator of all things, understands "that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," for "the worlds were framed by the word of God" (v. 3). God calls the things that are not as if they were.

#### God's Efficacious Call

God also calls man with an efficacious and creative call so that he occupies his own place and fulfills his own task in the history of the world, according to the counsel of God. Thus God calls Cyrus, his servant, whose right hand he holds, to subdue the nations before him. To Cyrus God says, "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have

surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isa. 45:4).

With the same efficacious calling, but now in a saving sense, God calls his people:

But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine (Isa. 43:1).

He calls his servant by name from the womb, and from the bowels of his mother he has made mention of his name (Isa. 49:1). He not only calls the things that are not as if they were, but he also quickens the dead (Rom. 4:17). He calls his people efficaciously from darkness into his marvelous light in order that they might declare his virtues (1 Pet. 2:9). Those whom God has known before and predestinated, them he also called (Rom. 8:30). "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). Presently, all who are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth either unto life or unto damnation (vv. 28–29). God the Lord is a calling God, and he brings everything into existence by the word.

#### The Calling of Reality (Vocatio Realis)

There is also a calling that is directed to the moral, ethical consciousness of the creature, especially of man, and that calls him to serve, to glorify, and to give thanks to his creator. God has formed all things for his own name's sake in order that all creatures should acknowledge him with thanksgiving and glorify his name. In the earthly creation all things must serve man in order that man may serve God. [1] God does not leave himself without witness (Acts 14:17) and calls man to his service. He does that through the things that are made:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge (Ps. 19:1–2).

Although the darkness does not comprehend the light, the light nevertheless shines in the darkness and is in itself the life of man (John 1:4–5, 9). By the calling through the things that are made, God gives witness of himself and of his eternal power and Godhead and demands that all men must glorify and serve him:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19–20).

#### The Call through the Word of God

There is not only a calling through the *vocatio realis*, but from the very beginning there was also a calling to man through the spoken word. This was true already in paradise in the state of rectitude. God created man in God's own image and likeness. God spoke to man and called him to fulfill the task unto which he was created:

Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so (Gen. 1:28–30).

Besides, God gave to man the commandment that he could eat of all the trees of the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16–17).

When man fell and violated the covenant of God, God still maintained his covenant and caused his calling to man to go forth through the incarnated Son, for the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). It is through that Word who came in the flesh, Immanuel, the power and wisdom of God, that the Lord calls unto salvation—the record of which calling we have in holy scripture. In the entire scripture it is the Christ who witnesses, and it is God who calls through Immanuel unto a world that lies in darkness.

True, Christ comes only in the fullness of time; only by his entering into the world, his death, and his resurrection is the gospel fulfilled. However, that does not alter the fact that from the very beginning of the world this holy gospel has been proclaimed. It was revealed in paradise, proclaimed by patriarchs and prophets, foreshadowed in the ceremonies of the law, and finally fulfilled in the Son that became flesh.[2] The same word was carried into the world by the apostles and evangelists. Essentially, it is always the very same calling and the very same holy gospel that is proclaimed, whether by prophets and apostles or by Christ himself, for the Spirit of Christ spoke in and through the prophets and led the apostles into all the truth.

This calling of God through Christ proclaims unto us the full Immanuel in all the riches of his salvation, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). It proclaims unto us the full revelation of the God of our salvation: satisfaction and reconciliation in his blood, the forgiveness of all our transgressions, and the fullness of grace in eternal life to everyone who believes. For he "that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36).

When this calling comes to the natural man, but is not accompanied by a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the heart of man is changed and his mind is illuminated and his will is turned to God, it can never bear any fruit other than that the sinner is placed before God without excuse. The calling maintains in him his rational, moral nature, holds him responsible before God, and is a means to bring sin to greater manifestation and aggravate its judgment. This is true already in regard to the calling that proceeds through the things that are made, as is evident from John 1:4–5, 9–10, Romans 1:18–25, and Romans 2:14–15.

Romans 1:18 teaches that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." This presupposes that, at least to a certain extent, sin is not a matter of pure ignorance, because men hold the truth in unrighteousness. Sin is not even a matter only of the mind. Sin concerns the heart and the will of man. The heart of man is corrupt and inclined to all evil (Jer. 17:9). It wills unrighteousness, and it loves the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19). Because it wills unrighteousness, it also loves the lie and rejects the truth, for the truth condemns the sinner. Only the lie allows him to walk in the way of unrighteousness. Because he loves the lie, he holds the truth in unrighteousness, stands in opposition to the truth, and attempts to change it into the lie.

All of this must be revealed in order to maintain the righteousness of God in judgment. It must be revealed that sin is neither a matter of ignorance, nor a mere matter of the mind, but an ethical evil of the heart. That is why there is a calling of God in the things that are made. Through that calling man receives the witness that God is and that he must be glorified and served. But the natural man rejects this calling of God and shows that he stands in opposition to the living God, for he will not glorify and thank God. In this way man is maintained as a rational, moral creature, and he remains without excuse before God.

John 1 teaches the same truth. The Word is indeed the light and the life of man and shines in the darkness (John 1:4–5, 9). Man by nature is indeed darkness, but not in the sense that he does not have any remnants of natural light. Through sin he did not turn into a brute, irrational creature; his ethical consciousness was not lost. Even when he walks in the lie and loves it, even when he is totally depraved and loves unrighteousness, and even when he is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil, [3] so that he does not will the good and is incapable of willing it, the fact remains that this Word  $(\lambda \acute{o}\gamma o\varsigma)$  shines before him and in him in such a way that he knows himself as a rational, moral, and responsible creature.

Natural man also knows in general the difference between good and evil. He does not sin because he is ignorant of this difference; but knowing it, he always chooses for the evil. For the Word is the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world (v. 9), even though the darkness has not comprehended the light that shines in the darkness (v. 5). There is, therefore, a calling to every man through the light (the Word) in the world. But the darkness does not comprehend the light, and sinful man holds this calling in unrighteousness.

This is also the presentation of Romans 2:14–15:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

The heathen do not have the law. That is, they have no objective revelation of the law as Israel did. Yet they do by nature the things that are of the law and show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another. These words must not be understood as if the apostle is teaching that the heathen accomplish the law by nature and that the law is written in their hearts. It is not his intention to teach anything of the kind. Whoever accomplishes the law and has the law written in his heart is righteous before God. The apostle intends exactly the very opposite, that is, to include all under sin. But the things that are of the law, which means that what the law—as it was expressed in the Decalogue—did for Israel, the heathen do by nature of themselves. The law clearly revealed what was good and evil and demanded the good. In this sense the heathen have the work of the law—not the law itself—written in their hearts.

By their natural light the heathen know along general lines what is good and evil. Hence they can by nature do the things which are of the law, that is, they can distinguish between good and evil, and place themselves before the demand to do the good, the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another. The heathen indeed do this. They even reach a very high degree of development, as, for instance, in Roman jurisprudence. Although they possess all this knowledge, yet they do not the good, but choose for the evil and love unrighteousness. They will not serve God and glorify him. Hence matters go from bad to worse with them, from sin unto sin, for whoever does not want to serve God presently bows himself before wood and stone, before ox and cow and serpent. Ultimately he casts himself, in the way of the lie, into all the corruptions which the apostle enumerates in Romans 1:22–32.

#### The External Call of the Gospel

This deliberate rejection of the light is also true with respect to the proclamation of the gospel, or the external calling through the word. The calling is in a certain sense general, although it does not reach all men, but only those to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel. Although this is true, the fact remains that many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:14). The calling through the gospel does not come only to the elect, but also to the reprobate, according to the good pleasure of God. And this calling has significance not only for the elect, but also for the reprobate.

This significance certainly is not, as some have it, that this calling is grace for all who hear the gospel. Scripture, as well as experience, teaches the very opposite. Just as it is no grace when the darkness does not comprehend the light of the Logos, so the preaching of the gospel is no grace for those who are lost. Neither on the part of God, who causes the gospel to be preached unto them, nor on the part of the hearers, who without the regenerating and illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit always reject that gospel, can it be called grace when a reprobate is under the calling of God through the gospel. Grace is never general, but always particular. But this does not alter the fact that the Lord God has his purpose and that this purpose is attained also when he causes men to come under the preaching of the gospel without changing their hearts through regenerating and illuminating grace.

Through this external calling the responsibility of man and his ethical character are maintained. God speaks to man through the gospel. In that gospel God calls man to repentance, to conversion and faith. In the gospel God very clearly and undeniably presents to man the way of sin as a way that displeases God and makes the sinner the object of God's wrath, and as a way in which man gathers to himself treasures of wrath in the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgment.

Moreover, in that gospel God opens for him who repents a way to be reconciled to God and to return to the heart of the Father, assures him that he will never be cast out, and promises him eternal life. No sinner who repents shall ever be able to say that God has delight in his death. All this is preached in the gospel—without distinction—to all who hear the gospel, including the reprobate. This calling through the gospel is distinguished from the *vocatio realis* in that the gospel call opens a way of redemption and salvation and gives the hope of eternal life in the way of faith and repentance, which is not possible through the *vocatio realis*. Through the external call of the gospel, however, the judgment of the ungodly is aggravated if he does not repent, for by virtue of the remnants of natural light that are in him, he certainly understands this calling of the gospel. [4]

With regard to the understanding of this calling of the gospel, there are differences of degree among natural men. Some have so little comprehension that they can understand only the first principles of the word of God, while others are illuminated, taste the gift of the Holy Spirit, and feel in themselves the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:1–6). But this does not alter the fact that, organically considered, the natural man has remnants of natural light, through which he can understand the preaching of the word. When he does not receive grace, and when God does not call him efficaciously through the operation of the Holy Spirit, he never embraces that gospel in a saving sense. He declares in word and deed that he would rather be lost than to serve and glorify the God who saves his people. He does not come to the light, for he loves the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19–20). In this way the preaching of the gospel becomes to him a savor of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16). He is fully revealed as a sinner who stands in rebellion against the loving God, so God is justified when he judges him (Ps. 51:4).

#### The Internal or Saving Call

When we speak of the calling in the saving sense, as a link in the chain of salvation, it is important that we remember and place on the foreground that this is a work of God's grace in the absolute sense and that he accomplishes this work only in the elect. We are so easily tempted to confuse the calling as a step on the way of salvation with the preaching of the gospel as it is proclaimed by men. The

calling as a work of salvation in that case becomes general, comes on the part of God to all men, and is gradually changed into a well-meaning offer on the part of God to all men, the acceptance of which depends on the free will of man. If we teach this we are on the track of Pelagius and Arminius. Therefore, although we certainly do not deny that the proclamation of the gospel comes to many and that, according to the good pleasure of the Lord, the gospel is brought to many who are not saved, we must never forget that many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 20:16; Matt. 22:14).

The calling as a work of God's grace—as it is being treated in soteriology—may never be confused with the external preaching of the gospel to all. The calling in a saving sense, through which the sinner is translated from darkness into God's marvelous light, is a work of God's grace and is wrought in the elect alone. Like all the work of God's grace, the calling in a saving sense is strictly particular. Even as election is strictly particular and dependent on God's sovereign grace alone; even as the blood of Christ and his atonement is particular, and as that blood is shed only for the elect; even as the work of regeneration does not at all depend on the will of man, but is wrought efficaciously by God's sovereign grace only in the elect, so also the calling in a saving sense is never general, but always particular. This calling of God does not come to all men, but only to the elect.

That this is true is plain from all scripture. More than once Holy Writ speaks of this calling. In every instance it is very plain that it is the work of the Lord that he accomplishes only in his own elect. The good shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out (John 10:3). When they hear the voice of the good shepherd as he calls them, they follow him (v. 27). They do not become his sheep only at the moment when he calls them, still less because they hear his voice and follow him. On the contrary, they are his sheep from before the foundation of the world. The Father gave them to the shepherd (v. 29). Because they are his sheep, he calls them by name. And because he calls them efficaciously, they hear his voice and follow him. Those who are not of his sheep and for whom the good shepherd did not give his life do not hear his voice, are not called by him by name, and believe not in him. "Ye believe not," says the Savior, "because ye are not of my sheep" (v. 26).

Romans 8:29–30, the well-known passage in which the apostle speaks of the chain of salvation, teaches the same truth. In verse 28 he writes that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those whom he has called according to his purpose. In the verses that follow he gives an explanation of this marvelous fact by pointing to the deepest cause of what he has said in verse 28:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (vv. 29–30).

They are called according to the good pleasure and purpose of God. This calling constitutes only a link in the unbreakable chain of salvation, the last link of which reaches into the glorification of the saints. Hence it is inevitable that one who is truly called can be absolutely sure also of the eternal glory that is set before him, because his calling is rooted in the eternal love-knowledge of God, and proceeds from predestination unto eternal glory. That is the reason why all things work together for good for those whom God has called according to his purpose. Here it is also very evident that the calling is just as particular as the predestination unto everlasting glory and salvation. It is a work of God which he accomplishes only in his own elect.

That only the elect are called is the presentation of the beautiful first chapter of 1 Corinthians. Paul writes to the congregation, to the church of God at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, to those who are called to be saints, that is, to those who through the calling have become saints of God in Christ Jesus. He further attributes this calling entirely to God the Lord, who is

faithful, and who called them unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (v. 9). Because they are called by God, he shall also confirm them unto the end, that they may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 8).

If the calling—in part or entirely—were dependent on the will and choice of man, it could never be sure. But it is God who is faithful, and the faithful God has called his people according to his purpose. He shall surely preserve them and finish his own work in them unto the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6). Therefore, Paul explains that the preaching of the gospel is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but is the power and wisdom of God to them who are called (1 Cor. 1:23–24). The calling of God is the sole determining factor. It does not make any difference whether one is a Jew or a Greek. By nature all men lie under sin and in darkness. The crucified Christ is surely a stumbling block and foolishness also to the elect as they are by nature. But when God calls, the situation becomes different, for then that same crucified Christ becomes unto them a power of God unto salvation.

The apostle also points to the eternal election of God as the root of this calling:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (vv. 26–29).

The meaning of the apostle is very plain. By their calling, believers may know that God has chosen them unto salvation simply because the calling is out of election and concerns the elect alone. The calling, like the atonement in the blood of Christ, is particular.

The word of God frequently speaks of the calling as that work of grace through which God translates the sinner from darkness into the light of life. Paul writes:

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God (Rom 9:22–26).

Two things are very clear from this passage. First, the calling of God concerns only the vessels of mercy, that is, the elect, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles. God calls them and them only. Second, this calling is efficacious, strictly a creative calling: They were not the people of God, but God calls them his people, and through this calling they become his people. Where it was first said to them, "Ye are not my people," now they are called children of the living God. The efficacious calling of God is the cause of their becoming children of God.

The same idea of the calling is clear from 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also here it is God, and God only, who through the gospel calls unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The calling is presented as proceeding only from the sovereign election of God. Thus Paul also writes to Timothy:

"[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9).

In this verse the calling is presented as an efficacious calling of God rooted in election.

In the epistles of Peter we find mention of this calling in the saving sense. Contrasting believers with those who stumble at the word, whereunto also they were appointed, Peter writes:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

Clearly, it is God who calls. As far as its fruit is concerned, this calling consists in the translation of the called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God. The calling is effective, therefore, only in the elect.

That this calling concerns only the elect is evident not only from the connection that the text establishes between calling and election, but also from the context. The precious and elect cornerstone that is laid in Zion is to some a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Therefore, they stumble at the word, which is a proclamation of that stone, and to this stumbling they are appointed (vv. 6–8). They hear the word, but are nevertheless not called in the saving sense. In distinction from these reprobate that stumble at the word, the saints are a chosen generation, who are for that very reason *called* out of darkness into God's marvelous light.

In verse 21, the apostle refers to the purpose of their calling: the saints are called in order that they might follow the example of Christ and walk in his steps, especially when they have to suffer for righteousness' sake. The same idea is repeated in 1 Peter 3:9:

Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

The apostle emphasizes that it is the God of all grace who called us, and who calls us to the end of the calling, namely, eternal glory (1 Pet. 5:10).

The purpose of the calling is also on the foreground in 2 Peter 1:3:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

The calling is inseparably connected with election in the well-known words of verse 10:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

Thus the calling is a work of the God of all grace in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit, whereby God irresistibly and efficaciously translates the elect sinner from darkness into his marvelous light. It is not a work that takes place below our consciousness, in the depth of our existence, as is the case with regeneration in the narrower sense. On the contrary, although the very beginning of this work of grace is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the depth of our hearts and therefore is hid from us, yet the calling as a whole certainly concerns our consciousness.

Through the efficacious calling we receive ears to hear, eyes to see, and an illuminated mind to perceive and understand the things of the Spirit of God. By the calling we receive the correct view of the things of the kingdom of God. By the calling we see and acknowledge our sin in a way in which we can never acknowledge and see our sin by nature. The calling causes us to look upon Christ in all

his fullness, his cross, resurrection, and exaltation, to perceive the power and glory of his grace, the precious benefits of salvation, the fullness of his grace, the forgiveness of sins, justification, wisdom, sanctification, and complete redemption, so that with all that is within us we long for him and for the possession of all his benefits, and so that we hunger and thirst after righteousness. By nature we may know many things about Christ without knowing him. But by virtue of this efficacious calling, we learn to know Christ himself in all the riches of his grace.

Besides, through the calling we learn to know with a spiritual knowledge the will of God concerning ourselves and our calling as the people of God's covenant in the midst of the world. Through the calling the light of eternal life shines upon our pathway through this vale of tears so that we look for the city that has foundations (Heb. 11:10). Hence it is a calling *out of* the darkness *into* the light, out of death into life, out of sin and misery into righteousness and sanctification, out of the lie into the truth, and out of our alienation from God into the communion and fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and into eternal glory.

#### The Relation between the External and the Internal Call

The calling is usually distinguished as an external and an internal call. This distinction may be maintained, provided that we understand correctly what is meant by it. First, it must be emphasized that the external and internal calling may not be conceived as two callings, the first of which is general and the second particular. This distinction is frequently made, with pernicious results. If this is done, the external calling is simply the general proclamation of the gospel by men. This external calling remains without effect in many who hear—although also for them it is supposed to be a well-meant offer of salvation and grace on the part of God—while in others the same external calling has the desired effect and bears the proper fruit through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

This, however, is not the intention of this distinction between the external call and the internal call. When we speak of the calling as a link in the chain of salvation (Rom. 8:29–30) and therefore of the calling in the saving sense, we never mean anything else than the work of God's grace whereby the elect sinner is translated out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Rather than conceiving of two callings, we must speak of one calling with two aspects, an external and an internal. These aspects are related as form and content or as the work and the means whereby this work is wrought. Together they form one whole; they are one calling. Instead of speaking of an external and an internal calling, it is preferable to say that the calling is both external and internal: the external aspect, as well as the internal, is the work of God through the Spirit of Christ. Only where both go together and cooperate is there the calling of God whereby the sinner is translated from darkness into God's marvelous light.

The calling in the external sense is the word of God as it comes to us in human form, in human language, in the proclamation of the gospel. The infallible record of the revelation of God in the scriptures is from beginning to end the word of God. We certainly must not speak of a word of God in the Bible, as if the whole of scripture from beginning to end were not divine, the full revelation of the God of our salvation in Christ Jesus. Walking in that direction, we will finally discover that we have no word of God left. No, the scriptures from beginning to end are the infallible record of the word of God, the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is not even safe to speak of a divine and a human factor in Holy scripture. It is true that the revelation of God as we have it in scripture came to us through men and in the course of human history. But we may never forget that also the cloth on which this divine work of revelation was embroidered by the Holy Spirit is not from man, but from God. He did not find organs of revelation,

but he prepared them. He did not find a human history, times, countries, places, circumstances, and experiences of persons, which he then deemed fit to be used as instruments of his revelation; but he created them and prepared them for the purpose which he had conceived. Thus the holy scriptures are not a mixture of divine and human factors, but they are from beginning to end the infallible record of the word of God.

Therefore, holy scripture is not dead, but is a living testimony of the Holy Spirit, a testimony that has its center in the incarnate Word. Consequently, the calling that proceeds from the proclamation of the gospel is a work of God. It is a divine calling; God causes this calling to proceed wherever he wills. When the word of God is proclaimed through the church and through the official ministration of the gospel, it is directed by God. The gospel is proclaimed wherever God sends it according to his own good pleasure.[5] Therefore, the calling from its external aspect is not a human, but a divine calling.

Yet this external side of the calling, without anything else, is not capable of causing the light of life to shine in the heart of any sinner, for the darkness does not comprehend the light of God. It is of no avail that an electric wire is led right into my home. That wire may scintillate with life and light, but in itself it is incapable of illuminating my home. If that wire is ultimately not connected with an electric bulb, and if the switch is not turned on, my dwelling remains in darkness.

The same is true of the living wire of the word of God. The gospel as it comes to us in human language and in human forms certainly brings the living wire of the Spirit to our natural ear and to our natural understanding—which, however, is in darkness. But if the mind of the sinner is to be spiritually illuminated, the Holy Spirit of Christ himself must call efficaciously and creatively, through the hearing of the gospel, to the very heart of the sinner, must give him eyes to see and ears to hear, must illuminate his mind spiritually, and thus translate him out of darkness into the marvelous light of God. This is the internal aspect of the calling of God through the preaching of the gospel. Only thus does the calling of God become efficacious and irresistible.

It stands to reason that the Spirit calls unto life and light only through the gospel, as contained in the scriptures. The living and light-giving wire of the scriptures may not be replaced by a dead wire of a human word. The human word is not used by the Spirit of God to call out of darkness into light. They who have the calling to be ministers of the word of God and to be instrumental in leading the living wire of the word to mind and heart through the preaching of the gospel must therefore be careful, lest they be anything else than ministers of the word of God. They may not add to it or subtract from it. No human philosophy may they ever proclaim. They may not change the word of God into a well-meaning offer of salvation to all men on the part of God. Ever and everywhere they must be nothing but ministers of the divine word.

That word, carried upon the vehicle of a human proclamation, kills and makes alive, not only as a savor of life unto life, but also of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16). Even through the preaching of the gospel, God is merciful unto whom he will be merciful, but hardens whom he wills (Rom. 9:18). Anyone who does not want to serve this twofold purpose can never be a minister of the word of God. But he who through divine grace has learned to will this purpose of God may be assured that in the proclamation of the gospel he is always well-pleasing to God who sent him.

## **Chapter 27**

# **Saving Faith**

## **Saving Faith Defined**

Saving faith is that work of God in the elect, regenerated, and called sinner whereby the sinner is ingrafted into Christ and embraces and appropriates Christ and all his benefits, relying upon him in time and eternity.

By faith we are ingrafted into Christ. Faith is the spiritual means whereby we are united with Christ, the bond whereby we are made one body, one plant, with him so that by faith we may live from him, draw our all from him, and receive all his benefits. Faith is not another work on the part of man, by the performance of which he becomes worthy of salvation. All the work that makes us worthy of righteousness, eternal life, and glory has been performed and completely finished by Christ himself. That is true even of the gift of faith itself: Christ merited faith for us by his perfect obedience.

We may not say that faith is a condition that we must fulfill before God is willing to give us the salvation merited by Christ for us. There are no conditions whatsoever unto salvation. It is free and sovereign. Nor is faith to be presented as the hand by which we accept the salvation proffered by God. Often it is presented thus. Salvation is compared to a beautiful gold watch that I freely offer to someone. I hold it in my extended hand and beg the person upon whom I would bestow this gift to take it. It is his for the accepting. But he will never actually possess that watch unless he will extend his own hand to take it from mine. Similarly, it is alleged, faith is the hand by which we take hold of the salvation proffered in the gospel.

But this is not true, for the reception and appropriation of the benefits of Christ is by no means such a mechanical and external transaction as taking a watch from a man's hand, but a profound spiritual activity of the entire soul. Besides, the natural man has no hand whereby he is able to accept the salvation of God in Christ Jesus. Faith is a bond, a spiritual bond, whereby we are so united with Christ that by it we live out of him. We must remember that literally all our salvation is in Christ. In him is our redemption, the forgiveness of sin, the adoption unto children, eternal and perfect righteousness, knowledge of God and wisdom, freedom from the dominion of sin and sanctification, and eternal life, light, and joy.

All the blessings of salvation are not only merited by Christ, but they are also *in him*. He is our wisdom and knowledge, our righteousness and holiness, our eternal life and peace—our complete redemption. In order to obtain these blessings of salvation, we must become one plant with him; we must be united with him in the spiritual, organic sense. And the bond whereby we are united with Christ is faith. This faith we do not possess of ourselves. It is strictly a gift of God, wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ.

This conception of faith is scriptural. The Savior compares the relation between himself and believers to the relation between the vine and the branches:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:1–5).

The apostle Paul speaks of being planted together in the likeness of the death of Christ and in his

resurrection (Rom. 6:5). In Romans 11:16–24 he uses the figure of the olive tree and its branches. By faith, therefore, whereby we are ingrafted into Christ, we appropriate him unto ourselves so that his righteousness and holiness, his life and peace, become our all, and we rejoice in the God of our salvation.

## The Essence of Saving Faith

A distinction can be made between the essence and the operation or between the *potentia* and *actus* of saving faith. As to its essence, faith is a spiritual *potentia* or *habitus*, the power or aptitude to apprehend and appropriate Christ and all his benefits. Faith is not another natural faculty of the soul in addition to the intellect and will. Faith is rather a new disposition of the entire soul, a spiritual *habitus*, which makes the whole soul of man, with mind, will, and all the inclinations of the heart, peculiarly fit to apprehend spiritual things. It is the fitness to believe, in distinction from the act of believing itself.

We may illustrate this by many natural examples. When a child is born, he has all the faculties, powers, and gifts he will ever have, even though they do not as yet actively function. The infant in the cradle has the faculty to think, to will, to perceive, and to understand the world about him, even though at that time he does not actually think and will, perceive and understand, speak and walk. If later in life the child develops into a great mathematician or a skillful musician, this mathematical bent of mind or artistic tendency was not added to the child's talents after he was born; his talents were all given with birth.

The same may be said of saving faith. As a spiritual *habitus* it is given with our spiritual birth, that is, in regeneration, while it develops into the conscious activity of believing through contact with the gospel applied to the heart by the Spirit of Christ. Without this spiritual *habitus* it is impossible for a man to believe in Christ. If a child is born blind, he cannot be taught to see. If he is born dumb, he will never speak. If he is born deaf, the activity of hearing will never develop. The same is true spiritually. By nature the sinner is born blind and deaf and dumb with regard to spiritual things. No one can possibly teach him to see and hear and confess the God of his salvation in Christ. Even though he were instructed in the knowledge of Christ from infancy, and the gospel were preached to him all his life, there would never be any response other than contempt and rejection. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Cor. 2:14).

This *habitus* of saving faith is the fruit of the Holy Ghost. It is true that the power of faith becomes active belief only through the gospel. Without that gospel, faith has no Christ to apprehend or cling to, and for that reason can never become active belief. But we must not make the mistake of presenting the matter of saving faith as if its *habitus* or *potentia* were implanted, wrought in the heart, by the Holy Spirit, while its activity is caused by the gospel without the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is not true. Both the power and the activity of faith are wrought through the Spirit of Christ only. It is the Spirit who applies the preaching of the gospel to the heart of the sinner in whom the aptitude or *habitus* of faith has already been wrought. It is, therefore, the Spirit of the Lord who calls and awakens the power of faith into the conscious activity of belief.

We must also remark here that this *habitus* or potential of faith (*potentia fidei*) is wrought in the heart immediately by the Spirit of Christ. The power of faith may be wrought in the heart of the smallest infant as well as in the heart of the adult. We may no doubt assume that in the sphere of the historical realization of God's covenant, God usually gives this power of faith to the elect of the covenant in their infancy. We may also remark that this *potentia fidei* can never be lost. The activity

of saving faith may be very weak at times, may seem to have died out and disappeared, so that we seem to have no hold on Christ and the precious promises of Christ. But the power of faith, the *habitus fidei*, can never be lost. Once a believer, always a believer. This is true not because of any inherent virtue in the *potentia fidei*, but is due only to the abiding, indwelling and continued operation of the Holy Spirit in the innermost recesses of our hearts. The bond of faith with Christ is never broken, because it is constantly preserved in us by his Holy Spirit.

## The Elements of Saving Faith

The word in the Old Testament that approaches closest in meaning to the New Testament words πίστις (faith) and πιστεύειν (to believe) is אָמֵן (to trust). In qal[1] this verb means "to stay, to support"; in niphal[2] it means "to be supported, to be borne in the arms, as a child"; and further, "to be founded, to be firm, stable, sure, to be lasting and permanent." From this אָמֵן derives the metaphorical meaning, "to be faithful, trustworthy, sure." Thus Psalm 78:8 literally says, "whose spirit was not faithful towards God" (וֹלְאֹ־נָאֶמְנָה אָת־אֵל רוּהוֹ). In hiphil[3] the verb means "to trust, to confide in." In this sense it is followed by the preposition בְּ (in). The phrase הַּבְּאֵמִין בֵּיהֹנָה trust or to believe in Jehovah." It also means "to believe in the sense of accepting as true"; then it is either used absolutely or is followed by the preposition \( \frac{1}{2}\) (to, for, at), sometimes followed also by the conjunction \( \frac{1}{2}\) (for) with a substantive clause.

Thus the well-known words of Genesis 15:6 are literally: "he trusted in [believed in] Jehovah, and righteousness" accounted him for לוֹ) to וַיַחִשְׁבֶהַ it which in the Septuagint is translated as καὶ ἐπίστευσιν Ἄβραμ τῶ Θεῶ έλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνη (And Abraham believed God, and he counted it to him for righteousness). In Isaiah 7:9 the prophet addresses the word of the Lord to Ahaz the king: "If ye will be established" לא) shall not believe, surely ye not כי תאמינוּ אמנד), which the Septuagint translates as καὶ ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε οὐδὲ μὴ συνῆτε (And if ye will not believe, then ye shall not understand). Habakkuk 2:4, which Romans 1:17 quotes, is literally, "the righteous by his faith shall live" (וצַדִּיק בַּאֱמוּנַתוֹ יָחֵיֵה). In the Septuagint this is translated by ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται (But the righteous shall live by my faith); here the personal pronoun is inexplicably translated by μου (my) instead of by αὐτοῦ (his).

In the New Testament the words πίστις (*faith*) and πιστεύειν (*to believe*) occur very frequently. The verb πιστεύειν occurs with the accusative; with a substantive clause (John 6:69, 1 John 1:1, 5); or simply with the dative, in the sense of "to believe someone" (John 2:22; John 4:50; John 5:47; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:12). It may be followed by the preposition  $\dot{\epsilon}\pi i$  (*on, upon*) with the accusative (Rom. 4:5, 24) or with the dative (Rom. 9:33; Rom. 10:11; 1 Tim. 1:16), and especially with the preposition  $\dot{\epsilon}i\zeta$  (*into, in*) with the accusative (Phil. 1:29; Col. 2:5). Besides, πιστεύειν is sometimes construed with  $\dot{\epsilon}v$  (*in*). This certainly is the most general construction in the Septuagint, but in the New Testament it does not occur very often.

The noun  $\pi i \sigma \tau \iota \varsigma$  (*faith*) also occurs with different constructions, for instance, with the genitive  $\dot{\epsilon} \kappa$  (*of*) in Romans 3:22 and Galatians 2:16; with  $\pi \rho \dot{\epsilon} \varsigma$  and the accusative (*toward*) in 1 Thessalonians 1:8; with  $\dot{\epsilon} \iota \varsigma$  and the accusative (*into*) in Colossians 2:5; with  $\dot{\epsilon} \pi \iota$  and the accusative (*upon*) in Romans 4:5, 24; and with  $\dot{\epsilon} \pi \iota$  and the dative (*in, at*) in Romans 9:33.

All of these constructions point to the fact that faith is as many-sided as life itself and that faith has its seat in the heart of man. They also point to the main distinction in faith, namely, knowledge and confidence. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, faith is both a certain knowledge and a hearty

confidence.[4]

In the course of time, much has been written about saving faith, and all kinds of conceptions have been developed concerning the nature and the essence of faith, the elements of faith, and the seat of faith in the human soul as well as concerning the connection of faith with the benefits of salvation that are received by faith.

Some conceive of the essence of faith as lying in the assent to the truth. According to this notion, faith is really nothing more than an operation merely of the intellect, by which he who believes accepts the truth. According to others, faith is essentially nothing but a certain knowledge. Still others emphasize that the real nature of faith must not be sought in assent, nor in a certain knowledge, but in a hearty confidence. Some connect all these different ideas and find in saving faith all three elements: knowledge, assent, and confidence. And some hold that it is better to speak only of knowledge and confidence, seeing that the assent of faith is really implied in the knowledge.

#### The Seat of Faith

There has always been a difference of opinion concerning the question whether the seat of faith must be sought in the intellect, in the will, or even in the feelings or emotions of man. Those who supported the idea that the seat of faith is in the intellect were the same who found the essence of faith in knowledge or in the mere assent to the truth. Those who emphasized instead the element of confidence averred that faith is a power (*habitus*) or an act of the will. Still others emphasized the mystical experience and blessedness that is wrought by faith in the heart of the sinner, and therefore they placed the seat of faith in the emotions or in the feelings of man.

As is often the case, it may be remarked that these different ideas concerning faith do not always give evidence of proper distinction, frequently separating what may be logically distinguished, but nevertheless cannot be separated. For instance, it is emphasized that the same gift or power (*habitus*) of faith cannot at the same time have its seat both in the intellect and in the will, and that therefore faith must be conceived either as a power (*habitus*) of the intellect or a power (*habitus*) of the will. Those who hold such a view lose sight of the fact that faith is not a natural gift but a spiritual power (*habitus*) which, according to the presentation of scripture, does not have its seat in the intellect or the will, but in the heart of man: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10).

Scripture always emphasizes the spiritual and ethical nature of man, and therefore it preferably speaks in terms of his heart. That heart is the center of all man's existence and life from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint. From the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). Out of the heart proceeds all of our thinking and willing, our loving and hating, and our desires and inclinations. From the heart all these abilities receive spiritual, ethical direction. By the heart, therefore, both intellect and will are controlled. That heart is either believing or unbelieving. It turns away from the living God, holds the truth in unrighteousness, and loves the lie; or the heart turns to God in Christ Jesus, seeks his face, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness. When we bear this in mind, there is no reason whatever to limit faith to intellect or will. Rather, we must conceive the truth of the matter: From the heart of man, the spiritual power (habitus) of faith controls both intellect and will.

Losing sight of this truth often resulted in a purely naturalistic or psychological conception and analysis of saving faith. This, in turn, resulted either in dead intellectualism, superficial practicism, or false mysticism, according as emphasis was laid on the factor of the intellect, the will, or the emotions.

Those who viewed faith as a function of the mind emphasized faith as a natural knowledge of the

intellect, a mere acceptance of the truth revealed in scripture. One came by faith to the truth, but through the truth came not to the living Christ. The natural intellect indeed had contact with the truth and accepted it, but the heart had no communion with the Savior of sinners. When doubt arose in the soul with respect to one's personal part in the salvation wrought by God in Christ, one was simply pointed to the truth of scripture. That truth must simply be accepted, and by the acceptance of that truth one was saved.

Those who saw faith as a function of the will—and who would have nothing of such dead intellectualism—emphasized that the will was gifted by faith with true freedom. Therefore, they emphasized that faith must produce fruit, for without that fruit faith is dead. The result was a natural practicism, which emphasized a practical Christianity, but which had no knowledge of sin and the righteousness of God that he has revealed to his people in Jesus Christ. The main question was not what one believed, but what one did in the world, for the tree is known by its fruit.

Those who understood faith to be rooted in the emotions wanted nothing of dead intellectualism or of cold practicism, but they emphasized feeling and mystical experience and sought in this feeling and experience the real and genuine character of faith.

## Faith as a Bond of Union with Christ

We must emphasize that faith is rooted in the heart of man and that from the heart it governs and controls both intellect and will. Faith is really the bond whereby God's people are united with Christ, the means whereby God ingrafts them into Christ and makes them one plant with him, so that they stand in living communion with him. All the benefits of salvation have not only been merited by Christ, but also are literally in him. He is their wisdom, righteousness, and complete redemption. From him and out of him they receive grace for grace.

Out of Christ, they receive the complete salvation that God has prepared for those who are given to Christ from before the foundation of the world. They receive this salvation because Christ imparts to them the benefits of salvation that he merited for them. Christ imparts himself to his brethren, for he is raised from the dead and received into heaven, far above all principalities and powers and dominion and every name that is named, and he received from the Father the quickening Spirit. "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47). The first man is become a living soul; the second man is become a quickening Spirit (v. 45). "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Christ is become the living and quickening head of his body, the church, and he imparts himself and all the benefits of salvation to all who are given him by the Father.

Christ imparts himself and all the benefits of salvation to his brethren only through faith, whereby God ingrafts them into Christ and makes them one plant with him. Faith, therefore, cannot be called a condition or a prerequisite that man must fulfill in order to receive salvation and all the benefits of grace, as has often been the presentation even of those who subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity. Especially when grace is presented as an offer, faith and conversion are frequently conceived of as prerequisites for the reception of that offer of grace.

This presentation of faith is erroneous through and through. Faith certainly is not a condition which man must fulfill in order to receive the gifts of grace. On the contrary, faith itself is one of the chief gifts of grace from God to the sinner. One does not receive grace *on condition* that he first believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, he receives the gift of faith *in order that* he may live out of Christ. There are no conditions for salvation, simply because salvation is never dependent on

anything in man. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

Neither is faith to be conceived of as a meritorious work on the part of man whereby he assents to God's righteousness and humbles himself in true repentance, in order to make himself worthy of the grace of God. On the contrary, faith is characterized by being itself entirely without merit. Nor may faith be presented as a spiritual power by which man's will is liberated to do good works, whereby he is enabled to merit his own salvation.

It is certainly true that faith without works is dead and that by faith believers are enabled to bear fruit unto God. This does not alter the fact that they are not saved out of works, but that faith itself is a power unto salvation. All these presentations must be rejected on the ground of holy scripture, which teaches that *the real work of God* is that his people believe in Jesus Christ whom God has sent (John 6:29). Instead of these erroneous ideas, we must maintain that faith is God's own work, the work of his free grace within his people, the spiritual means of God, the spiritual power (*habitus*), whereby God ingrafts them into Christ through the Holy Spirit, and whereby he causes all the blessings of salvation to flow out of Christ to them. It is the bond to Christ whereby their souls cleave unto him, live out of him, and receive and appropriate all his benefits.

## Faith as Knowledge

It stands to reason that as this spiritual power (habitus) of faith controls the entire soul of man—and that as in this soul we may distinguish the intellectual faculty (facultas intelligendi) and the volitional faculty (facultas volendi)—faith reveals itself as a spiritual knowledge and a spiritual confidence. We speak of a spiritual knowledge in distinction from the knowledge that consists in the mere acceptance of the truth of scripture. This is emphasized by all Reformed theologians. For example, Kuyper writes:

This "certain, secure knowledge" does not consist in a further development of a knowledge which in part we already possessed, nor in an unfolding of a knowledge that was hid within us. One does not make any headway in this knowledge, though he would finish the courses in all the schools. Even if one would do nothing else all his life long than read the Bible, and compare Scripture with Scripture, he would not even advance one step toward the knowledge that is here meant. No, here a new knowledge is meant, which you did not possess as a sinner, and of which you received the power in regeneration. Another kind of knowledge this is, comparable to the "original knowledge" which Adam received in Paradise, and which is given us of God in Christ "our wisdom." He who receives this knowledge knows differently, sees differently, touches differently. That which before he could not discern, he now perceives, and it becomes life to him. "Enlightened eyes of the understanding" the apostle therefore calls this knowledge; and they are eyes too, which gaze with such uncommon accuracy that they afford immediate and complete certainty and assurance concerning those things that are perceived by them: so clearly, so lucidly, so sharply this knowledge defines the things before your consciousness. The natural man does not see anything of this, but the spiritual man that has the gift of faith discerns all things. But, "if one is not born again, he cannot even see the kingdom of God."

Without the implanting of this saving faith, one may, therefore, indeed, commit the Bible to memory and accept its contents historically, but this does not help him. He may also work himself into it by the spur of the emotions and for a time rejoice in it, but neither this "historical" nor this "temporary" faith has anything in common with the faith whereby we are ingrafted into Jesus. Even "miraculous" faith has nothing in common with saving faith, for although you had a "faith to remove mountains" (and that is miraculous faith), and love was not infused into your heart, you still would be nothing.

Disputations, therefore, do not help. We must have *testimony*, the word must be *administered*, because usually it pleases God to use the word as a means for implanting of faith; but even though you talk day and night to someone, as long as his soul cannot see through the eye of faith, you cannot show him the glories of God. [5]

Also to Calvin this knowledge of faith is more than a natural knowledge and more than the mere acceptance of the truth of scripture:

By knowledge we do not mean comprehension, such as that which we have of things falling under human sense. For that knowledge is so much superior, that the human mind must far surpass and go beyond itself in order to reach it. Nor even when it has reached it does it comprehend what it feels, but persuaded of what it comprehends not, it understands more from mere certainty of persuasion than it could discern of any human matter by its own capacity . . . This is also indicated by Paul when he says, that "whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight)" (2 Cor. 5:6, 7): thus showing that what we understand by faith is yet distant from us and escapes our view. Hence we conclude that the knowledge of faith consists more of certainty than discernment. [6]

With these sentiments all Reformed theologians agree. Knowledge is an essential part of saving faith. It is a very special kind of knowledge, by which man discerns and appropriates spiritual things. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, true faith is "a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his Word."[7] Without the word of God we know nothing of the things of the Spirit. The knowledge of saving faith is not a certain inner light, which can do without and despises the letter of the word. It is in the holy scriptures that the Christ is mirrored. True faith is certain knowledge; it holds for truth, and it assents to all that is revealed in the scriptures.

This does not mean that the knowledge of faith is mere intellectual certainty and assent to the truth. Saving faith is not historical faith plus a hearty confidence. The knowledge of faith is more than an intellectual apprehension and assurance of truth. It is different. It is not at all like the knowledge which a natural man may have of the truth of the word of God, for the natural man does not discern and receive the things of the Spirit. The knowledge of saving faith is spiritual. It is experiential. It is not a theoretical knowledge *about* God in Christ, but it is the knowledge *of him*. There is a wide difference between knowing all *about* a thing or person and *knowing* that thing or person.

In knowing *about* something or someone, my knowledge is purely theoretical, and my relation to the thing or person known is external and superficial. I place myself above the object of my knowledge, investigate it, feel superior to it, criticize it, analyze it minutely, and describe it. But in *knowing* something or someone, my knowledge is experiential. It is a knowledge of love and fellowship. My relation to the object of my knowledge is profound and spiritual. A dietitian may be able to analyze thoroughly every item on a menu and inform you exactly as to the number and kinds of vitamins each dish contains. But if he has cancer of the stomach, he cannot taste the food and enjoy it; neither is he able to digest it and derive the necessary strength from it. In contrast, a man with a hungry stomach may sit at the table with the dietician, knowing absolutely nothing about vitamins; but he will order his meal, relish his food, and appropriate it to himself in such a way that he is refreshed and strengthened.

Similarly, a man may be a keen theologian who can ably and thoroughly discuss all kinds of theological subjects. He may be thoroughly versed in Christology and deliver learned discourses on the incarnation, the person and natures of Christ, the atonement, the resurrection, and the exaltation at the right hand of God. But if he is a mere natural man, he is like that scholarly dietitian with his stomach full of cancer. He knows all about Christ with his natural mind. Yet he does not know *Christ*, neither can he appropriate Christ. In reality he does not even see Christ, nor does he hear his voice, because Christ must be spiritually discerned. He does not feel a need for Christ because, although he has a head full of theories about sin, he does not know his sin. Although he knows all about the atonement, he does not flee to it. And although he probably can deliver a lecture on Christ as the bread of life, he does not hunger after it and cannot eat it. He has knowledge, but it is not the knowledge of faith.

Conversely, a person may be far inferior to this able theologian in intellectual capacity, and his knowledge of the gospel may be very simple; but if he has the knowledge of saving faith, he will be like the hungry man who relishes and digests his food. He will know himself in all his misery and

emptiness as a damnable and guilty sinner, void of light, wisdom, and righteousness, full of darkness, foolishness, and iniquity; he will deplore all this before God. He will know Christ as the bread of life, as the fullness of his own void, as the righteousness in his guilt, the holiness in his corruption, the light in his darkness, the life in his death; he will hunger and thirst in this knowledge of faith for the bread and water of life, take it, eat it, relish it, appropriate it, make it part and parcel of himself, and live. The knowledge of saving faith is the kind of knowledge of which Jesus speaks in John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Such, then, is the spiritual knowledge of faith.

### Faith as Confidence

The second element of faith is a spiritual confidence. Spiritual confidence may be distinguished, but never separated from the spiritual knowledge of faith, because faith is one spiritual power (habitus) rooted in the heart. Knowledge and confidence are two aspects of the same spiritual power.

We can distinguish various faculties in the human soul, but these may never be presented as if they were separate powers or functions. Man is an intellectual-volitional being. He has a mind and a will. From the interaction of these two arise the emotions. Although we may distinguish in the soul of man the faculty of intellect and the faculty of will, these two do not exist or ever act apart from each other. There is never a mere or pure thought, a separate functioning of the intellect. All man's thinking is volitional and emotional thinking. Nor can there possibly be a pure act of volition apart from the intellect. All man's willing is rational, intellectual willing. Man is one, and as one being he lives a physical and psychical, an intellectual and volitional life. All his actions involve all his powers and faculties, cooperating and interacting most intimately.

So faith is not two, but one spiritual power (*habitus*). There is never pure knowledge of faith without confidence, nor is there ever mere confidence without true knowledge. Confidence without knowledge would be blind, would have no object in which to trust, and would therefore be impossible. Thus when one defines the true, spiritual knowledge of saving faith, he cannot avoid speaking of confidence at the same time.

Yet, knowledge and confidence may be distinguished. The knowledge of faith is strictly a spiritual disposition or act of the intellect, while confidence belongs to the domain of the will. Knowledge presents to the believing soul the object of confidence, the God of our salvation in Christ as revealed in the scriptures. Confidence clings to that Christ and to the God of our salvation. By the act of confidence, the soul surrenders itself to and wholly relies on Christ revealed. Confidence is the immediate result of the true knowledge of saving faith.

The confidence of God's children is an act of friendship whereby they draw near unto God without fear, make known to him the secrets of their hearts, flee to him for refuge in all their miseries, cast themselves upon him, and lay hold upon his promises, assured of his good will toward them and of his power to save them to the uttermost. The indispensable ground of their confidence is the knowledge that God loves them, the knowledge of his favorable attitude to them personally.

Of and in himself the sinner is afraid of God. He looks upon God as his enemy. Everything warns the sinner that he should beware of the living God, because "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). Under that consuming wrath man pines and dies. His own conscience, that is, the handwriting of God in his own moral consciousness, witnesses against him and accuses him before the judge of heaven and earth. God intends to kill him. God will forever consume him in his fierce anger. Such is the testimony that

reaches the sinner from every side, from without and from within. Therefore, he is afraid of God and would flee far away from him.

But God assures the sinner of his eternal good will and love toward him. He reveals himself to that sinner in the face of Jesus Christ his only begotten Son. In the cross and resurrection of Christ and in his exaltation at the right hand of God, he reveals his exceeding great power to save to the uttermost and shows his eternal good will, covenant friendship, and love to the elect sinner. In the gospel he speaks of his boundless grace and mighty power unto salvation. But this is not sufficient. A general offer of salvation is of no avail to fill the sinner with confidence in that God of whom he is dreadfully afraid. It is not sufficient for him to know that God loves sinners. He must know that not only to others, but also to him personally, God is gracious and filled with eternal good will. This assured confidence God works through the Holy Ghost by the gospel in the sinner's heart. It is the confidence of faith whereby the sinner wholly casts himself upon the eternal mercies of the living God in Christ, expecting from him every good thing.

#### **Faith and Conversion**

Faith in its operation is at the same time the conversion of man in the spiritual sense. We can also put it this way: conversion is the immediate fruit of faith because conversion, considered as repentance ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\dot{\alpha}\nu\omega\alpha$ ), is a change of the mind ( $\nu\omega\delta\zeta$ ) and therefore also of the will. By the power of faith, both mind and will are changed from sin to righteousness and turned in the direction of the living God in Christ. By this change of mind and will through faith, the mind observes and judges in a radically different way about guilt and sin. Thus man comes to condemn himself before God and comes to true repentance. By faith the desires of the will turn in a different direction, the direction of God in Christ, and man comes to hunger and thirst after righteousness. The old man is mortified, and the new man is quickened. By faith the conversion of man is accomplished in principle, a conversion that continues throughout his whole life.

## Saving Faith Distinguished from Other Forms of Faith

We must still distinguish between saving faith and other forms of faith, such as so-called historical faith, temporary faith, and miraculous faith.

Historical faith is a mere objective assent by the natural mind to the truth of some parts of scripture, without being rooted in the love of God and in regeneration and without personal application. Just as one may believe that Socrates existed, so one can also believe that Christ was born in Bethlehem, that he died on Golgotha, and so forth, without being spiritually affected by the truth at all. The term historical faith is really not quite correct, for it includes not only acceptance of the facts of history, but also certain moral and ethical truths. For instance, one may believe that man is a sinner and that he is not perfect without being sorry for sin and coming to repentance.

By no means can all the truths of scripture be accepted by historical faith. This is very evident from modern philosophy and modern theology, which deny such things as the virgin birth, the atonement, the resurrection of Christ, and the second coming. The fact is that the natural mind cannot and will not accept spiritual things. Thus historical faith is very limited, although with difference of degree it can accept certain facts and truths that are revealed in Holy Writ. So we read that the devils believe that God is one, and they tremble (James 2:19). Agrippa, according to Paul, believes the prophets (Acts 26:27). But after all is said, historical faith is essentially different from saving faith. It is not spiritual,

but natural. It is not rooted in the regenerated heart of man, and therefore it is no saving faith at all.

What is known as *temporary faith* is an affectation of the emotions or even of the natural mind and will of man, whereby for a time one apparently embraces Christ and all his benefits and even evinces an enthusiastic joy and interest in the things of the kingdom of God. Reference is usually made to the sowing of seeds in Matthew 13:5–6:

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

Reference is also made to Hebrews 6, which speaks of "those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," but who then fall away (vv. 4–8). Especially under the influence of wild and enthusiastic revivals, it is natural that such temporary faith reveals itself. But this temporary faith has nothing to do with true saving faith. True faith operates from within, from the principle of the regenerated heart, and through the efficacious calling by the Holy Spirit. Temporary faith is effected from without, especially through strong and emotional preaching, by which the heart is not affected.

Miraculous faith is either active or passive. Active miraculous faith is the strong conviction that a miracle can be performed by the one who has this faith. No doubt even a man such as Judas performed miracles. Passive miraculous faith is the conviction that a miracle can be and will be performed upon one. The question is often asked whether miraculous faith still exists. Our answer is that God is able to perform miracles now as well as at the time of Christ and the apostles. Nor can we deny that in exceptional cases, when it is necessary for the establishment of the gospel, God will still perform miracles, although we have no proof to establish such facts. Before the time when the special revelation of scripture was completed, signs and wonders were performed in order to establish the truth concerning Christ and the gospel. It is not impossible that in the future, immediately before the coming of Christ, God will once more show signs and wonders.

It is also essential to observe that this miraculous faith has nothing in common with saving faith. One who has miraculous faith and believes that he can perform miracles or that a miracle can be performed upon him does not necessarily possess saving faith in Christ.

## **Chapter 28**

## **Justification**

#### **Justification Defined**

Justification is that act of God's grace whereby he imputes to the sinner—who is in himself guilty and condemned, but elect in Christ—the perfect righteousness of God in Christ, acquits him of all guilt and punishment on the ground of Christ's merits, and gives him a right to eternal life.

### The Biblical Terms for Justification

The words used in scripture for the idea of justification are the verbs צַדָּק (to justify, make righteous) and δικαιοῦν (to justify, make righteous). Both of these verbs uniformly have a legal or judicial significance: they refer to declaring one just, placing him in a state of righteousness, and setting him forth as righteous by a legal decision. This meaning of the Hebrew word is evident from Proverbs 17:15: "He that justifieth מְצְדִּיק the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." The same meaning is evident from Deuteronomy 25:1, where we read in "They אַת־הַצַּדִיק Hebrew: אָת־הרַשַׁע וָהָרִשִׁיעוּ that is, shall וָהָצְדִיקוּ, justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked," which is translated in the Septuagint by καὶ δικαιώσωσιν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ καταγῶσιν τοῦ ἀσεβοῦς. The same meaning is evident from Isaiah 50:8, where the servant of the Lord challenges, "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me?" (אָתי translated the Septuagint by Ότι έγγίζει מי־יריב מצָדיקי קרוב), in δικαιώσας με τίς ὁ κρινόμενός μοι. This judicial meaning of the verb predominates in qal, piel, niphal, and hiphil.[1]

In the New Testament the verb δικαιοῦν has the same meaning as the Hebrew [ξις]; it does not refer to one's ethical righteousness, but to the state of righteousness that is the result of a judicial or legal decision. Thus Romans 2:13 says, "the doers of the law shall be justified [δικαιωθήσονται]," while Romans 3:20 states, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified [δικαιωθήσεται] in his sight." The difference between the two passages is that although both refer to a judicial state, Romans 2:13 refers to the norm, while Romans 3:20 refers to a matter of fact.[2] Titus 3:7 speaks of "being justified [δικαιωθέντες] by his grace." Galatians 2:16 teaches "that a man is not justified [δικαιωθήσεται]." In Romans 4:5 the apostle Paul uses the apparently unjustifiable expression, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (cf. Rom. 3:26). God justifies the ungodly (τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ).

In Romans 3:26 the apparently unwarranted declaration of the apostle in Romans 4:5 is justified, and the assertion is made "that [God] might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (cf. Gal. 2:16). The well-known lexicographer Cremer writes:

A comparison of the words δικαιοῦν τὸν ἀσεβῆ and tovn τόν ἐκ πίστεως with the expressions [in] Romans 4:3, ἐπίστευεν . . . καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, and [in] verse 5, λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, and other texts, shows that δικαιοῦν, even as used by Paul, denotes nothing else than the *judicial act* of God, whereby man is pronounced free from guilt and punishment, and is thus recognized or represented as a δίκαιος . . . Το the δικαιοῦν on God's side corresponds on the side of the object δίκαιος καθίστασθαι, Romans 5:19, compare verse 18, or δικαιοῦσθαι,

whose result is δικαιωθῆναι, Romans 5:1. As an element in the divine work of saving the individual, δικαιοῦν is specified in Romans 8:30 οῦς δὲ προώρισεν τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν καὶ οῦς ἐκάλεσεν τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν οῦς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.[3]

From all these passages and from many others in the New Testament, it is evident that  $\delta \iota \kappa \alpha \iota o \delta v (to justify)$  does not refer to any real or ethical righteousness, but to the legal act of justification, that is, the placing of man, the sinner, in the state of righteousness before God. This emphasizes the difference between justification and sanctification: Sanctification removes the pollution of sin and causes the life of regeneration to triumph over the old man of sin, but justification removes the guilt of sin and clothes the sinner with the righteousness of God in Christ.

#### **Justification in the Reformed Creeds**

The great Reformers of the sixteenth century emphasized this truth of justification as a legal act of God whereby he declares the sinner righteous. Before the Reformation the truth of justification was not always clearly stated. The *making* just or righteous was often confused with the forensic act of God's *declaring* the sinner righteous. In the Middle Ages justification was presented as really including sanctification: the sins of man are forgiven, and he is made righteous. This became the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church: the grace of justification is infused into man, and on the basis of that infused righteousness his sins are forgiven. Hence justification is based at least in part on the good works of the sinner himself.

The Reformation changed this doctrine and emphasized the truth that justification is a purely legal act, changing the state of the sinner without changing his condition. Sanctification is based on justification, not the reverse. This is the expression of all the Reformed symbols as well as of the Lutheran symbols, such as the Formula of Concord, which states that

we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that Christ is truly our righteousness, but yet neither according to the divine nature alone, nor according to the human nature alone, but the whole Christ according to both natures, to wit: in his sole, most absolute obedience which he rendered to the Father even unto death, as God and man, and thereby merited for us the remission of all our sins and eternal life. As it is written: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

We believe, therefore, teach, and confess that this very thing is our righteousness before God, namely, that God remits to us our sins of mere grace, without any respect of our works, going before, present, or following, or of our worthiness or merit. For he bestows and imputes to us the righteousness of the obedience of Christ; for the sake of that righteousness we are received by God into favor and accounted righteous.

We believe, also, teach, and confess that Faith alone is the means and instrument whereby we lay hold on Christ the Saviour, and so in Christ lay hold on that righteousness which is able to stand before the judgment of God; for that faith, for Christ's sake, is imputed to us for righteousness (Rom. 4:5).[4]

#### In the Second Helvetic Confession we read:

To justify, in the apostle's disputation touching justification, does signify to remit sins, to absolve from the fault and the punishment thereof, to receive into favor, to pronounce a man just. For the apostle says to the Romans, "God is he that justifieth. Who is he that can condemn?" (Rom. 8:33–34). Here to justify and to condemn are opposed. And in the Acts of the Apostles the apostle says, "Through Christ is preached unto you forgiveness of sins: and from all things (from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses) by him every one that believes is justified" (Acts 13:38, 39). For in the law, also, and in the prophets, we read, that "If a controversy were risen among any, and they came to judgment, the judge should judge them; that is, justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked" (Deut. 25:1). And in Isa. 5:22–23, "Woe to them which justify the wicked for a reward."

Now, it is most certain that we are all by nature sinners, and before the judgment-seat of God convicted of ungodliness, and guilty of death. But we are justified—that is, acquitted from sin and death—by God the Judge, through the grace of Christ alone, and not by any respect or merit of ours. For what is more plain than that which Paul says?—"All have sinned,

and are destitute of the glory of God, and are justified freely by grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23–24).

For Christ took upon himself and bare the sins of the world, and did satisfy the justice of God. God, therefore, is merciful unto our sins for Christ alone, that suffered and rose again, and does not impute them unto us. But he imputes the justice of Christ unto us for our own; so that now we are not only cleansed from sin, and purged, and holy, but also endued with the righteousness of Christ; yea, and acquitted from sin, death, and condemnation (2 Cor. 5:19–21); finally, we are righteous, and heirs of eternal life. To speak properly, then, it is God alone that justifieth us, and that only for Christ, by not imputing unto us our sins, but imputing Christ's righteousness unto us (Rom. 4:23–25).

But because we do receive this justification, not by any works, but by faith in the mercy of God and in Christ; therefore, we teach and believe, with the apostle, that sinful man is justified only by faith in Christ, not by the law or by any works. For the apostle says, "We conclude that man is justified by faith, without the works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to boast; but not with God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:2–3, 5; Gen. 15:6). And again, "Ye are saved by grace, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not by works, lest any might have cause to boast," etc. (Eph. 2:8–9). Therefore, because faith does apprehend Christ our righteousness, and does attribute all the praise of God in Christ; in this respect justification is attributed to faith, chiefly because of Christ, whom it receives, and not because it is a work of ours; for it is the gift of God. Now, that we do receive Christ by faith the Lord shows at large (John 6:27, 33, 35, 48–58), where he puts eating for believing, and believing for eating. For as by eating we receive meat, so by believing we are made partakers of Christ

Therefore, we do not divide the benefit of justification, giving part to the grace of God or to Christ, and part to ourselves, our charity, works, or merit; but we do attribute it wholly to the praise of God in Christ, and that through faith. Moreover, our charity and our works can not please God if they be done of such as are not just; wherefore, we must first be just before we can love or do any just works. We are made just (as we have said) through faith in Christ, by the mere grace of God, who does not impute unto us our sins, but imputes unto us the righteousness of Christ; yea, and our faith in Christ he imputes for righteousness unto us. Moreover, the apostle does plainly derive love from faith, saying, "The end of the commandment is love, proceeding from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5).[5]

#### The Belgic Confession teaches:

We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him. For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Saviour. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works, which he hath done for us and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.[6]

### Justification is described more fully:

We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied; as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works. And the same Apostle saith, that we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ. And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig-leaves. And, verily, if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed. And therefore every one must pray with David: O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. [7]

### The Heidelberg Catechism teaches the same truth:

How art thou righteous before God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, although my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and that I am still prone always to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.

Why sayest thou that thou art 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.[8]

In the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, the article on the justification of man reads as follows:

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification. [9]

#### In the articles on justification and faith in the Irish Articles of Religion, we read:

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, applied by faith, and not for our own works or merits. And this righteousness, which we so receive of God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God, for our perfect and full justification.

Although this justification be free unto us, yet it cometh not so freely unto us that there is no ransom paid therefore at all. God showed his great mercy in delivering us from our former captivity without requiring of any ransom to be paid or amends to be made on our parts; which thing by us had been impossible to be done. And whereas all the world was not able of themselves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father of his infinite mercy, without any desert of ours, to provide for us the most precious merits of his own Son, whereby our ransom might be fully paid, the law fulfilled, and his justice fully satisfied. So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him. He, for them, paid their ransom by his death. He, for them, fulfilled the law in his life; that now, in him, and by him, every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law: forasmuch as that which our infirmity was not able to effect, Christ's justice hath performed. And thus the justice and mercy of God do embrace each other: the grace of God not shutting out the justice of God in the matter of our justification, but only shutting out the justice of man (that is to say, the justice of our own works) from being any cause of deserving our justification.

When we say that we are justified by faith only, we do not mean that the said justifying faith is alone in man without true repentance, hope, charity, and the fear of God (for such a faith is dead, and can not justify); neither do we mean that this, our act, to believe in Christ, or this, our faith in Christ, which is within us, doth of itself justify us or deserve our justification unto us (for that were to account ourselves to be justified by the virtue or dignity of something that is within ourselves); but the true understanding and meaning thereof is, that although we hear God's Word, and believe it—although we have faith, hope, charity, repentance, and the fear of God within us, and add never so many good works thereunto—yet we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues, of faith, hope, charity, and all our other virtues and good deeds which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and imperfect and insufficient to deserve remission of our sins and our justification, and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy and the merits of his most dearly beloved Son, our only Redeemer, Saviour, and Justifier, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, because faith doth directly send us to Christ for our justification, and that by faith given us of God we embrace the promise of God's mercy and the remission of our sins (which thing none other of our virtues or works properly doth), therefore the Scripture useth to say that faith without works—and the ancient fathers of the Church to the same purpose—that only faith doth justify us. [10]

#### The Westminster Confession of Faith states:

Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God. [11]

It is worthy of note that in the Westminster Confession of Faith we read for the first time of eternal justification:

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.[12]

It is plain that, according to the Westminster Confession, justification is eternal and that believers are justified in Christ in the fullness of time through his death and resurrection.

#### The Ground of Justification

What is the ground of our justification? This inquiry is perfectly proper, because it proceeds from the assumption that God's verdict, whereby he declares us free from all guilt, must have a basis in fact. The question proceeds from the truth that God himself is true, holy, righteous, and just. He cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13). If he renders the verdict that we are righteous, that sentence must be based on truth. He is the righteous one, the implication of all infinite perfections, whose will is ever in harmony with his own being.

If God declares us righteous, his verdict is based on his own righteousness and justice. God cannot simply pardon the sinner, that is, excuse him from paying the penalty for his sin. Although this is possible in human justice, which is always imperfect, this is not possible with God. Yet we read in scripture that God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). How is that possible? What is the ground of God's verdict declaring the sinner righteous?

The answer from all scripture is that Christ alone is the meritorious ground of that verdict. In Christ the righteousness of God is revealed, that is, the gift of righteousness of which God is the sole author, which he conceived from before the foundation of the world, and which he alone realizes and bestows by faith on the sinner in the moment of his justification. This is undoubtedly the meaning of the phrase that so frequently occurs, especially in Romans: "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17; Rom. 3:5, 21–22; Rom. 10:3).

God reveals himself in Christ as the reconciler, as the one who is righteous and just even when he justifies the ungodly:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:21–26; cf. Rom. 4:25; Rom. 5:6–10; Rom. 8:1–3; 2 Cor. 5:18–19; Eph. 1:7–8).

The righteousness of Christ—a righteousness which is of God, conceived by him and prepared by him for us—is the ground of our justification.

Christ is the justified one *par excellence*. His justification is the justification of all the elect, of all that believe on his name; for Christ is the Son of God, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father. On this confession rests the whole truth concerning our justification. If Christ is not very God, if he is not the God of salvation, the very foundation of this truth is removed. However, he is God of God, co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost. He came in the flesh. He, the Lord, who is above the law, came under the law (Gal. 4:4). He came in the state of men. He became a servant,

and he must function as a servant. He, the Son of God in human nature, assumed the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7).

Even that was an act of his own, freely performed. He was not of necessity born a son of Adam. He freely assumed human flesh and blood. What is more, he entered into the *state* of sinners. He was not a sinner. The guilt of Adam could not be imputed to him, for he was personally the Son of God. The corruption of the human nature could not touch him, for he was conceived by the Holy Ghost. He was holy and righteous; he knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), but he entered into the state of sinners. Before God he took the legal position of a sinner. In that state it became his obligation before God to pay the penalty for sin. He must not merely suffer the punishment for sin, which is death, but he must actively pay for sin. If he himself was to be justified in the state into which he had voluntarily entered, he must cancel the debt of sin. To cancel that debt he must satisfy the righteousness of God. This satisfaction could only consist in an act of love, for man must love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Such is the demand of the law.

When Christ, the Son of God, assumed the form of a servant and entered into the state of man, he was obliged to keep that law of love. When he entered into the state of sinners, it was his calling to love the Lord his God, even in God's wrath, even when in the hour of judgment God poured out all the vials of his wrath and indignation over Christ's head. This is what Christ did. He did so in all his life on earth; in the state of a servant, in the state of sinners, he functioned before the face of God in perfect righteousness and holiness. He never faltered. Gradually, as the shadows of death and wrath deepened, he remained obedient. Finally, he entered into deepest death and desolation and became obedient even unto the death of the cross. All the righteousness of God against sin he perfectly fulfilled, and thus he satisfied for sin.

Hence it is evident that the resurrection of Christ is God's own word concerning our justification. The resurrection from the dead of the Son of God in the flesh is God's sentence that his servant is justified and that we are therefore justified in him. This is the meaning of Romans 4:25: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Christ went into death not for his own sin, but for and with our sin. He knew no sin, but he was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Never could he have been raised from the dead if he had not fully atoned for our transgressions and satisfied the justice of God. He would have been swallowed up by death. But by raising him from the dead God gave him testimony that as the head of his people he was righteous, which also means that they are righteous in him. Therefore, the resurrection of Christ is the word of God concerning our justification:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Rom. 10:9).

## The Steps in Justification Distinguished

In considering the whole idea of justification, which has its meritorious ground in the obedience and death of Christ and its divine testimony in the resurrection of Christ, we may distinguish several steps in this concept.

First, we certainly may speak of our justification from eternity. We are justified in the decree of election from before the foundation of the world. About this truth there was at one time a dispute in Reformed churches. Evidently afraid to over-emphasize the counsel of God, some maintained that one could speak only of justification by faith. They denied eternal justification. But it is very clear that this is not correct. In his eternal counsel God has ordained Christ as mediator and head of all the

elect. Therefore, it must be true that God knew the elect in Christ as justified from all eternity.

The elect do not become righteous before God in time by faith, but they are righteous in the tribunal of God from before the foundation of the earth. God beholds them in eternity not as sinners, but as perfectly righteous, as redeemed, as justified in Christ:

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel (Num. 23:21).

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29–30).

#### The Conclusions of Utrecht, 1905, settled the matter of eternal justification as follows:

In regard to the second point, eternal justification, Synod declares:

that the term itself does not occur in our Confessional Standards but that it is not for this reason to be disapproved, any more than we would be justified in disapproving the term Covenant of Works and similar terms which have been adopted through theological usage;

that it is incorrect to say that our Confessional Standards know only of a justification by and through faith, since both God's Word (Rom. 4:25) and our Confession (Art. 20) speak explicitly of an objective justification sealed by the resurrection of Christ, which in point of time precedes the subjective justification;

that, moreover, as far as the matter itself is concerned, all our churches sincerely believe and confess that Christ from eternity in the Counsel of Peace undertook to be the Surety of His people; taking their guilt upon Himself as also that afterward He by His suffering and death on Golgatha actually paid the ransom for us, reconciling us to God while we were yet enemies; but that on the basis of God's Word and in harmony with our Confession it must be maintained with equal firmness that we personally become partakers of this benefit only by a sincere faith.

Wherefore Synod earnestly warns against any view that would do violence either to Christ's eternal suretyship for his elect, or to the requirement of a sincere faith to be justified before God in the tribunal of conscience.[13]

This description by the Conclusions of Utrecht is what we mean by justification from eternity.

Second, eternal justification is realized in time and is grounded historically in the death of Christ. Christ died for all the elect. He atoned once and forever for all the sins of those whom the Father had given him from before the foundation of the world. Hence in the hour of judgment on the cross, they all are justified objectively forever. Their sins can never be imputed to them anymore, and they have a right to eternal life. On the cross the debt of the sins of all the elect was paid, and they are righteous before God.

Third, in the resurrection of Christ, the elect have God's own assurance of justification, for even in his glorious resurrection they are all in him, and with him they have been raised and therefore justified. This is plain from Ephesians 2:4–6:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Fourth, this justification is declared in the gospel, because the gospel is the declaration of the righteousness of God for all the elect, so that in the gospel they have their legal citizenship in the eternal kingdom of God.

Fifth, we receive this righteousness by faith only, not as if faith were another ground for our justification, but simply as the means whereby we are ingrafted into Christ and become partakers of all his benefits. Of this we must presently say more.

Sixth, we shall be justified publicly before all the world in the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, when our righteousness in Christ shall be universally revealed and recognized, and when our public adoption unto children and heirs will take place.

And not only [the whole creation], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23).

When God realizes the justification of the ungodly, he appears not only as a righteous and just judge in his rendering of a perfectly just verdict, but also as a gracious God and Father in his realizing everything necessary to the rendering of this just judgment in favor of his elect children.

#### The Content of Justification

To these six distinctions we must add three remarks regarding the content of justification.

First, justification implies the complete forgiveness of sins. In justification we are perfectly acquitted in the judgment of God from all guilt, sin, and death through Christ: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Second, justification implies the adoption unto children, including the granting of all the rights of children and the right to the eternal inheritance:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:4–6).

Third, justification implies an eternal righteousness, a righteousness that can never be lost and that gives the elect the right to eternal life. In its eternal character the excellency of this righteousness is evident in distinction from the righteousness of Adam in the state of rectitude. Adam was righteous, too; that is, he was without sin; therefore, he too was worthy of life. He did live, and in the way of obedience he would no doubt have continued to live. But his life was earthy; he never could have been found worthy of that higher state that the Bible calls eternal life and that can be attained only through the death of the Son of God. Not only was it impossible for Adam to have attained to that higher glory in the heavenly tabernacle, but it was equally impossible for him to have merited it.

In contrast, Christ is worthy of the resurrection, of life eternal. He is the Son of God in human nature who humbled himself deeply into death and hell in perfect obedience of love. Hence according to the justice of God, in the same measure that Christ humbled himself, he was highly exalted and attained to the state of immortality in eternal glory. Such is the teaching of Philippians 2:6–11:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ's righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and in him we are worthy of eternal life.

### The Relation between Justification and Faith

What is the relation between justification and faith?

All scripture emphasizes that justification is by faith only. Already in the Old Testament it is said of Abraham, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). The faith of Abraham was faith in the promise of God, essentially the same promise that was given by God already in paradise in the protevangel, the promise of the seed of the woman, namely, Christ

(Gen. 3:15). This promise was the object of Abraham's faith. His faith, therefore, was saving faith. Abraham believed God through Christ, and God accounted that faith of Abraham for righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 presents that relation of faith and justification not as a mere subjective reality on the part of Abraham so that he was justified in the forum of his conscience (*in foro conscientiae*), but speaks of an objective act of God: he counted Abraham's faith as righteousness. This undoubtedly means that all our righteousness is in Christ only and that faith is the bond that unites us with Christ, so that through faith we are righteous in Christ before God.

This is how the apostle Paul explains the relation between faith and justification, especially in his epistle to the Romans. In Romans 4:3 he refers to Genesis 15:6: "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." The apostle shows emphatically that justification by faith is opposed to justification by works; even faith itself cannot be accounted as a work and, thus, as a basis for righteousness. In verse 2 Paul wrote, "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." In verses 4 and 5 he continues to emphasize that justification by faith is of mere grace, for he writes, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness not because of the worthiness of his faith, but because it was strong enough to believe the promise of God and through the promise to cling to Christ. This is also the teaching of Romans 4:17–22.

The same truth is evident from Romans 3:20–31, throughout which the truth of justification by faith only is emphasized. It is evident from this passage that we are not justified because of the worthiness of our faith, but only because faith lays hold upon the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. He is our righteousness before God, and we are justified freely by his grace.

In Romans 5:1, however, the relation of justification and faith is conceived of from the subjective point of view in the well-known words: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We read literally in the original, "justified *out of* [&k] faith." The emphasis seems to fall on faith as being the source of our justification subjectively, in the forum of the conscience (*in foro conscientiae*). The same truth is taught in Galatians 2:16–19 and Galatians 3:5–11, 22–24.

From all these passages it is evident that we are justified by faith only. Further, this faith whereby we are justified is not another work. It stands opposed not only to the work of the law, but also to all merit. It is not meritorious in any sense. Yet it is evident that faith is nevertheless accounted by God for righteousness. Finally, it is plain that the basis of this imputation on the part of God is the promise to which faith clings. The promise is Christ; his righteousness and holiness are the only and ultimate ground of our righteousness before God.

It is clear, then, how we must conceive of the proper relation between faith and justification. Faith is not the ground or part of the ground of our righteousness before God. It is not another work. That this is the relation, however, is the view of virtually all who deny the vicarious nature of Christ's satisfaction and atonement. For instance, the governmental theory maintains that Christ died not to atone and to pay for the sins of all the elect, but as a setting forth of the justice and righteousness of God and as an expression of what God might justly do to all sinners. If sinners acknowledge the justice of God and repent, God is satisfied because his moral government of the world is maintained and vindicated in the consciences of men, and God freely forgives them their iniquity. It is plain that according to this view, faith becomes a meritorious work of man rather than the complete reliance upon the righteousness of Christ. The Arminians, who deny particular atonement—the truth that Christ

died only for the elect—and who for that reason must ultimately deny vicarious atonement altogether, present this view of the relation between faith and justification.

That this is true can be seen from the second head of doctrine in the Canons of Dordt, where the synod rejects the errors of those

Who teach: That it was not the purpose of the death of Christ that he should confirm the new covenant of grace through his blood, but only that he should acquire for the Father the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as he might please, whether of grace or of works.

Rejection: For this is repugnant to Scripture which teaches that Christ has become the Surety and Mediator of a better, that is, the new covenant, and that a testament is of force where death has occurred (Heb. 7:22; Heb. 9:15, 17).

Who teach that Christ by his satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that he merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.

Rejection: For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error.

Who teach that the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, in as much as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God having revoked the demand of the perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.

Rejection: For these contradict the Scriptures: *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood* (Rom. 3:24–25). And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church.[14]

Especially in this last rejection, which exposes the grievous error of the Socinians (followed by the Arminians), it is plain that faith is presented as a work of man acceptable to God. It is not faith in the merits of Christ by which we are justified before God; rather, faith as a work and the works of faith, though they are imperfect in themselves, are regarded by God as perfect obedience and worthy of eternal life. All of this is contrary to the plain teaching of scripture. This error denies both the satisfaction and vicarious atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as salvation by pure grace over against all work and merit of man.

According to others, the relation between justification and faith is such that righteousness before God, at least in part, is because of the fruits of faith in good works. This is the Roman Catholic position: Christ merited the gift of faith, and a living faith brings forth good works. Because of those good works of faith men are justified.

We must call attention to that well-known passage in James 2:14–26, upon which this erroneous view of the relation between faith and justification is chiefly based. Apparently, James teaches that man is justified by the works of faith. He asks the question, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (v. 14). In verse 17 he makes the statement, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." And in verse 21 he asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" James refers to the example of Rahab the harlot, stating that she was "justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way" (v. 25). Then he concludes from the whole passage, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (v. 24).

However, if this were the teaching of James, it would be in flat contradiction with that of the apostle Paul, who always emphasizes that a man is justified by faith only, without works. And scripture certainly cannot be in conflict with itself. But if we look closely at the passage from James 2, it will be evident that James makes a sharp distinction between a living faith and a dead faith. He

does not mean to contradict the truth that a man is justified by faith, but he opposes the pretension of him who claims that he has faith without manifesting a true and living faith in its works.

This distinction is evident from James 2:14–17. When James asks the question, "Can faith save him?" (v. 14), he does not have in mind the true and living faith, but a faith that a man says he has, that he professes to have, but which is a mere intellectual assent, a dead faith, without works. The question is: What is the proper work of faith? According to scripture the answer must be: Faith is the work of God by which the sinner clings to Christ as the revelation of the God of his salvation. Such faith is indeed saving. Faith that a man claims to have, but which is nothing more than a mere intellectual assent, is—as far as the result is concerned—just as vain as the man in the illustration who says to his destitute and empty brother, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," without giving him food and clothing (vv. 15–16).

Just as that mere statement profits the brother nothing, so mere intellectual faith, which is not a reliance on the God of salvation in Christ, cannot save. This truth is further elucidated when James addresses the supposed speaker or objector, "Thou hast faith, and I have works" (v. 18), while repudiating the implied separation of faith and works. He means to say, "You object that you will gladly let me have my works, if you only can keep the faith. But I answer that you will have to show me by your works that you possess the true and living faith at all. Otherwise, it is no faith."

James strengthens his point with an illustration. The faith that the devils have, though they tremble (v. 19), refers to nothing but a factual faith in one God, which is the very opposite of the knowledge and confidence of true faith.

From all this it should be plain that James is not writing about saving faith at all, but about a mere intellectual assent to the truth, which has no saving power. The work of a living faith is the knowledge of and confidence in the God of our salvation. It is the tie that binds us to Christ, the power whereby we cling to Christ crucified and raised from the dead, and through him it is the complete reliance upon God who justified the ungodly. Such a living faith has its fruit in repentance and hearty conversion from sin unto holiness.

The example of Abraham's faith illustrates this point. The faith of Abraham, James teaches, was made perfect by works (v. 22). By what works? It is striking that as an example of the work of faith that Abraham performed, James refers to his offering up of Isaac. Not to any works of the law, nor to any meritorious act whereby Abraham became righteous before God, but to the sacrifice of Isaac James refers as the sole illustration of the faith made perfect by works. By this act Abraham revealed that even after he had first hoped against hope, he still clung to God who could raise the dead and completely fulfill his promise. That faith was imputed to him for righteousness.

The same is true of Rahab the harlot. Rahab, by the God-given power of faith, clung to the promise, chose the party of the living God against the whole world, and was saved. Her faith, too, was perfected by works. Rahab by the work of faith clung to Christ and to God, who justifies the ungodly. Hence the truth remains that all scripture emphasizes justification by faith only.

The relation between faith and justification is not to be conceived as a benefit on God's part and as a condition on our part, as has often been alleged. Justification, then, is conditioned by faith. Yet this cannot be the relation. Objective justification is before faith. We are justified objectively regardless of our faith. In eternal election all those given to Christ by the Father are righteous before God forever. This righteousness cannot be contingent upon faith, even though it is true that the gift of righteousness cannot be appropriated except by a true and living faith. Besides, the justification of all the elect is accomplished forever in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ long before they believe. Further, although it is true that they cannot receive justification except by means of faith, this

faith is not of them, but is a gift of God. Faith is, therefore, not a condition that they must fulfill in order to be justified. Justification is strictly unconditional.

Because justification is unconditional, we must also repudiate the illustration of faith as the hand whereby man accepts the proffered salvation. That figure is often used. Someone offers one a present, for instance, a watch. All that is necessary for the one who is offered the watch to become possessor of it is to accept the gift. But salvation is not to be compared at all to such an external gift that one can accept or reject. Besides, no man of himself *has* such a hand whereby he can accept the gift of salvation. He is by nature dead in sin and misery, so that he hates the very gift of righteousness if it should be offered to him by God; he loves the darkness rather than the light.

The only proper conception of the relation between justification and faith is that faith is a means or instrument that God gives his people, whereby he unites them with Christ and whereby they receive him and all his benefits. No doubt there is an objective relation in this faith-union with Christ. Of Abraham it is said that his faith was imputed to him for righteousness. This imputation certainly implies that objectively the sinner is declared righteous in Christ before the tribunal of God. God declares that the sinner is free from all his guilt, is perfectly righteous, is adopted as God's child, and is worthy of eternal life. He is, as it were, severed from his natural and legal relation that he sustains to the human race in Adam, and by faith he is legally incorporated into the body of Christ. In Adam he is guilty and worthy of death. In the corporation of Christ, he is righteous and worthy of eternal life. God declares the ungodly righteous, certainly not because of any work of faith or on any condition of faith, but because God imputes as righteousness the objective legal relation that the sinner sustains to Christ. This relation is the relation of faith only.

## **Objection to Free Justification**

Objection has always been raised to the doctrine of justification on the ground that it violates the ethical character of man and his responsibility. The objection is as old as the doctrine of justification itself and runs as follows: The doctrine of justification teaches that a man is legally righteous before God without being actually righteous. His ethical condition and his works have nothing to do with his righteousness before God. His good works can never add to his righteousness, nor can his sin possibly in any wise detract from it.

This is a positively immoral doctrine. If this is true, it matters not what man does; he is free to sin as much as he likes, because he is righteous before God anyway. Whether he walks in sin or performs works of righteousness, he is certain of eternal life. No matter how much iniquity he commits, he is certainly headed for everlasting glory. He is in a position to enjoy freely the pleasures of the world. He can afford to be perfectly careless. In fact, it would seem to be better for the Christian not even to make the attempt to walk in all good works, for the old man is corrupt always and will ultimately perish in death. To walk in sin has the advantage of showing forth the greater glory of the grace of God. The doctrine of justification, therefore, leads to licentiousness.

In dealing with the subject of good works, the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of this objection against the doctrine of justification by faith alone:

But does not this doctrine make men careless and profane? No; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by true faith should not bring forth fruits of righteousness. [15]

In answer to this objection, we note that it is quite contrary to Christian experience. Subjectively, it is impossible for the Christian to say that he can freely walk in sin because of his justification.

Christians utterly repudiate the notion that righteousness is by works. They know that their best works are defiled with sin and that their works cannot be the whole or part of their righteousness before God. Yet if you ask them if this exclusive confidence in the cross as the ground of their righteousness has the effect upon them that they become careless and profane, and if it induces them to draw the conclusion that it is profitable to continue in sin that grace may abound, they will answer that such is certainly not their experience. They will assure you that the power of the cross, as they have experienced it, bears the opposite fruit: the grace of their justification causes them to abhor sin, to eschew it, to flee from it, and to fight it with all their might. Enemies of all sin they have become, and they long for nothing more fervently than to be delivered from the defilement of sin finally and completely. Whether or not they are able to explain the mystery of justification by faith through grace, the voice of their spiritual experience tells them that justification certainly cannot make men careless and profane.

But one does not have to appeal to the experience of the Christian to prove that this objection is utterly groundless, because although justification is not the same as sanctification, nevertheless justification is the ground of sanctification. They are inseparably connected. The Christian is subjectively justified only by a true and living faith, which means that he is implanted into Christ. Apart from Christ he has nothing; in Christ he has all. To Christ he belongs with body and soul for time and eternity. He is one with his Lord both judicially and organically.

Justification, therefore, means that in Christ the believer has the right to be delivered from the dominion of sin. In Christ the right of sin to have dominion over him and to reign in his flesh has been destroyed:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

The believer, then, is judicially and in principle dead to sin, a truth very plainly taught in Romans 6:2–18:

How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

This passage teaches that the Christian is both forensically and organically in Christ and that the two are absolutely inseparable. In a judicial sense he is freed from sin in Christ, and being organically connected with Christ, he is also actually—though in principle—delivered from the power of sin. He lives out of Christ. This organic union with his Lord is inseparable from the faith whereby he is justified. That means not only that in Christ he has the right to be delivered from sin,

but also that he is in principle liberated from the dominion and bondage of sin through the Spirit of Christ who dwells in him. Paul teaches this in Romans 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, it is impossible that those who are ingrafted into Christ by a true and living faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness. [16]

In Romans 6:2 the apostle teaches that the Christian is dead to sin. We should note carefully that this is not the same as saying that sin is dead in him. The difference is evident. It would be indeed a grievous error to maintain that as long as the Christian is still in the flesh and in this world, sin is dead in him. This error would certainly create confusion in the mind and heart of the sincere Christian.

The fact is that when we are ingrafted into Christ, when the power of the cross is realized in us, and when we are justified by faith, sin is not dead, but remains very much alive. In this life we never have more than a small beginning of the new obedience. Even the very holiest of the saints, he who is farthest advanced on the way of grace and sanctification, still has only a principle of the new life in Christ. Our old nature, earthly and carnal, remains with us till the grave. Not until we breathe our last are we delivered from sin. In that old nature are the motions of sin, and they are very active. In fact, it often seems that as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the motions of sin in our members also increase their activity, always attempting to bring us again into bondage. Until the day of our death we must heed the exhortation of the word of God to put off the old man and to put on the new.

Sin is not dead, but the Christian is dead to sin. The difference is very plain. The natural man, the sinner apart from Christ, is alive unto sin. Sin is his lord. The power of sin is enthroned in his heart. Sin is his rightful lord. Sin has the right to exercise dominion over him, and he is its legal slave. God's sentence is that the sinner shall die. To this death belong the spiritual darkness of mind, the perversion of will, and the pollution of the desires and inclinations that make the sinner a slave of sin. From this slavery he does not even have the right to be delivered, unless atonement is made for his sin. Sin, therefore, has dominion over him. This dominion of sin, however, is not contrary to the will and desire of the sinner so that he continually longs to be delivered from its bondage. On the contrary, he agrees with it. He is well pleased with the reign of sin. As a willing servant, he delights in the service of his evil lord. He loves the darkness rather than the light. He yields his members to the service of unrighteousness. He is in bondage. Yet, because the service of sin is sweet to his corrupt taste, he does not feel the oppression of his slavery. For sin he lives; with sin he agrees; the paths of sin are his delight. He is alive unto sin.

In contrast, when we are no longer under the legal dominion of sin, we are dead to sin. Sin is no longer our lord. It no longer has the right to reign over us. Just as a slave for whom the price is paid or who has been declared free by law is no longer legally bound to serve his former master, so the child of God is dead to sin, freed from the legal dominion of sin by God's own verdict of liberation. Sin shall not have dominion over him.

This sentence of liberation is realized in him through Christ. The child of God is actually, spiritually liberated from the bondage of sin; his fetters are broken. Grace instead of sin, the law of the Spirit of life rather than the law of sin and death, is enthroned in his heart and has dominion over him. His mind is enlightened, his will is turned about, and his heart is renewed. From that renewed heart all the issues of his life move in the direction opposite to that of sin.

The result is that he beholds and judges sin in a new light, in the light of the love of God. Formerly he agreed with the dominion of sin. Formerly he always said "Yes" when sin said "Yes," and "No"

when sin said "No." Now he opposes sin with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. When he was alive unto sin, he loved the works of darkness. Now he is dead to sin and hates the works of darkness with all his heart. While in his bondage to sin he yielded his members to the service of unrighteousness, he now strenuously opposes that service. He is dead unto sin. Therefore with the Heidelberg Catechism, we say that far from being an occasion to sin, the doctrine of justification yields fruits of righteousness, because the Christian is ingrafted into Christ. [17]

#### The Reward of Grace

Finally, we must say a few words about what is known as the reward of grace. It is entirely in harmony with scripture to speak of the reward that God will give to his faithful servants for their faithful service. The Bible teaches in general that God will reward every man according to his works; more specifically it frequently speaks of a great reward for those who suffer with Christ, as all the people of God must suffer for righteousness' sake in the midst of a hostile world.

Repeatedly, scripture speaks of the general truth that God shall reward every man according to his deeds:

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Matt. 16:27).

[God] will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:6–11).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

### The apostle John beheld a vision of the great judgment:

[He] saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

Jesus promises, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Everywhere the Bible speaks of the reward that shall be given to the faithful servants of Christ. This reward is repeatedly mentioned in the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor in the book of Revelation:

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star (Rev. 2:7, 10, 17, 26–28).

### The faithful in Sardis, the Lord promises,

shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels (Rev. 3:4–5).

The church in Philadelphia receives the promise:

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name (v. 12).

To the faithful in the church of Laodicea who will hear the Lord's voice and come out to him, the Lord promises:

I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne (vv. 20–21).

The same note is struck everywhere in scripture. Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake the Lord exhorts, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12). Those who give their alms in secret and enter into their closet to pray to their Father in heaven the Lord encourages, "And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6). The eternal inheritance is presented as a reward for the faithful service of Christ: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23–24). The apostle Paul, putting his trust in the righteous judge of heaven and earth for the reward that he shall receive in the day of Christ, writes,

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

From all these passages and many more, we learn, first, that in the day of the Lord, God will reward every man according to his works by righteous judgment over the good and the evil. Second, the reward for the righteous is eternal life, nothing less than the eternal, glorious inheritance. Third, there will be gradations in the reward of glory. Not all the saints in glory will be alike. They shall not occupy the same place. All the saints will be completely filled with blessing, but some will have a greater capacity for blessing and glory than others. These gradations in glory will be according to each man's work and suffering for Christ's sake in the world. Fourth, the hope of the reward may indeed encourage us and spur us on to greater faithfulness, especially as we must suffer for righteousness' sake in the midst of a hostile world.

## **Kuyper's View of Rewards**

How must we conceive of this eternal reward?

Abraham Kuyper offers a peculiar explanation of this reward of grace. [18] According to him, the reward of grace does not include the blessing of eternal life itself. He argues that eternal life is merited by Christ's atoning death, that by his active and passive obedience it is given to all the elect, and that in principle the reward is the same for all. Second, according to Kuyper, the reward refers only to the different degrees of glory. All have eternal life; all enter into glory; but not all have the same capacity for the enjoyment of glory, nor do they all occupy the same place in the eternal kingdom. This difference is the reward of grace. The reward of grace, therefore, is not for *all* the saints, but only for certain redeemed children of God. Third, according to Kuyper, this extra reward of glory that some of the saints receive is freely bestowed upon them by God. He uses the illustration

of a parent who expects obedience and willing service from all his children out of love, but who sometimes promises them a special reward to encourage them or to honor their love and their devotion. So God promises an extra reward of grace to those who serve him faithfully in the world, especially to those who must suffer for righteousness' sake.

With this explanation we cannot agree, first, because it would evidently explain the reward of grace apart from the death and obedience of Christ. This is impossible. All that we ever have and ever will have in eternal glory certainly flows from the sacrifice of Christ as its meritorious cause. Apart from the death of Christ, we have nothing; for only in and through that death our sins are forgiven, and we are righteous before God. Only upon those who are righteous in Christ, whose righteousness is imputed to them, and who receive this righteousness by a true faith, will God bestow all the gifts of grace.

Second, Kuyper postulates a mechanical and entirely arbitrary division and separation between eternal life *per se* and the different degrees of glory, which, according to Kuyper, only some of the saints enjoy. These different degrees of glory are not something extra, something outside of and apart from eternal life, something that is added to it, but they constitute simply the full measure of glory of which each individual saint is capable. For the same reason we cannot agree that the reward of grace is something that is bestowed only upon some particular elect, while the great multitude of the saints in glory do not enjoy it, but simply have eternal life. Scripture makes no such distinction. All the saints without distinction, from the least to the greatest, undoubtedly perform a certain measure of good works, and all will receive the reward of grace according to their works.

Third, this theory does not explain those passages of scripture that tell us that the reward will be according to work. Surely, this plain teaching of scripture that the reward will be according to each man's work is entirely general. It includes all men. It cannot refer to some who receive an extra gift and extra enjoyment of glory, while it does not refer to the multitude of saints who only have eternal life and nothing more.

Finally, Kuyper's theory plainly contradicts those passages of Holy Writ that clearly teach that eternal life itself is a reward of grace. In answer to Peter's question what the disciples who had forsaken all should receive, the Lord says,

Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matt. 19:28–29).

To the church of Smyrna, the Lord promises, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). The meaning is evidently that they will receive eternal life as a crown of victory.

### The Biblical Idea of the Reward of Grace

We shall have to look for a solution to the problem of this reward of grace in a different direction from that in which Dr. Kuyper seeks it. We must proceed from the evident truth of scripture that everything that ever shall be given to us of eternal life and glory is merited for us by Christ's death and obedience. He alone merited glory and eternal life; for as the Son of God in human flesh, he humbled himself deeply:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled

himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:6–8).

By this humiliation and sacrifice on the cross, by this complete emptying of himself, Christ alone merited the reward of glory:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (vv. 9–11).

This glory he merited not only for himself, but also for all whom the Father had given him.

The grace of the perfect righteousness of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, is fundamental. Without the imputed righteousness of Christ, we have no right to anything at all. Without it we have no right to be delivered from the dominion of sin, no right to dwell as free sons in the Father's house, and no right to the delight of serving him and walking in all good works. Without the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we are nothing but legal slaves of sin and of the devil. But in Christ's perfect obedience we have the right to be delivered from this awful slavery and to enjoy the freedom with which Christ liberates us. All this is the free grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

As Christ, on the basis of his atoning death and obedience, has the right to deliver us, so he actually delivers us, liberates us from the dominion of sin and death, and translates us into the state and condition of free sons of God, who in principle delight in doing his will: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). By his Spirit, Christ himself dwells in us, regenerates us, and gives us new life. He calls us by his Spirit into the fellowship of his everlasting covenant. Even as he justifies us, so he also sanctifies us, causing us to hate all sin and to flee from it, and in principle to have delight in all good works (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4–6, 8–9).

It is plain, then, that all our good works are fruits that Christ bears in us and through us. Without him we are nothing and can do nothing, as he himself declares:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:4–5).

Besides, our good works are gifts of God to us, which in the deepest sense flow from God's eternal predestination and good pleasure: "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).

In this way, then, we would explain the reward of grace: It is all of grace from beginning to end. It is of grace that Christ died for us and merited eternal righteousness for us. By his death he also merited for us the privilege of performing good works. It is of grace that we are ingrafted into him by a true faith and sanctified unto good works. Good works, therefore, are the fruits of Christ's dwelling in us, fruits that God ordained for us before the foundation of the world, and in which we are privileged to walk. In the way of good works we must enter into glory. But it is all through grace and never of works. And the end is always, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31).

## **Chapter 29**

## **Sanctification**

#### **Sanctification Defined**

Sanctification is that act of God whereby he delivers the justified and regenerated sinner from the defilement and dominion of sin as a spiritual, ethical power, renews him according to the image of Christ, and enables him to walk in all good works, which God has prepared for him.

#### The Relation between Justification and Sanctification

Sanctification is inseparably connected with justification. Although these two must certainly be distinguished, they can never be separated. The distinction is indeed very necessary. The separation is very precarious for faith and life. Justification is a forensic idea and consists in a judicial act of God that is realized objectively in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by which the elect are righteous before God through faith. Sanctification is a spiritual, ethical act, also proceeding from sovereign grace and operating within us out of Christ, who not only is raised from the dead, but who also is at the right hand of God, who also has received the Spirit and has become the quickening Spirit, and who through that Spirit has returned to his own to abide in them forever (Rom. 8:34; Acts 2:33; 2 Cor. 3:17; John 14:16–18).

Justification is the ground for sanctification. By nature we not only lie in the midst of death, but we also are legally bound in the power of sin and corruption. We have no right to be delivered from the power of sin. The judicial ground for such deliverance must first be established in the death and perfect obedience of Christ. Only on the basis of that judicial ground can the Spirit of Christ deliver us from the law of sin and death. It is of the greatest importance that this order not be reversed or that justification not be replaced by sanctification. We are not justified because we are holy, but we are sanctified because we are justified. Besides, justification is not a process but a complete act of God, a perfect change of our state. Sanctification, although complete in Christ and given to us in principle in regeneration, does not dominate the believer completely in this present life. Sanctification follows a process, a continued mortification of the old man and a quickening of the new.

Although these distinctions are of the highest importance, it is of no less importance to understand that sanctification and justification can never be separated. This follows already from the very nature of justification itself. It is a translation out of the state of sin into the state of righteousness. It is not deliverance from the condition of sin. Although state and condition must be distinguished, they nevertheless can never be separated in the spiritual, ethical sense. The transition by a judicial judgment of God from the state of guilt to the state of righteousness must necessarily be followed by a translation from a sinful condition into a condition of holiness. The end must be that the condition corresponds perfectly to the state.

Justification in its main elements is that act of God whereby we receive the remission of sins, the adoption unto children, and the right to eternal life. But it lies in the nature of the case that this cannot be the end of the matter. A forgiveness of sins that would not have its final purpose in deliverance from sin and perfect obedience of love would prove vain and fruitless. The adoption unto children, if it is to be realized and experientially enjoyed by the believer, must have its fruit in spiritual, ethical

sonship of God and a walk as a child of God before his face. The right to eternal life must be fulfilled in the granting of that life itself, which consists in knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Sanctification, therefore, must necessarily follow justification objectively. But this close and inseparable connection is also true in the subjective sense, for the elect are justified by faith. Without a living and saving faith the justification of the sinner in the subjective sense is inconceivable. Although according to its idea justification certainly precedes sanctification, although justification is the ground of sanctification, and although this relation is also experienced in the consciousness of faith, the fact is that the child of God is already regenerated, and therefore in principle he is sanctified before he even longs for the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ. The natural man does not hunger and thirst after righteousness, does not come to a true spiritual knowledge of sin and sorrow after God, does not seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and never will seek refuge in the blood of Christ.

Hence it is evident that also in the subjective sense, justification is inseparable from sanctification. He who through faith prays for forgiveness also prays through that same faith for deliverance from the power of sin. He who through faith embraces the adoption unto children longs through that same faith for the complete spiritual, ethical realization of that sonship. He who through faith is assured of his right to eternal life can never rest until he has become a complete partaker of that eternal life. Hence one who has no need of sanctification has never been justified by a true faith.

## The Necessity of Sanctification

In the deepest sense the necessity of sanctification follows from God himself, who calls his people into his fellowship. "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy," is the constant refrain of Holy Writ (Lev. 11:44–45; Lev. 19:2; Lev. 20:7, 26; 1 Pet. 1:15–16). God is the Holy One. Holiness in him is that divine virtue whereby he is completely consecrated to himself, seeks and finds himself as the highest good, and reveals himself as such in all the works of his hands. Therefore, God is separated from sin, for he is a light, and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5). He is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29) and is filled with terrible wrath against sin. In the positive sense the holiness of God is his eternally perfect self-consecration. Hence his people must also be holy. Because God, the Holy One, has called them, their calling can never be other than a calling out of darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9). They are called unto holiness.

Besides, they are called not only through the Holy One, but also unto him. They are called to be of his party, to stand in his covenant communion, to be manifestations of his glorious virtues in the midst of the world, to taste his friendship, and eternally to dwell in his house. This is impossible without sanctification. Without sanctification no one can see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Only he who is pure of heart is blessed, because he shall see God (Matt. 5:8).

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:5–7).

Even as holiness in God is that virtue whereby his entire being and divine life is consecrated only to himself and whereby he seeks himself, so sanctification is that act of God in us whereby we are delivered from the power and the corruption of sin, so that with heart and soul, with mind and will

and all our powers, we are consecrated to the living God, seek him, and keep his commandments. By this positive act of God's grace, we are separated from sin and the world, and we stand in an antithetical relationship over against the power of darkness.

## Sanctification as a Principle

Scripture teaches very emphatically that the child of God is sanctified in principle, that God also continually sanctifies him, and that he is called to strive after sanctification with all that is in him. He is dead to sin, and it is impossible that he can still live in sin (Rom. 6:2). This does not mean that sin is dead in him; the very opposite is true. But it does mean that a radical change is effected in the believers exactly with respect to their relation and attitude toward sin. Formerly they lived in sin, loved sin, and agreed with sin; now they are dead to sin so that they no longer yield their members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, but yield their members servants to righteousness unto holiness (v. 19). They are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that even as he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also they should walk in newness of life (v. 4). Their old man is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and therefore they do not serve sin (v. 6). They are made free from sin; they become servants to God; they have their fruit unto holiness and the end, everlasting life (v. 22). They are liberated from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2).

They were indeed fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners. Now they are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:9–11). Christ died for them in order that they should henceforth not live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:15, 17). Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24). They have put off the old man with its works and have put on the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of him that created him (Col. 3:9–10). They are born of God; those who are born of God do not commit sin. They cannot sin because they are born of God, and his seed remains in them (1 John 3:9).

### Sanctification as a Continued Work

The child of God, then, is sanctified in principle and liberated from the dominion of sin. But the word of God also teaches that believers are continually sanctified by the Spirit of God, for it is God who works within them to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). They are branches of the true vine, Christ; they do not live independently from him, but only through him and out of him. They must abide in him, for even as the branch cannot bear fruit if it does not abide in the vine, so also they cannot bear fruit unless they abide in him; without him they can do nothing (John 15:4, 5).

Only because believers are in the Spirit, and because the Spirit of Christ dwells in them, can they please God (Rom. 8:8–10). Only through the Spirit can they escape the lusts of the flesh, for the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; these two stand opposed to each other. Believers are led by the Spirit of God as God's children (Gal. 5:16–18). For that reason the apostle does not cease to give thanks and to pray for the church, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto his people the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened, so that they may know what is the hope

of their calling and what are the riches of his inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:15–18). Paul bows his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, asking that he would grant that the saints, according to the riches of his glory, may be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and that they might be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14–19). He is confident that he which hath begun a good work in them will also perfect it until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6). The apostle glories that he is crucified with Christ and nevertheless lives; yet not the apostle lives, but Christ lives in him; the life which the apostle now lives in the flesh, he lives by the faith of the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him (Gal. 2:20). Believers, then, are continually sanctified by the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus their Lord.

## Sanctification as a Calling

Scripture also teaches that the people of God are called to strive after sanctification of life and to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called. While it is God who works in them both to will and to do according to his good pleasure, they are nevertheless called to walk in obedience and to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12–13). They are admonished to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service, and not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their mind, so that they may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1–2).

They must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness, and light has no communion with darkness; Christ has no concord with Belial, and the believer has no part with an infidel. Believers are the temples of the living God, and they have the promise that God will dwell in them. Therefore, it is their calling to separate themselves, to go out of the midst of the unbelievers, and not to touch that which is unclean (2 Cor. 6:14–17). While believers have these promises, it is their calling to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

The people of God must put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:22–24). They must be followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love (Eph. 5:1–2). They must walk as children of light, prove what is acceptable unto the Lord, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (vv. 8–11). They must be blameless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they must shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15). Unto this they are also chosen and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in order that they should be holy and without blame before him (Eph. 1:3–4).

Thus scripture emphasizes the necessity and the reality of the sanctification of the people of God in the midst of the world. They are sanctified in principle, cleansed and purified. They already have put off the old man and put on the new man (Col. 3:9–10). They have been born of God (1 John 3:9). They are crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) and liberated from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). They are also being continually confirmed and strengthened through grace, and they live continuously out of the Spirit. God himself preserves in them the good work which he has begun (Phil. 1:6). At the same time they themselves also perfect holiness in the fear of God, keep themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit (2 Cor. 7:1), work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), and fight the good fight of faith even unto the end (1 Tim. 6:12), that no one

may take their crown (Rev. 3:11). So scripture presents the truth of sanctification in all its implications.

## The Relation between God's Work and Man's Activity

The relation between our walking in sanctification of life and God's work of sanctification must not be conceived in the Arminian or synergistic sense. God is first also in the work of sanctification. Without him we can do absolutely nothing. Only when he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure can we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12–13). Only when he realizes his promises unto us, so that we actually have hold of those promises, can we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit and perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). Our work is rooted in the work of God, and it is the fruit of his work in us. He works in us the spiritual energy, the living spiritual power, to work out our own salvation and to walk as children of light. All spiritual power is alone from him. From him is life, faith, love, hope, purity of heart, illumination of our understanding, knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. But his work in us always preserves us as rational and moral creatures so that we bear fruit consciously and willingly. God works within us, not without our will, but rather in such a way that we willingly present our bodies living sacrifices to God and make our members subservient to righteousness (Rom. 12:1; Rom. 6:19).

The Canons of Dordt teach that

. . . when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit he pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.[1]

#### The Canons instruct further:

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; nor 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.[2]

The Canons therefore attribute the work of sanctification to God only. Nevertheless, this work of God does not violate the rational, moral nature of man, as the Canons also teach:

But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin, which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it, that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore, unless the admirable Author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin.[3]

Thus God works continuously in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. He not only regenerates us in principle, but he also continuously sanctifies us through the Spirit of Christ. That work of God in

us is of such a nature that we consciously and willingly bear fruit unto righteousness. It is not true that God works our sanctification and that we work also, and that these two aspects of the work of salvation stand independently from each other or must be conceived as an irreconcilable contradiction. Nor is it true that God alone accomplishes sanctification and that he drags us along the way as stocks and blocks, as is the presentation of the antinomians. Still less is it true that the relation between God's work and our work is such that we must work, and that if we work, God will help us, as is the view of the Pelagians.

All these wrong conceptions are repudiated by scripture. Rather, the relation is always that we work out of the power of the work of God in us. God is first, and we follow. God is the fountain out of which we live. God works our salvation to will and to do of his good pleasure, and we work out our own salvation as the fruit of the work of God (Phil. 2:12–13). "God is light" (1 John 1:5), and we are always the light-bearers. God energizes us through Christ, and we manifest his energy as rational, moral creatures. He gives, preserves, and strengthens our life, and we live. He works and continues to work in us true faith, and we believe. He works in us continued conversion, and we turn. He gives us and preserves in us the love of God, and we taste his love and love him. He works within us sorrow after God, and we call upon him in penitence for the forgiveness of sins. He gives us true humility, and we walk in meekness of heart and life. He enlightens us, and we know. He leads us by his Spirit, and we walk. He makes us hungry and thirsty for the bread and water of life, and we hunger and thirst after righteousness. He calls efficaciously, and we come. He gives us the power to persevere, and we persevere.

The power and the operation of the power—faith and believing, love and loving, hope and hoping, the eye and the seeing, the ear and the hearing, the understanding and the knowledge, the will and the willing, the power to fight and the fighting—all in connection with gifts, talents, means, circumstances, and time—are from God alone. He sanctifies us, and we walk in sanctification. Exactly from this relationship arises the possibility and the high calling of the people of God to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, because this obligation does not violate the moral, rational nature of the sanctified people of God, but rather preserves it. We must not say, therefore, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, but God must do it." Still less must we say, "Work out your own salvation, then God will do it." But according to Philippians 2:12, 13, we must say, "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." Of him, through him, and unto him are all things. To him be the glory forever (Rom. 11:36).

# Perfectionism Explained and Refuted

Reformed people have always opposed the teaching of the perfectionists. According to this doctrine, which is defended by all who make salvation dependent upon the free will of man, it is possible for the child of God in this world to attain to perfection and to walk without sin. To support this teaching they appeal to the word of God. They have especially four grounds. First, they appeal to those passages of Holy Writ that command the child of God to walk holily and to be holy as God is holy (Matt. 5:48; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:15). Second, they point out that the word of God calls the church holy (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). Third, they appeal to examples of perfection and holiness of the saints on earth, such as Enoch and Noah, who walked with God (Gen. 5:24; Gen. 6:9). Fourth, they appeal to passages that apparently teach perfection in the child of God (1 John 3:9; 1 John 5:18).

Reformed theologians, however, have strongly repudiated this theory. They had a more profound

insight into Holy Writ and a more sober view of the reality of the life of the child of God in the world. Besides, they usually took the reality of sin over against the righteousness and holiness of God far more seriously than the perfectionists, and in perfectionism they saw a great danger. Our fathers taught that a theory claiming that the child of God is able to live perfectly in this world and can actually attain to perfection must necessarily lower the criterion or standard of perfection. He who takes sin seriously and has any idea of the righteousness and holiness of God certainly cannot be satisfied with the outward keeping of some of the commandments of God, but he understands that God demands truth in the inward parts. The child of God who knows himself and from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint gains an ever-deeper insight into his own sinful heart and existence will not easily be tempted to imagine that his walk is perfect before the Lord. He is too vividly conscious of the very opposite.

Those who claim that the child of God is able to attain to perfection usually speak in a very superficial way about their conversion to God. They commonly speak of some very gross sins in which they used to walk and from which now they have been delivered. Formerly they were drunkards or immoral, but since they have been converted, they live soberly and chastely. Little do they speak of the inner fountain of the heart, out of which are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

Lack of proper self-knowledge is the basis of their imagination that they can walk perfectly before God. Sin is excused, and the life of sanctification consists in the external walking in some of the commandments of God. Moreover, the teaching of the perfectionists leads to neglect with regard to watching and prayer. Of a daily seeking refuge in the cross of Jesus Christ, in order there to find forgiveness of sins and peace of mind and heart, they have no need. For all these reasons Reformed people have always contested this serious error.

The arguments of the perfectionists are not difficult to refute. It can readily be granted that the Lord God demands holiness in the life and conversation of his people. Reformed theologians emphasize this demand with far more seriousness and in a far deeper sense than do the perfectionists. But from this demand of God does not follow the possibility that the Christian can live perfectly and without sin. It may also be granted that the church of Christ in the world is called holy and that she actually is holy in Christ Jesus. But at the same time it is true that the church possesses that holiness in Christ only in principle. In the same epistles in which the church and the saints are called holy in the Lord, the believers are rebuked for all kinds of sins and corruptions. As far as the texts that apparently teach perfection in this life are concerned, it is very evident from other parts of the same epistle in which those expressions occur that they mean perfection only in principle. Truly, in 1 John 3:9 we read that he who is born of God cannot sin, because his seed remains in him. But in this same epistle we also read that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8). As far as examples in Holy Writ which are supposed to teach that the saints can and do walk in perfection before God in this world, we may certainly remark that in the entire cloud of witnesses of the old dispensation, there never was one who lived without sin before God.

Over against this presentation of the perfectionists, Reformed people emphasize the necessity of a daily and continual conversion to God, of a very serious struggle between flesh and spirit, between the old and the new man, and of the calling continually to put off the old man and to put on the new man. The Reformed conceive of the Christian in this life as indeed perfect in principle, but as still living in the flesh and as characterized by many sins and infirmities.

## Perfectionism Refuted in the Creeds

This is the teaching of the Reformed confessions. In the Heidelberg Catechism we read:

In how many things does true repentance or conversion consist?

In two things: the dying of the old man, and the quickening of the new.

What is the dying of the old man?

Heartfelt sorrow for sin; causing us to hate and turn from it always more and more.

What is the quickening of the new man?

Heartfelt joy in God; causing us to take delight in living according to the will of God in all good works.[4]

Good works are described not according to their outward appearance, but according to their inner nature: "Those only which are done from true faith, according to the law of God, for his glory; and not such as rest on our own opinion or the commandments of men." [5]

We read further in the Catechism:

Can those who are converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?

No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience, yet so that with earnest purpose they begin to live, not only according to some, but according to all the commandments of God. [6]

Yet the seriousness with which the Heidelberg Catechism takes the demand of God to walk in all sanctification of life is also evident:

Why, then, doth God so strictly enjoin upon us the ten commandments, since in this life no one can keep them?

First, that all our life long we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and so the more earnestly seek forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ; secondly, that we may continually strive and beg from God the grace of the Holy Ghost, so as to become more and more changed into the image of God, till we attain finally to full perfection after this life.[7]

#### In the Belgic Confession we read of man's sanctification and good works as follows:

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do any thing out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man: for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith as is called in Scripture *a faith that worketh by love*, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in his Word. Which works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace: howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works, otherwise they could not be good works any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we merit?)—nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not he to us, since it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written: When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

In the mean time we do not deny that God rewards good works, but it is through his grace that he crowns his gifts. Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we should always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually vexed if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Saviour. [8]

#### The Canons of Dordt instruct:

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.

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 death, they are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Although the weakness of the flesh can not prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in a state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by, and to comply with, the lusts of the flesh; they must therefore be constant in watching and prayer, that they be not led into temptation. When these are neglected, they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world, and the flesh, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into these evils. This the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scriptures demonstrates. [9]

This is the teaching of the Reformed fathers, who must have nothing of the theory of the perfectionists.

# Perfectionism Refuted in Scripture

The same is clearly taught in Holy Writ; the teaching of the perfectionists is indeed foreign to scripture. All the admonitions in the word of God to the effect that the saints must walk in the world in a new and holy life presuppose that sin is still in their members.

Thus the church is admonished:

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:22–24).

What this means is explained in the verses that follow. The saints must put away lying and speak truth every man with his neighbor. They must be angry and not sin; they must not give place to the devil; they must not steal, but rather labor, working with their hands the thing which is good, that they may have to give to him who has need. No corrupt communication must be allowed to proceed out of their mouth, but only that which is good for the use of edifying. They must beware that they grieve not the Holy Spirit of God. They must put off all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, with all malice. They must be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgive one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven them. They must be followers of God, must walk in love, and must put off all fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting. They are warned that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God, for because of all these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. (vv. 25–32; Eph. 5:1–6). All of this is not presented as an ideal that is already attained, but as a goal that must constantly be striven after. Throughout their whole life the saints must put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ Jesus.

The same note of warning and admonition is sounded throughout Holy Writ. Paul writes to the saints of Rome:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:6).

#### Then he admonishes them:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (vv. 12–16).

The apostle certainly figures with the reality of the members of sin that are still present in the believers when he writes:

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him (Col. 3:5, 8–10).

To the same reality the apostle refers in Galatians 5:16–23:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 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. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:12–13). Everywhere in scripture, therefore, we find the same note. Everywhere all the admonitions directed to the saints presuppose that sin is still in their members and that they must continually put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ Jesus. Everywhere the Christian in this world is presented as indeed perfect in principle, but very imperfect according to his sinful nature that remains with him until the grave.

In very vivid colors the apostle Paul describes the spiritual, ethical condition of the child of God, speaking from his own experience. The law is spiritual. He consents to the law that it is good. But he is carnal, sold under sin, which is why he acknowledges that he does not do what he wills, but that which he hates. He finds in himself indeed the will to do the good, but the actual doing of the good he does not find. In him, that is, in his flesh, dwells no good thing. So he finds this law in himself, that when he will do good, evil is present with him. According to the inner man he has his delight in the law of God; but there is another law in his members that wars against the law of his mind and brings him into captivity to the law of sin that is in his members. He draws the conclusion that with the mind he serves the law of God, but with the flesh he serves the law of sin. Finally he exclaims, "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. 7:14–25).

It is well known that many deny that the apostle Paul speaks here of himself here as a Christian. It is also noteworthy that those who try to defend the free will of man and who deny the total depravity of the natural man want to apply to the unregenerated natural man what the apostle writes here. Men like Pelagius and Erasmus, Socinus and Arminius, Episcopius and Grotius, and the Remonstrants in general have always attempted to explain this passage as referring to the apostle before his conversion. This attempt, however, is vain and impossible.

First, such an explanation of the passage certainly does not fit in the context of the chapter or in the preceding and following contexts of the entire letter. Second, such an interpretation is in direct conflict with the doctrine of Scripture in general, which certainly denies that the natural man has a delight in the law of God, that he hates sin, and that with his mind he serves the law of God. The natural mind is enmity against God, and it is neither subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Rom. 8:7). The natural mind certainly does not consent to the law of God that it is good. Third, the

apostle in Romans 7:14 certainly employs some very strong expressions when he speaks of himself as carnal and sold under sin. But in the light of the context, these expressions refer to his members, to the old man of sin that is still within him, while according to the inner man he has a delight in the law of God. Understood in this light, there is nothing in these expressions that is not clearly taught in other places in Scripture or anything that every child of God who knows himself cannot take upon his lips. In Galatians 5:17 the apostle writes in the same style: "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." Finally, in the entire passage of Romans 7, the apostle writes in the first person and in the present time, so it cannot be doubted that he describes his spiritual, ethical experience and condition as it is at the very moment of his writing to the Romans.

#### The Old Man and the New Man

Hence according to the presentation of Holy Writ, as well as in harmony with the experience of the people of God in the world, believers know of a battle between flesh and spirit, between the old man and the new man, and between the law of the Spirit of life and the law that is in their members—a battle that is fought to the very end of their lives.

What is the old man? What is the new man? How is it possible that they can exist next to each other in the same Christian? What is their relation to each other, and what does it mean that we must put off the old man and put on the new man? It is of greatest significance for the doctrine of sanctification that we give clear answers to these questions.

It is indeed very difficult to form a clear conception of the life of the Christian from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint, of the old man and the new man in him, and of the battle between flesh and spirit which is being fought by him and through him. The believer is regenerated. Regeneration is the principle of a new life. It is a principle renewal, a radical translation, a total change of the heart, a transition from death into life, from darkness into God's marvelous light. The Christian is a new creature in the strictest sense. Old things have completely passed away; all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

If this were not the case, if regeneration were simply the beginning of a certain moral reformation, the apparent dualism in the life of the child of God could probably be explained rather easily. But this is not true. The Christian has become a totally different man. He is born out of God. The seed of God remains in him, and he cannot sin (1 John 3:9). He lives; yet not he, but Christ lives in him (Gal. 2:20). Yet it seems that this renewal, this radical change in the life of the child of God, often comes to manifestation but very little, and so much in his life and walk cannot be explained from that root or seed of regeneration. He confesses that in himself there is only a small beginning of the new obedience. Holy Writ speaks of flesh and spirit warring against each other, of the conflict between the old and the new man, which places the Christian in a position of continual battle.

Although the language of Romans 7 certainly is the expression of the experience of every child of God, its apparent dualism cannot easily be explained. One would almost reach the conclusion that two entirely different persons are speaking. It would seem impossible that one and the same person could say of himself what is expressed in Romans 7. On the one hand, Paul speaks of a person who testifies of himself that he is carnal and sold under sin (v. 14), of a person who does not perform that which is good, for the good that he would, he does not; but the evil which he would not, that he does (v. 19). On the other hand, he speaks of a person who is filled with a deep love of the good and is motivated by a deeply rooted hatred against the evil. The good he wills; the evil he wills not, but

hates (vv. 15, 20). He has a delight in the law of God according to the inner man, and with the mind he serves the law of God (vv. 22, 25).

Notice, however, that in this passage the apostle does not speak of two persons, but always of the same person. Notice also that that one person does not speak of experiences in different times, but of his experience at the same time. The same person at the same time wills to do the good, and does not do it; he hates the evil, and does it; he serves with the flesh the law of sin, and with the mind he serves the law of God.

How is such a sharp conflict and contrast conceivable in the same person at the same time?

Different attempts have been made to explain this apparently irreconcilable contrast between the old man and the new man in the Christian. It has been maintained that regeneration is really not a renewal of the heart, but the increating of an entirely new man within the sinful man. The Christian is really a dualism. He is not one, but two persons. There are in him two egos. In actual life this view led to antinominianism. In his one person the Christian can never do any good, and he is delivered over unto corruption. In his other person, however, the Christian can never sin, for he is born of God. Hence the one person in the Christian does not hold himself accountable for what the other person does, and the attempt by the regenerated person to fight against and to overcome that evil person in the Christian is simply vain.

This presentation certainly does not solve the problem, nor is it in harmony with Holy Writ, which speaks of exactly the same person as being under the influence of both the flesh and the Spirit.

Others have tried to explain this apparently irreconcilable contradiction by distinguishing between the person or the ego and the expressions or manifestations of that ego in the nature, in the mind and will of the Christian. According to this presentation, the *person* is entirely renewed. He is a new man. But the manifestations and expressions of that renewed person in the consciousness and will of the Christian are still under the influence of the operations of sin.

## Kuyper's View of the Old Man and New Man

Kuyper makes distinction between the center and the periphery of our life. The center, according to him, is the very kernel or pith of our ego. From the ego the lines run to the periphery. In the periphery lie our consciousness, our perceptions, our inclinations and desires, our will, and our acts, personally, in relation to others, and in relation to the whole world. According to Kuyper, the pith of our ego is regenerated. From the center of that regenerated ego, our consciousness, our desires, our inclinations, our will, and our mind are influenced in conversion. But there are also reacting influences from the periphery upon the regenerated ego, and those reacting influences are not holy, but sinful. So Dr. Kuyper explains that although the regenerate man always sins, yet he remains holy in the very center of his ego. [10]

Different figures have been used to elucidate this relation between the regenerated ego and the periphery of the regenerated man's life. The figure of a steamboat has been used. It runs, for instance, in a westerly direction, but its engine is suddenly reversed so that the boat, as far as the engine is concerned, now runs in an easterly direction. According to Kuyper, the momentum of the boat will still run for a while in a westerly direction even though the engine is put into reverse. This is supposed to explain the relation between the sinful motions in the members of the Christian and his regenerated ego.

The organic figure of a cultivated twig grafted onto a wild tree has also been used. By the process of grafting, the tree has become essentially a cultivated tree. Yet for a long time the trunk of the tree

will shoot forth wild branches.

To explain the operation of our sinful nature, the figure of a cut-down tree has also been used. Obviously such a tree is really dead; it has been separated from its root. Yet, according to Kuyper, by virtue of the life still in the tree, it will still shoot forth branches for a while. These figures and others are used to explain how a Christian who is regenerated in the very center of his ego can yet bring forth wild fruits of sin.

## A Critique of Kuyper's View

It should be evident that the explanation of Dr. Kuyper is in harmony neither with Scripture nor with reality. According to his theory, the regenerated person or ego of the Christian really stands outside of his sinful life. That person or ego is regenerated and therefore holy. The pith of his ego always does that which is good. The *person* of the Christian, therefore, really is presented as standing outside of his sinful deeds and as unable to be held accountable for them. In this way Kuyper's theory tries to account for the expression, "Now . . . it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:20). But this explanation is impossible and certainly is not in harmony with the language of Romans 7.

One who pays close attention to the words of the apostle in Romans 7 will admit immediately that the one who speaks there does not put his *person* or his *ego* outside of his sinful deeds. For he says, "I am carnal; I am sold under sin; I do not what I will; I do what I hate; I do not do the good that I will to do; I do the evil that I do not will; I serve with the flesh the law of sin" (vv. 14–15, 19, 25). It is very evident that the same person, the same ego, speaks these words.

How can one and the same ego speak in such apparently contradictory language about his own life from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint? This question is not answered by saying that the very pith of the ego is regenerated and therefore is completely holy and sins no more, because the apostle teaches in Romans 7 exactly that the ego of the Christian indeed sins. When Paul says, "With the flesh [I serve] the law of sin" (v. 25), he admits that according to his flesh—in his old man—he serves the law of sin. Nevertheless, it is still his person that is serving sin. If the theory of Dr. Kuyper were correct, namely, that the person or ego is entirely holy and separated from sin, it would be entirely impossible that the same ego still serves sin. His explanation, therefore, is not in harmony with Holy Writ.

How true this is may be ascertained when we pay attention to another figure that Kuyper uses in the same connection:

The comparison of a Negro who works in a plaster mill and a white European who works in a coal mine makes this distinction perfectly lucid. When they meet each other and look into the mirror, the Negro, somewhat white because of the powder of the plaster mill, and the white European, black as coal as he crept out of the coal mine, might, judging by experiences, indeed maintain that the Negro is less black than the European. Nevertheless, the Negro knows very well that he is black, even though he appears for the moment somewhat white. And the European claims with perfect assurance, "I am white," even though you see him before you black as coal. And when the same European laborer—who appears black for the moment and who boasts over against the Negro, "Nevertheless I am white"—comes home, and his child jumps up to him and wants to embrace him, the father will say to his child, "Just a moment, darling, for I am black." Are there then two egos, a black ego and a white ego in that man? Of course not. It is one and the same ego who one moment boasts, "I am white," and who the next moment acknowledges, "I am black," and which of those two he will say depends entirely on the contrast. Over against the Negro, who disputes the now-hidden whiteness of his skin, he maintains definitely, "Not true, I am entirely white, there is no black spot on me." But over against his child, who would become defiled by touching him, he acknowledges, "I am completely black." The same is true of the regenerated man. Over against the man who disputes the work of God in him, he will boast, "I am holy and cannot sin." But over against his brother and before God on his knees, he will confess, "I am a miserable man." [11]

From this figure it appears very clearly that it is not the condition of the *person* or the *ego* that determines the condition of the nature; on the contrary, it is the condition of the *nature* that determines the condition of the ego. Just analyze the figure quoted above. Will the Negro maintain that he is white because there is some plaster powder on his face? Will the white European acknowledge that his skin is black because he just comes out of the coal mine? Of course not. But both the Negro and the white European will certainly say, "I am dirty." And this is certainly true.

But notice that both admit that their persons, their egos, are dirty. They say, "I am dirty." Neither of them can say, "I am not dirty." And what determines that dirt of their ego? Are their persons dirty, and consequently are their natures dirty? Of course not. The very opposite is true. The dirt is upon their bodies and therefore upon their natures. Because of that dirt on their natures, they say, "I am dirty." When presently they both wash themselves, they simply undergo a change in the appearance of their natures, and both say, "I am clean." The Negro does not say, "A while ago I was white, and now I am black," and the white European does not say, "A moment ago I was a Negro, and now I am a white man." But both say, "A while ago I was dirty, and now I am clean." The condition of the ego is determined by the condition of the nature. In a spiritual, ethical respect this is no different from the natural sense.

The relation between the ego and the nature is also evident from the incarnation. We confess that the person of the Son of God assumed an impersonal human nature from the virgin Mary. May we say that the entering of the person of the Son of God into the human nature made the *sinful* human nature holy? Or is the person of Christ in the human nature holy by virtue of the fact that he is the person of the Son in a *sinful* human nature? Of course not. The person of the Son was not able to assume a sinful human nature, because in that case the ego or person of Christ in that sinful human nature would have been unholy. It is blasphemous even to conceive of such a thing. But the fact is that the person of the Son, from the womb of the virgin Mary, through the conception and operation of the Holy Spirit, assumed a sinless and holy human nature. Only in this way is the person of the Son of God also in the human nature a holy ego.

Not the person or the *I* of the Christian is regenerated, but the heart, and from that heart, the nature. The essence of the nature in regeneration is radically changed from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint.

This is also plain from a comparison with what took place through the fall of man. We do not say that through the fall the person was corrupted, but the nature. Through the fall of our first parents, our nature was so corrupted that we are wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. [12] This we must surely bear in mind if we would understand somewhat what Scripture means when it speaks of flesh and spirit, of the old man and the new man, in the child of God.

#### The Nature of Man

In order to have some understanding of this difficult problem, it is necessary to ask the question, What is man *as man*, regardless of the influences and changes wrought by sin and by grace? These changes are of a spiritual, ethical character; yet in and through all of them, man remains man. He is man in the state of rectitude. He remains man when he falls. And he is still man when he is regenerated through the Spirit of Christ. In order to gain a clear conception of the relation between the old man and the new man in the Christian, it is important to distinguish between the spiritual-ethical aspect and the physical-psychical aspect of man's nature. The first question, therefore, is, Who is man as man by virtue of his creation?

In distinction from the rest of the living creatures, man was formed by a twofold act of creation:

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). This creative act of God must not be conceived as two separate acts, but as one creative act of God with two aspects.

Man, then, is not two beings, but one. That one being has two different aspects: man is both a material or physical being and a psychical being. These two aspects of his being are most closely connected with each other. The lines of his living nature run through from the periphery of his bodily existence, through which he stands in connection with the material world, to the inmost center of his being, through which he is a pneumatic, personal being, and those lines also run from that center to the periphery. The body is adapted to the soul and the soul to the body. Hence we can distinguish two aspects of the body. On the one hand, the body is related to the material, earthly world. On the other hand, the body is related to the spiritual, internal existence of the human nature. In other words, we can distinguish between a material and a psychological aspect of the body.

Again, as we can distinguish between the purely material and psychical aspect of the body through which it is connected with the spirit of man, Scripture always distinguishes two aspects in the internal existence of man, namely, his soul and his spirit. It is a well-known fact that Scripture more than once makes this distinction—a fact that induces many to speak of three different substances in man: body, soul, and spirit. They are mentioned together in 1 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." The distinction among the aspects of man's being is made often in scripture, as in John 10:11: "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," which is literally, "The good shepherd giveth his soul [τὴν ψυχήν] for the sheep." The same is true of verse 17: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again," which is literally, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my soul [τὴν ψυχήν], that I might take it again."

In Matthew 16:25–26 Jesus says, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" In these verses the same word that is translated both "life" and "soul" is  $\psi \nu \chi \dot{\eta}$  (soul).

In John 12:25 we read, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." In both instances the word translated "life" is  $\psi \nu \chi \dot{\eta}$  (soul). In verse 27 of the same chapter,  $\psi \nu \chi \dot{\eta}$  is translated by "soul": "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour."

It is noteworthy that the Lord, in the hour when he is reminded of his impending suffering on the cross, says that his soul is troubled, and that in Gethsemane he says to his three disciples, "My soul  $[\dot{\eta} \psi \nu \chi \dot{\eta}]$  is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38); while in the last supper, when he is on the verge of sending away the traitor, Jesus is "troubled in spirit" ( $\tau \ddot{\varphi} \pi \nu \epsilon \dot{\psi} \mu \alpha \tau \iota$ ) and says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me" (John 13:21). When the Lord thinks of his impending suffering, he is troubled in soul; but when he thinks of the traitor who sits with him at the last supper, he is troubled in spirit.

Of great importance is 1 Corinthians 15:44–46:

It is sown a natural body [σῶμα ψυχικόν]; it is raised a spiritual body [σῶμα πνευματικόν]. There is a natural body [σῶμα ψυχικόν], and there is a spiritual body [σῶμα πνευματικόν]. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul [εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν]; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit [εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν]. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual [τὸ πνευματικόν], but that which is natural [τὸ ψυχικόν]; and afterward that which is spiritual [τὸ πνευματικόν].

In this passage mention is made of a psychical body in distinction from a spiritual body.

All this gives us sufficient reason not to separate the aspects of man's being, as if he consisted of three different substances, but to distinguish them very carefully. This distinction must be made in such a way that in the inner spiritual existence of man there are two aspects—a psychical aspect and a spiritual aspect—while in the bodily, external existence of man two aspects may also be distinguished—a material or earthly aspect and a psychical aspect.

Through the psychical aspect of his inner nature, connected with the psychical aspect of his bodily existence, man is connected with the earth, lives an earthly life, and stands in connection with the things of the earth round about him. This is his life in this world, the life that he can lose, the life of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling, the life with home and possessions, with wife and child, and with the entire visible world. The first man is of the earth, earthy, and lives an earthly, psychical life through the body (v. 47).

This psychical aspect is not to be separated from the spiritual side of his internal existence. Also in this internal existence of man there may be distinguished two aspects. The one aspect is that of the natural, rational, moral side of man, through which he directs himself as a thinking and willing being to the earthly things round about him. The other aspect is the spiritual side of man in the highest sense, through which man as a person stands in relation to God.

Thus man is an earthly, material, psychical, rational, moral, spiritual being. He is this in connection with the whole of the human race, with the entire earthly creation, and before the face of God. The lines run out of the earthly creation through his body into his soul, through his soul into his personal spirit, and concentrate in his *person*. Exactly because he is a rational, moral, spiritual being, he is also a personal being, and he speaks as soon as he reaches self-consciousness of his ego. Such is man as he was created.

Such is man also from a purely natural point of view. Scripture, however, describes and views man not only from a purely natural viewpoint, but also in his spiritual, ethical relation to God. From that viewpoint, scripture makes the distinction not of body and soul, or of person and nature, but of the heart and the issues of the heart, and—as far as the Christian is concerned—between spirit and flesh or between the mind  $(vo\tilde{v}\varsigma)$  and flesh.

The heart is the center of all the issues of life from a spiritual, ethical point of view, that is, from the viewpoint of our self-determination in relation to God. According to Proverbs 4:23, from the heart are the issues of life (cf. Matt. 5:28; Matt. 12:34–37; Matt. 15:18–19; Mark 7:18–23; Luke 6:45). As the heart is, so are our thoughts and desires, our willing and thinking, and our deepest inclinations and the hidden recesses of all our existence, not from a natural, psychological, but from a spiritual, ethical point of view. The heart is moved either by the principle of love or by the principle of hatred. It is pure or impure. And as the heart is, so are all the issues of the heart. All the lines, according to the teaching of Holy Writ, run always from the center to the periphery, never from the periphery to the center. The entire presentation of the theory of common grace—as if there were an operation of the Spirit upon the periphery, influencing even our willing and our thinking—is directly in conflict with scripture. When the tree is good, the fruit is good; when the tree is evil, the fruit is also evil (Matt. 7:17–19; Matt. 12:33; Luke 6:43–44).

Scripture teaches that man was created according to the image of God, and it also teaches that this image of God is a thoroughly spiritual, ethical reality. The distinction between the image of God in a wider and a narrower sense is not only in conflict with scripture, but is also dangerous. According to this presentation, the image of God in the wider sense consists of man *as man*, his physical-psychological, rational, moral nature. But according to scripture, the image of God is not a natural,

psychological concept, but a spiritual, ethical reality. It consists in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

This means that the heart of man was originally filled and motivated by the love of God. In the center of his nature, from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint, the love of God was implanted as the motive power of all his life. From that heart this motive power of the love of God worked throughout his entire nature in all his spiritual, rational, moral, material, and earthly existence. That motive power of the love of God worked in all his thinking, willing, and desiring, so that he knew God in love, glorified and praised him, willed the will of God, was servant of the Lord in connection with the whole creation, and was consecrated to God and sought him with all that was within him.

This spiritual, ethical operation of the image of God was pure in man in the state of rectitude. There was no conflict, either in his soul or in his body, or even in the world about him. The heart of man had dominion in love over all things. Conflict between flesh and spirit, between the operations of the body and the mind, between the old man and the new man, Adam did not know in the state of rectitude. Also his person was pure from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint. He could say indeed, "I have delight in the law of God with my whole being."

#### The Effect of Sin and Grace on Man's Nature

Through sin man did not change essentially. He still is the same personal, rational, moral, psychological, material, earthly being. From a natural viewpoint, he still stands in the same relation to the world about him, although even from a natural point of view he lost much of his original power and natural gifts. He retained only a few, small remnants of them. This is especially evident regarding his knowledge of earthly things. But that does not remove the fact that he still remains man.

The influence of sin is of a spiritual and ethical nature. Spiritually and ethically, man's nature was put into reverse. His knowledge became darkness and the lie, his righteousness was changed into unrighteousness and iniquity, and his holiness became hatred of the living God. Instead of the love of God in his heart, there was enmity against the Most High, for the minding of the flesh is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). Out of the heart are the issues of life in the natural man (Prov. 4:23). Because his heart became evil, his thinking and willing, his inclinations and deepest recesses of his nature became evil, and he became an enemy of God in all his life. In the natural man there is no conflict from a spiritual, ethical point of view. He loves sin with all his heart and follows it in all his life. He is an enemy of God who minds and wills sin. He is totally depraved and stands in enmity against God with all his mind, heart, soul, and strength.

The Christian, however, is fundamentally and in principle renewed through the work of regeneration. This is not an essential change, but a spiritual and ethical conversion. The regenerated man remains man. His nature remains a spiritual, ethical, moral, psychological, material, earthly nature. He remains in the same relation to the earthly creation as before his regeneration. The suffering of this present time is also his suffering as long as through the body he stands in organic relationship with the human race. He is neither entirely delivered from death and from the operations of death in his members, nor does he regain the original natural gifts in all their power and glory, but retains the likeness of sinful flesh.

But from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint the Christian undergoes a radical change. He goes from death into life, from darkness into light, from unrighteousness into righteousness, from the corruption of his nature into holiness. This change is presented in scripture as a radical change of heart. The proper life-center of this change is found in the resurrected and glorified Christ. Through his Spirit,

Christ himself dwells in the heart of the elect sinner, connects that heart forever with himself, and dominates it by grace. He imparts to that heart new life, his own resurrection life, the life of God, so that the Christian may boast with the apostle, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). From that heart the lines run from an ethical, spiritual point of view throughout his whole nature. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). The Christian wills and thinks, desires and longs, hears and sees, tastes and touches, speaks and acts differently from the natural man. He has become partaker of the divine nature. The motive power of his whole life is the love of God in Jesus Christ his Lord.

#### The Continued Presence of Sin in the Believer

However, the new life of the Christian meets with all kinds of opposition, which frequently bring him into captivity to the law of sin in his members. To start with the periphery of things, there is the old world to which he belongs from a natural perspective, in which he must live and on which he is dependent for his whole existence. In that old world are the old sinful forms of life, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These sinful forms of life he meets everywhere. In the world is the language he learns, the garment he wears, and the book he reads. With the sinful forms of that world he is in contact in commerce and industry, in state and society, in factory and office, on the street, and in the home. These forms of life are as old as sin itself and dominate everywhere. In the midst of that world with its old sinful forms of life, it is not always easy for him to know what is the good will of God. Those sinful forms lead him astray and take him into captivity to the law of sin so that he does not do that which he wills (Rom. 7:21–23).

Further, according to his old nature, the Christian is of that world. By nature he is born out of a sinful race and, therefore, receives a nature in which for centuries the principle of sin and enmity against God has been operating. The Christian does not stand all alone, merely as an individual, but is organically one with the human race. The human nature that he receives through his parents is centuries old. In that human nature, in body and soul, in mind and will, deep ruts have been dug by the operations of sin.

Even as the world in which the Christian lives and moves is not yet the new creation in which righteousness dwells, so also his body is not yet the body of the resurrection, the spiritual body. His nature is not yet the glorified human nature. These operations of sin, the old ruts of sin, the scripture calls "the motions of sins . . . in our members," the "flesh," and "the body of this death" (Rom. 7:5, 18, 24). Although this must not be understood in such a way that sin is really material and physical, it nevertheless is clear from all these expressions that especially the psychical body has long been an instrument of sin, that it adapts itself very easily to the sinful forms of life in the world, and thus takes us into captivity under the law of sin. In the regenerated Christian, evil thoughts and desires no longer issue from the heart. He has received a new heart through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But in his nature there still are the old operations of sin. This causes conflict and opposition so that he is frequently led astray in the direction of unrighteousness.

Thus we can somewhat understand that the same *person* can *appear* in this world as two *egos*. One and the same person, the one subject of all the Christian's actions, of all his thinking and willing, seems to become two egos from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint. Insofar as his person is the subject and knows himself to be responsible for all the acts and operations of sin in his nature, he is brought into captivity under the law of sin in his members (Rom. 7:23). He performs that which is evil, and he serves sin (v. 25). But insofar as the same person is the subject of the new operations, of the new life

that arises from his heart, he hates evil, even the evil that he does, and he loves the good and strives after sanctification of life (v. 15).

Yet for the Christian these two subjects are not identical, even for his own consciousness. For his own consciousness the reality is that old things have passed away and that all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17); he can say, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:20). The old man of sin and the new man in Christ do not stand on the same level. The old man is his person as it is the subject of the old operations of sin in his nature. The new man is the same person, but as it is the subject of the new operations of grace and righteousness in the same nature. But these two do not stand in the same position, even before his own consciousness. The Christian certainly is conscious of the fact that the operations of sin do not arise any more out of his heart. Even when he sins, he sins differently from the purely natural man, for although sin is not dead in the Christian, yet he certainly is dead to sin. He does that which he hates; nevertheless, he hates it. Formerly he loved sin; now he has become enmity against all sin.

Thus it is clear that the life of sanctification is a continual battle, even unto the day of our death. Sanctification does not consist in the Christian's gradually becoming more regenerated and of his being gradually delivered from his old nature. For, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, the very holiest men while in this life have only a small beginning of the new obedience. [13] But sanctification does consist in a continual putting off of the old man and the continual putting on of the new man, and in a continual battle to let the power of grace from the heart dominate the motions of sin that are in the members of the believer. The Christian must fight the good fight of faith against Satan, the flesh, and the world to the very end.

## Chapter 30

# **Preservation and Perseverance**

#### The Reformed Doctrine of Perseverance

In the nature of the case, Reformed theologians have always maintained that believers in Christ will certainly persevere unto the end and that final and complete apostasy and falling away from grace is impossible. The reason is that the Reformed attribute all the work of salvation to God alone, as the sovereign and almighty author who works all things according to the counsel of his will, and who also works in the elect to will and to do of his good pleasure.

To be sure, this preserving work of God does not make of believers stocks and blocks, does not deny their responsibility, and does not deny their rational, moral nature, but rather maintains it. Man, according to Reformed theology, is not the author of his own salvation, either completely or in part. Salvation is the work of God, and his alone. Since God never forsakes the work of his hands, it is evident that the question whether the saints shall persevere unto the end is equivalent to the other question, whether God will perfect his own work in the believers. Therefore, we say that it lies in the nature of the case that Reformed theologians always maintain the perseverance of the saints.

#### The Canons of Dordt on Perseverance

In the confessions of the Reformed churches, this truth is especially developed in the last chapter of the Canons of Dordt. There we are taught that the regenerated are indeed delivered from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life, but also that they are not altogether delivered from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in this world. [1] Further, we are taught that daily from this body of sin spring sins of infirmity so that spots adhere to the best works of the saints, which furnishes believers with constant matter for humiliation before God, for 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 death they are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven. [2] The Canons emphasize, moreover, that if believers were left to their own strength, they could never persevere in a state of grace: "But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end." [3]

This preservation does not prevent the believers from sometimes deviating from the path of righteousness and the guidance of divine grace. Believers must therefore be constant in watching and prayer so that they are not led into temptation. Otherwise, they are in constant danger of falling into heinous and grievous sins. [4] By such sins they offend God, grieve the Holy Spirit, and interrupt the exercise of faith, losing the sense of God's favor for a time, until in the way of repentance God's countenance again shines upon them. [5] But they can never fall away, for

. . . God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffer them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

For in the first place, in these falls he preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being

totally lost; and again, by his Word and Spirit he certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore his mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. [6]

That they do not finally fall away is certainly not due to their own merits or to their own strength, but only to the mercy of God. If left to themselves, they certainly would fall away.

. . . but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since his counsel can not be changed, nor his promise fail, neither can the call according to his purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated.[7]

Moreover, the elect unto salvation certainly can be assured of their preservation and their perseverance in the faith:

[They] obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion that they ever will continue true and living members of the Church; and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life.[8]

This assurance does not spring from any peculiar revelation apart from the word of God, but springs from faith in the promises of God, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are children of God, and from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works.[9] Not indeed as if believers are always fully assured of their salvation and of their preservation and perseverance unto the end: they have to struggle with carnal doubts, and under grievous temptations they are not always aware of this full assurance of faith.

But God, who is the Father of all consolation, does not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it. [10]

This certainty of their preservation and perseverance certainly does not inspire in believers a spirit of pride or make them carnal and profane. On the contrary, it is a source of humility, reverence, piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering, in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God.[11] And when, after they have backslidden, they stand again in renewed confidence of perseverance, this confidence does not cause in them licentiousness,

... but it renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord, which he hath ordained, that they who walk therein may maintain an assurance of persevering; lest by abusing his fatherly kindness, God should turn away his gracious countenance from them (to behold which is to the godly dearer than life, the withdrawing whereof is more bitter than death), and they in consequence thereof should fall into more grievous torments of conscience. [12]

It is especially by the preaching of the gospel and by the use of the sacraments that this perseverance of faith is wrought in the believers. [13]

However,

The carnal mind is unable to comprehend this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and the certainty thereof, which God hath most abundantly revealed in his Word, for the glory of his name and the consolation of pious souls, and which he impresses upon the hearts of the faithful. Satan abhors it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrite abuse, and heretics oppose it. But the spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it, as an inestimable treasure; and God, against whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her to continue this conduct to the end.[14]

#### The Arminian Denial of Perseverance

In the nature of the case, all Pelagians and Arminians deny and combat this plainly revealed truth. The deepest cause of their opposition is their denial of sovereign election and reprobation. They indeed profess to believe in a counsel of God with respect to the salvation of the elect, but it is a counsel that turns upon the axis of the free will of man. They teach that God foresaw that some would accept the gospel and others would reject it; those who accepted were elected unto faith. But God also foresaw a way of conflict and battle between the beginning of salvation and its end. God foresaw that on that way many would fall away and not persevere in the faith, while others would persevere unto the end. Only those who were foreseen by God to persevere to the end has he chosen unto everlasting life. Even as the beginning of the way of salvation rests in and depends upon the free will of man, so its continuance is dependent upon the same will. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Arminians, holding such an erroneous view of election, must teach a possible falling away from grace. This error is clearly expressed in the Remonstrance of 1610:

That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand; and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hands, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds. [15]

## Scripture Passages Used by the Arminians

As do all heretics, the Arminians appeal to scripture for their view of the possibility of the falling away from grace. They point out that scripture itself exhorts us to perseverance and self-preservation. We are told that only they who endure unto the end shall be saved (Matt. 24:13). "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" is promised (Rom. 2:7). We are admonished to abide in Christ and are taught that whoever does not abide in him as the branch in the vine is cast out (John 15:1–4). Scripture teaches that final glorification depends upon the keeping of the faith (Col. 1:23), and it binds upon our hearts and consciences "to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. 2:1). Only if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end are we made partakers of Christ (Heb. 3:14). We must labor and give diligence to enter into the rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:11). The church of Ephesus is warned that if she does not repent and remember whence she is fallen and do the first works, Christ will come unto her quickly and will remove the candlestick out of its place (Rev. 2:5). The church of Thyatira is admonished to hold fast that which she has until the coming of the Lord (v. 25). The congregation of Smyrna is exhorted to be faithful unto death, and unto those who are faithful, Christ promises the crown of life (v. 10). The church of Sardis is addressed, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3:3). The church of Philadelphia is admonished and exhorted, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (v. 11).

The conclusions the Remonstrants draw from these passages are self-evident.

First, they conclude that since scripture exhorts us to persevere and to be faithful and steadfast, it

must be plain that such perseverance and steadfastness depend upon our will and exertion. Admonition presupposes not only *responsibility* for that unto which we are admonished, but this responsibility presupposes in turn that we who are thus admonished also are *able* to follow the contents of this admonition. Hence perseverance depends on us.

Second, the Arminians insist that in these scripture passages the final salvation is presented as dependent upon our giving heed to and following the admonitions. Whoever fails in this respect falls away and becomes reprobate, while those who are faithful and persevere unto the end receive eternal life. Salvation is contingent upon our abiding in Christ, and our abiding in Christ is in last instance an act of our own. Hence according to the Arminians, perseverance and the final salvation depend on man.

Third, these passages of scripture presuppose the possibility that some do not abide in Christ and are cast out.

The Arminians also appeal to those passages of scripture that seem to point to examples of a falling away from grace. They point to Hymenæus and Philetus, who departed from the truth, claiming that the resurrection of the dead had already occurred (2 Tim. 2:17–18). They point to Hymenæus and Alexander, whom the apostle delivered unto Satan, in order that they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20).

They also point to the false teachers who arise in the church, deny the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1); and they point to those who, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ Jesus, are again entangled in those same pollutions and are overcome, whose latter end is worse than the beginning (v. 20).

For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (vv. 21–22).

From all of these examples, the Arminians presuppose that these apostates really had been partakers of the grace of regeneration and faith and that they lost all this grace through their own unfaithfulness and apostasy.

The Arminians even appeal to certain passages of Holy Writ that they claim teach the possibility of a final falling away from grace. Such passages include Romans 11:17–22, where the apostle speaks of branches that are cut off on account of unbelief, and where he warns believers that they must not be highminded, but rather fear. If God did not spare the natural branches, they must beware lest he also does not spare them. They also appeal to John 15:2, where the Lord speaks of branches that are cut off from the vine.

They also appeal to Hebrews 10:26–31:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

They quote also Hebrews 6:4–8:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of

the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

It would appear from all of this evidence that those who oppose the doctrine of the certain perseverance and preservation of the saints have a solid basis in Holy Writ. It seems that scripture teaches the possibility of a falling away of those who have been purified by the blood of Christ, who have known the way of righteousness and have walked therein, who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gifts, and who have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. According to scripture, they fall away so definitely and so finally that their end is worse than their beginning, they increase in ungodliness, and they can never be brought again to repentance.

Besides, the Remonstrants argue that the doctrine of the certain perseverance of the saints simply makes careless and profane men. This objection also seems to have considerable weight. The scriptures admonish that we must watch and pray that we may not fall into temptation (Matt. 26:41). We are called to be faithful even unto death, keeping that which we have, that no one take our crown (Rev. 3:11). We shall not be highminded, but rather fear, seeing that we also may be broken off as branches from the olive tree (Rom. 11:20–21). The Arminian argues that if it is established *a priori* that the believer can never fall away from grace finally and completely, these admonitions of scripture lose all their seriousness. If it is established beforehand that saved once is saved forever, why should we still fight the battle in order to be saved? Therefore, it appears indeed as if the doctrine of the preservation and perseverance of the saints must make men careless and profane.

#### The Canons' Refutation of the Arminian Arguments

A doctrine that is based on such an ungodly conception certainly cannot have the truth of scripture for its foundation. It is therefore necessary that we weigh some of these scriptural arguments of the opponents.

As to the argument that the scriptures admonish the believers to stand fast and not to fall away from the faith, but to persevere, we answer that this in no way militates against the truth of the preservation and perseverance of the saints. Even as conscious faith is wrought through the preaching of the word and by the Holy Spirit, so also the perseverance of the saints is a fruit of the operation of the Holy Spirit through the same word. We must remember that grace does not destroy the rational and moral nature of man, but preserves it. God always treats believers as rational, moral creatures. This is also the language of the Reformed confessions:

But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin, which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore, unless the admirable Author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin. [16]

The same note is struck in the fifth chapter of the Canons:

This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure, that, on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God; so that the consideration of this benefit should serve as an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

Neither does renewed confidence of persevering produce licentiousness or a disregard to piety in those who are recovered from backsliding; but it renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord, which he hath ordained, that they who walk therein may maintain an assurance of persevering; lest by abusing his fatherly kindness, God should turn away his gracious countenance from them (to behold which is to the godly dearer than life, the withdrawing whereof is more bitter than death), and they in consequence thereof should fall into more grievous torments of conscience. [17]

From these quotations it is clear that the work of God's grace, whereby the believers persevere even unto the end, does not treat the believers as stocks and blocks, but as rational, moral creatures. That God preserves the elect presupposes, first, that the Most High has determined in his counsel the final destination of his people from all eternity. This determination is not only general, so that he preordained his church unto glory, but also particular, so that he pre-ordained every one of his elect to his own place in that final glory.

Second, this preservation also presupposes that God, with a view to that final destination of the elect, also determined the way along which and in which the believers reach that end and ordained also the means that must serve the attainment of the final glory.

Third, this preservation implies that God himself executes his counsel and that through almighty grace he leads to their final destination the believers in particular, as well as the church in general, along and in the way determined by him. To those means that God has ordained to lead his children to glory also belongs the preaching of the word. Once more we emphasize, God deals with his people as rational, moral creatures. He preserves them, and through the power of that preservation, they persevere.

The power of God whereby he preserves the saints does not make them stocks and blocks, but works in them and through them. It works in their hearts through the power of the Spirit of Christ. From their hearts that power influences the mind, will, and entire consciousness of God's people. According to 1 Peter 1:4 and 5, they are indeed infallibly preserved unto the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away; but that preservation is in the power of God through faith. For that reason the argument of those who oppose the truth of the final preservation and perseverance of the saints and who appeal to the exhortations of scripture in order to maintain the opposite is of no validity whatever. The word of God, addressed through the preaching, is one of the means whereby God leads his people infallibly unto salvation.

# Scripture's Refutation of the Arminian Arguments

The argument that there are examples in scripture of those who have fallen away from grace and from the faith is not difficult to contradict. To all such arguments certainly apply the words of the apostle John:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:19).

This also applies to the false prophets and teachers mentioned in 2 Peter 2:1. This verse certainly cannot mean that those false teachers were bought by the blood of Christ, but that they have fallen

away from grace. Rather, it must mean that although formerly and nominally they were reckoned to belong to the church of Christ in the world, they became enemies and denied the atoning blood of Christ. The same interpretation applies to the well-known words of Hebrews 10:29, which speaks of those who have trodden under foot the Son of God, have counted the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace. 1 John 2:19 speaks of those who "went out from us, but they were not of us." Although for a time they appeared as if they belonged to the true church, in reality they did not.

To the same category of texts that apparently teach a falling away from grace, although from a different point of view, belong the passages of John 15:1–6 and Romans 11:17–22:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John 15:1–6).

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (Rom. 11:17–22).

It does not surprise us that the Arminians appeal to these texts to prove a final falling away from grace. If the broken-off branches of the vine and of the olive tree are understood to refer to individual believers, then it stands to reason that the conclusion must be a falling away from grace.

However, we must first call attention to the fact that if, according to the presentation of these texts, there is actually a falling away from grace, such falling away is indeed final, and those who fall away can never return. The finality of the falling away from grace does not occur at the moment of the death of the believer, but at any time when he so falls away. Understood thus, the Arminian certainly proves more than he intends to demonstrate by these verses.

Second, when we bear in mind the historical, organic development of the covenant of God in the line of continued generations, it is perfectly evident that these verses do not teach a final and definite falling away from the faith. Rather, according to this organic conception, the branches that are broken off from the vine and from the olive tree are not individual believers, but rather generations. God established his covenant with Abraham and his seed in the line of continued generations. Those generations of the covenant are the branches in the vine and in the olive tree. This historical development of the covenant in the line of continued generations, however, is the cause of the fact that some generations do not remain in the tree, although they were originally live branches of the vine and the olive tree. Just as there are branches of the vine that do not bear fruit, so also in the generations of the people of God there are those who are fruitless and who are cut out. This could not be the case if all the seed of Abraham were spiritual seed. But according to scripture, this is not the case: they are not all Israel that are of Israel, and only the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:6–8). Therefore, these verses do not teach a falling away of individual believers in Christ Jesus.

Finally, a word must be said about the well-known text from Hebrews 6:4–8:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. If they shall fall away, to

renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

How must this passage be explained in the light of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? The text indeed uses strong terms that almost would leave the impression that those of whom it speaks were true saints indeed. The text says that these men were once enlightened, that is, they have received the light of the gospel. Intellectually they have understood the truth of the word of God, and they clearly have apprehended its import. Moreover, the text says that they tasted of the heavenly gift. Without any doubt the heavenly gift is the fullness of grace, the gift bestowed from heaven through the Spirit of Christ. It includes such blessings of grace as forgiveness, righteousness, peace, joy, and more. The text says that of the heavenly gift they tasted. Mark you well, it does not say that they had a spiritual part in that heavenly gift, but says that they simply tasted of it.

Moreover, the passage teaches that these men were partakers of the Holy Ghost, that is, of the special and general gifts bestowed by the Spirit upon the church, such as healing, tongues, prophesying, comfort, exhortation, teaching, and admonition. Still more, they tasted the good word of God. The word of God is good because of the blessed promise of eternal life, and of that word of God they tasted. Further, they tasted of the powers of the world to come, that is, the glorious kingdom in which Christ is Lord and in which all his people reign with him over all things. The victorious powers of that world to come are experienced by the true believers even in this present time. Of these powers those who fall away have also tasted. The text, therefore, does not speak of true believers, but of men in the church of Christ who have come very near to the kingdom of God, have apprehended that kingdom and its blessings with their intellectual and natural minds, and have tasted of the powers of salvation without having a spiritual part in that salvation.

That this is true is evident from the rest of the text, which says that after they have fallen away, it is impossible to renew those men again unto repentance. To renew is not the same as to make something entirely new, but it means "to renovate, to make something new out of something old." Spiritually, it means to make a new man out of an old man, to change the natural man into a spiritual man, to change an unbeliever into a believer, to change an unregenerate into a regenerate Christian. The text says that it is impossible that those men can be renewed again unto repentance.

Repentance is a state of mind, a turning of the mind from the love of sin and unrighteousness unto the love of righteousness, and therefore unto a true sorrow over sin.

When Hebrews says that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, it does not mean that formerly they were truly penitent Christians, true believers, with a true sorrow over sin, for then there would after all be a falling away of saints, which all scripture definitely contradicts. Rather, the author has in mind their former state, as they appeared, as they were known by men, as they were members of the church visible in the world. They were baptized; they went through the outward show of repentance, and for a time they walked in that repentance. But now they have definitely fallen away even from the outward show. They have become unbelievers. They have become wicked. They have become part of the antichrist. The text says that it is impossible to renew again unto repentance those who so fall away from their former apparent membership in the body of Christ.

The case of those people is therefore hopeless. Their falling away is final. They can never return. But the question is, Is this renewal impossible for men, or for God? The author does not say. We may no doubt answer that it is impossible for both. It is impossible for men, because as men they do not have the power of themselves to bring anyone to repentance. To bring to repentance is always the

work of the grace of God. Men can preach and admonish to repent, but when they put forth efforts in the direction of those men who have so fallen away, they find that all their attempts to renew them again unto repentance are hopeless and fruitless. But, reverently speaking, it is impossible also for God to renew them again unto repentance. In the absolute sense, of course, all things are possible for God. But in reality it is impossible because it is not the will of God to bring those men to repentance, because they have become manifest as reprobates. Therefore, reprobation is the deepest cause both of their falling away and of the impossibility of bringing them again unto repentance.

God never lets his elect people come so near to the kingdom of heaven in order then to allow them to fall away so deeply and hopelessly. Only the reprobate—in order that they may become manifest as reprobate and profane—are ever placed in that outward relation to the kingdom of heaven. Notice, they actually become manifest as antichristian. Verse 6 says that they crucify Christ afresh. They hate him. They despise him and treat him as a criminal. They crucify him afresh. This second act of crucifixion is much worse than the historical crucifixion by the world, because they who do it understand that they shed anew the blood of atonement; they show their hatred for that blood of atonement and trample it underfoot. Unto themselves they crucify the Son of God afresh; they openly profess that they want no part in the cross and in Christ. They put him to an open shame. They take part with the enemies of Christ and his cross. They mock him and condemn him openly. Thus those wicked reprobates, who stood in very close connection with the church and with the kingdom of God, who tasted the good word of God, and who tasted of the heavenly gift and were partakers of the Holy Spirit, join the ranks of the antichrist.

That this is indeed the true significance and interpretation of this passage is evident from the illustration that the author of Hebrews uses in verses 7 and 8. It is the illustration of a field. In that field is the good seed, as well as the seed of thorns and thistles. If no rain would come upon that field, neither the good seed nor the seed of thorns and briers would ever become manifest. But through the rain that often comes upon that field, the field brings forth two crops: the crop of thorns and briers and the crop of good corn and grain. In the first instance, the field receives a curse from God in the very rain that falls upon it. In the second instance, it receives blessing through that same rain. The same is true of the rain of the word of God. The rain of the word falls upon the reprobate as well as upon the elect. In the heart of the reprobate is the seed of sin, and the rain of the gospel coming upon that heart serves to manifest the corruption of sin in that heart. That rain is a savor of death unto death. But in the elect, God implants the seed of regeneration. When the rain of the gospel falls upon that regenerated heart, the fruit brought forth is repentance, righteousness, and eternal life. Therefore, while the one receives a curse, through the same word of God the other receives a blessing from God.

## Perseverance of the Saints Defined

The perseverance of the saints is the act of the grace of God whereby he preserves the believers and saints in Christ Jesus, in his power and through faith, to the very end unto salvation and glory, so that they fight the good fight of faith, and so that they can never fall away from the grace they once received. Scripture and the Reformed confessions teach the perseverance of the saints because of God's infallible preservation.

## **Scriptural Proof for Perseverance**

The perseverance of the saints is indeed the teaching of the word of God:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:37–40).

#### To the unbelieving Jews Jesus says:

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one (John 10:26–30).

Philippians 1:6 assures the saints: "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." We are begotten again to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3–5).

The certain perseverance of the saints is rooted in God's eternal election. It is guaranteed by the work of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of grace, which are without repentance. It is guaranteed by the very intercession of Christ for his own, for his prayer will surely be heard. Finally, it is in the very nature of the spiritual life of the saints, for their life is eternal. He who believes in the Son has eternal life, and therefore he can never perish. God, who has implanted that eternal life in his heart, will preserve it unto final glory.

# THE FIFTH LOCUS Ecclesiology

## Chapter 31

# The Idea of the Church

## **Scope and Definition**

The subject of the fifth locus of dogmatics is the church, including the means of grace, that is, the preaching of the word and the sacraments, which are included because they have been instituted in the church and are observed and used by her.

The church is the body of Christ, an organic whole; those who are chosen from before the foundation of the world constitute its members; they are gathered by the Son of God through his Spirit and word in all ages and from all the nations of the world so that the church on earth manifests itself as the gathering of believers and their seed.

#### The Biblical Terms for the Church

In the Old Testament the terms אָהָל and אָהָל are used to denote the church. The first of these terms, comes from the verb אָהָל, which means "to call, to convoke." Hence the noun אָהָל means "an assembly" or "a congregation." It is applied especially to the convocation or assembly of the people of Israel, as in אָהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל (congregation of Israel—Deut. 31:30) קּהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל (congregation of Israel—Deut. 31:30) אָהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל (congregation of Israel—Num. 16:3; Num. 20:4) אַהָל הָאֵלהִים (congregation of God—Neh. 13:1). The other term, אָהָר probably is derived from the root יָבֶיּר means "to meet at an appointed place or appointment" and "to meet together at an appointed time and place." Hence אַדָּה designates an assembly or a congregation.

The Septuagint translates τριξ by ἐκκλησία (church) in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, although it uses the word συναγωγή (synagogue or assembly) once in Deuteronomy. In Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the Septuagint uniformly translates τριξ as συναγωγή (synagogue). In these books of the Pentateuch, τριξ denotes the people in their collective capacity, while in other parts of the Old Testament, it denotes the assembly of the people of Israel or the representatives of the nation congregated for a definite purpose. In Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, τριξ is used for this purpose rather than τριξ. In the Psalms τριξ is τranslated by ἐκκλησία, except in Psalm 40:10, where the Septuagint uses συναγωγή. In Jeremiah and Ezekiel the translation of τριξ is συναγωγή (synagogue or assembly).

In the New Testament συναγωγή is never used for the church, but always for the assembly or meeting place of the Jews. The term ἐκκλησία denotes the entire church or all those who are called into the fellowship of Christ, that is, the church universal (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; Acts 5:11; Acts 9:31; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 6:4; 1 Cor. 14:4; Gal. 1:13). The church is called ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ (*the church of God*—1 Cor. 10:32; Gal. 1:13), as well as the σῶμα Χριστοῦ (*body of Christ*—Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:18). However, more often ἐκκλησία refers to the local congregation (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Rev. 1:4, 11, 20; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17). In the New Testament the church is also called Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:5).

#### The Doctrine of the Church in the Early Fathers

The early fathers inseparably linked salvation and the church together. They all taught and emphasized in their writings that salvation is only in and with the church and that there is no salvation outside of the church. As we consider the views of the early church fathers, we must bear in mind that their conception of the church was not clearly defined. In appreciating them, we must remember that they made no sharp distinctions between the church visible and invisible or between the church as an organism and as an institute. Irenaeus, for example, maintained that all the treasures of the truth are deposited in the church; outside of the church are only thieves and robbers, pools of foul water, namely, those who profess to be Christians but are not connected with the church.[2] Clement of Alexandria defined the church as the society of the elect, the body of the Lord outside of which there is no salvation, and compared her to a mother to whom the members owe their spiritual life and nourishment.[3] Origen, a disciple of Clement of Alexandria, also declared that no one is saved outside of the church.[4] Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, also emphasized that there could be no salvation for anyone except in the church.[5] All this, of course, is true of the church considered as the elect organism of the body of Christ.

The same early church fathers also strongly emphasized the unity of the church. The church is one, not many, although there are many congregations. Especially Cyprian emphasized this unity of the church. He compared the church to the sun with its many rays, to a tree with its many branches, and to a source from which flow many brooks. [6]

In a later period, AD. 300 to 750, beginning especially at the time of Constantine the Great, the church developed in external power and glory in the world, and it increasingly assumed the form of a kingdom of this world. At this time a controversy arose between the Donatists and the church catholic about the purity of the church and church discipline. The Donatists held that the church visible must be pure and advocated strictest discipline; the church must exist only as the true spiritual people of God. In contrast, Augustine admitted the necessity of church discipline, but maintained that absolute purity could not be attained for the church in the world. The two distinguishing marks of the church, according to Augustine, are catholicity and apostolic connections, that is, connection with the churches as founded by the apostles.

As to the importance of membership in this true church, it was generally held that membership in the Catholic Church was strictly necessary unto salvation. According to Augustine, "Whoso is not in this church does not now receive the Holy Ghost."[7] The Council of Florence (1438–1445) said, "... those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart 'into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devils and his angels' [Matt. 25:41] unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock."[8]

# The Development of the Roman Catholic Doctrine of the Church

The period from A.D. 750 to the time of the Reformation was characterized chiefly by the emphasis on the supremacy of the pope of Rome, although for various reasons the prominence of the papacy was somewhat relinquished towards the end of this period. The popes themselves defined their power and position, not only with relation to the church, but also with relation to temporal sovereigns. Gregory VII, pope from 1073 to 1085, compared the relative dignity and power of the pope and of temporal rulers to the light of the sun and the moon. [9] Innocent III, pope from 1198 to 1216, taught that although the primary and principal foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the second and secondary foundation of the church is Peter. After Christ had

consecrated the Roman church with his own blood, he left the primacy of the church to Peter, his successor, and transferred to him the whole plenitude of power. Single keys have single realms; but Peter, both in fullness and in breadth, surpasses them all, because he is the vice-regent of him to whom belong the earth and the fullness thereof. As the moon derives its light from the sun and is inferior to it in both quantity and quality, in position as well as in effect, so the regal power derives the splendor of its dignity from pontifical authority. [10] Boniface VIII, pope from 1294 to 1303, issued the decree, "We declare, say, define, and pronounce it to be altogether necessary for salvation for every human creature that he be subject to the Roman pontiff." [11]

This conception of the church easily led to spiritual despotism, as can be readily understood. The idea that heretics and schismatics should be brought to repentance by physical coercion was defended. Even capital punishment was held to be none too severe for a heretic. If a temporal lord should fall short of showing his allegiance to the Roman pontiff, he was excommunicated, and his domain was placed under the ban, thereby releasing all his subjects from submission to him.

The Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) most clearly and ably set forth the Roman Catholic view of the church. According to him, the church is a company of men externally bound together by the profession of the same Christian faith, the communion of the same sacraments, and under the same government of legitimate pastors, especially the pope. Hence all professed unbelievers, all who do not partake of the sacraments, and all who do not recognize the pope are excluded from the church. Included in the church are all others, whether they are godly or ungodly, reprobate or elect. He therefore made no distinction between the church visible and invisible. The pope, according to him, is infallible in matters pertaining to faith and life. [12]

## The Protestant Conception of the Church

The Reformation of the sixteenth century broke in principle with the Roman Catholic conception of the church. The main principles of the Reformation are usually considered to be two; they are distinguished as the formal and the material principles.

The formal principle was that the Reformers acknowledged only one source of authority—the holy scriptures. By this principle they stood opposed to Roman Catholicism, false mysticism, and rationalism. The Reformers opposed the Roman Catholic Church because it acknowledged tradition as a source of authority beside scripture. The Protestants rejected everything as having authority except the word of God. Besides, the Roman Catholics included the apocryphal books in the Bible, while Protestants recognized only the sixty-six canonical books. Roman Catholics claimed that the right and power to interpret the Bible belonged to the church only, that is, the clergy, while Protestants maintained that every Christian is able and has the right to interpret the word of God. By this same principle the Reformation was opposed to false mysticism, which is characterized by a reliance upon inner light and a rejection of the objective authority of the Bible. Protestants claimed that the objective revelation in scripture must be the sole and only reliable canon for faith and life. In opposition to rationalism, the Reformation maintained that reason must be subjected to the scriptures as the word of God.

The material principle of the Reformation was expressed in the words "justification by faith only." The Roman Catholic Church had become semi-Pelagian and taught that justification is by works as well as by faith. The Reformers rejected this conception and maintained that the believer is justified only by faith. The influence of these principles on the doctrine of the church is plain. A considerable part of the Roman Catholic doctrine concerning the church—the priesthood, the pope, and the

sacraments—was not based on the word of God at all, but on tradition and the institutions of men. The Reformation rejected all this. Besides, by virtue of the principle that works as well as faith justify man, especially by the external observance of rites and ecclesiastical ordinances, the Roman Catholic Church had gradually assumed the position of mediator between Christ and the believer. The Reformers swept away the institution of the church from its mediatorial position between God and the individual soul.

The Protestant conception of the church is that it consists essentially of the fellowship of all who are united by the bond of true faith. To the church belong all the elect of the past, the present, and the future. The true church on earth is invisible as far as its spiritual fellowship is concerned, but becomes manifest as the church visible where the word of God is purely preached, the sacraments are rightly administered, and Christian discipline is maintained. All believers are priests, not just the separate class of clergy. Yet the church functions through its duly ordained and called officebearers in the ministry of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline.

#### The Doctrine of the Church in the Creeds

Since the Reformation the doctrine of the church has been embodied in all the confessions of the Protestant churches.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches:

What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Catholic Church?

That out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, the Son of God, by his Spirit and Word, gathers, defends, and preserves for himself unto everlasting life, a chosen communion in the unity of the true faith; and that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member of the same. [13]

#### In the Belgic Confession we read:

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of true Christian believers, expecting all their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost.

This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal king, which, without subjects, he can not be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appear[s] very small, and, in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing: as during the perilous reign of Ahab, when nevertheless the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit. [14]

The object of faith, according to this article, is a catholic church, which at the same time is holy. This church is not confined, but spread over the whole world, and is gathered throughout the history of the world. It includes all who are saved and excludes all who are not saved. Within her confines are all the benefits of salvation; outside of these limits, there is no possibility of salvation. There is only one holy, catholic church.

The Belgic Confession further states this in emphasizing that everyone is bound to join himself to the true church:

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assemblage of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to

the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them. And that this may be better observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it; yea, though they should suffer death or bodily punishment.

Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God. [15]

It is evident from these quotations that our fathers took the doctrine of the church very seriously and did not teach any false multiformity of the church. They taught that it is possible to join oneself to the true church. Exactly because of this, it is necessary that we must be able to distinguish between the true and false church. Therefore, the marks of the true church must be known. Hence the Belgic Confession speaks of those marks wherein the true church differs from the false church:

We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true Church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church.

But we speak here not of the company of hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true Church must be distinguished from all sects who call themselves the Church.

The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself. With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians, namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ as the only Saviour, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they have remission of sins through faith in him.

As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the Sacraments, as appointed by Christ in his Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry. These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other. [16]

The Second Helvetic Confession has a long chapter on the holy, catholic church, from which we quote the following:

Forasmuch as God from the beginning would have men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), therefore it is necessary that there always should have been, and should be at this day, and to the end of the world, a Church—that is, a company of the faithful called and gathered out of the world; a communion (I say) of all saints, that is, of them who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God, in Jesus Christ the Saviour, by the word of the Holy Spirit, and who by faith are partakers of all those good graces which are freely offered through Christ. These all are citizens of one and the same city, living under one Lord, under the same laws, and in the same fellowship of all good things; for the apostle calls them "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19); terming the faithful upon the earth saints (1 Cor. 4:1), who are sanctified by the blood of the Son of God. Of these is that article of our Creed wholly to be understood, "I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints."

And, seeing that there is always but "one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 2:5); also, one Shepherd of the whole flock, one Head of this body, and, to conclude, one Spirit, one salvation, one faith, one Testament, or Covenant,—it follows necessarily that there is but one Church, which we therefore call Catholic because it is universal, spread abroad through all the parts and quarters of the world, and reaches unto all times, and is not limited within the compass either of time or place. Here, therefore, we must condemn the Donatists, who pinned up the Church within the corners of Africa; neither do we assent to the Roman clergy, who vaunt that the Church of Rome alone is in a manner Catholic. [17]

The last part of this long chapter speaks of the marks of the true church:

Furthermore, we teach that it is carefully to be marked, wherein especially the truth and unity of the Church consists, lest that we either rashly breed or nourish schisms in the Church. It consists not in outward rites and ceremonies, but rather in the truth and unity of the Catholic faith. This Catholic faith is not taught us by the ordinances or laws of men, but by the holy Scriptures, a compendious and short sum whereof is the Apostles' Creed. And, therefore, we read in the ancient writers that there were manifold diversities of ceremonies, but that those were always free; neither did any man think that the unity of the Church was thereby broken or dissolved. We say, then, that the true unity of the Church does consist in several points of doctrine, in the true and uniform preaching of the Gospel, and in such rites as the Lord himself has expressly set down. And here we urge that saying of the apostle very earnestly, "Let us, as many as are perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:15, 16).[18]

#### The Scottish Confession of Faith strikes the same note:

As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men, chosen by God, who rightly worship and embrace Him by true faith in Christ Jesus, who is the only Head of the Kirk, even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus. This Kirk is Catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the chosen of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles, who have communion and society with God the Father, and with His Son, Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of His Holy Spirit. It is therefore called the communion, not of profane persons, but of saints, who, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, have the fruit of inestimable benefits, one God, one Lord Jesus, one faith, and one baptism. Out of this Kirk there is neither life nor eternal felicity. Therefore we utterly abhor the blasphemy of those who hold that men who live according to equity and justice shall be saved, no matter what religion they profess. For since there is neither life nor salvation without Christ Jesus; so shall none have part therein but those whom the Father has given unto His Son Christ Jesus, and those who in time come to Him, avow His doctrine, and believe in Him. (We include the children with the believing parents.) This Kirk is invisible, known only to God, who alone knows whom He has chosen, and includes both the chosen who are departed, the Kirk triumphant, those who yet live and fight against sin and Satan, and those who shall live hereafter. [19]

#### The Westminster Confession says the following about the church:

The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law) consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion, and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. [20]

#### The Reformed Doctrine of the Church

From all the above quotations from the confessions, we can gather the Protestant and particularly the Reformed position concerning the church: I believe a holy, catholic church.[21] Such is the confession that from earliest times the church placed upon the lips of her members and that is still repeated every Sunday by Protestant churches of every denomination wherever they congregate for worship.

By this confession the believer declares, first, that the church is an object of his faith. The existence, nature, and calling of the church is to be determined not from experience, not by human philosophy, not by observation of the actually existing churches in the world, but only from revelation, that is, from the word of God in the holy scriptures. Just as the church confesses, "I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in the Holy Ghost, I believe the forgiveness of sins, I believe the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," so she also declares, "I believe a holy, catholic church."

Second, therefore, the believer declares that there is such a church, regardless of what may be seen or not seen of her in the world, regardless of what men may make of the church, and regardless of what men may do either to establish and organize the church or to destroy her. There *is* a holy, catholic church.

Third, the believer says that this church is holy; the church is without sin, without spot or wrinkle, consecrated unto God, and therefore quite distinct and separate from the world in its evil sense, from fallen and sinful mankind.

Fourth, the believer confesses that this church is catholic. It is not limited to any particular nation, tongue, or tribe, but embraces all the nations of the world and transcends all human relationships. The church is neither Jew nor Greek, neither German nor American, neither British nor Russian. It swallows up all natural distinctions into one, holy, catholic fellowship. Such is the meaning of the confession, "I believe a holy, catholic church."

## Scriptural Descriptions of the Church

What is the idea or the essence of the church of Christ? Scripture is rich in terms that describe the church of Christ.

There is the well-known term *body of Christ*. The church is the spiritual body of which Christ is the head. God has revealed his exceeding great power

when he raised [Christ] from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:20–23).

The marvelous passage in Colossians 1:15–20 describes Christ as the firstborn of every creature, by whom and unto whom all things are created. "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (v. 18). Later the church is again described as Christ's body: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (v. 24).

In close connection with the idea expressed by the figure of the body of Christ, the church is compared to the vine and its branches:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman . . . As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches (John 15:1–5).

To describe the church of all ages, the apostle Paul employs the figure of the olive tree on which the branches from Jews and Gentiles are ingrafted (Rom. 11:16–24). Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says,

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12, 13).

From a slightly different viewpoint, the church is called the city of God, the new Jerusalem, Mount Zion, and the temple of God:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God,

him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:16–18).

[Believers] are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22–23).

Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26).

Believers are also called the household of God (Eph. 2:19), the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), and are compared to a building in Ephesians 2:20–22:

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

#### **Elements in the Idea of the Church**

From these and other passages we learn that scripture presents the church as one whole with a definite number of parts or members, each of whom occupies his own place in the whole and in that place serves the purpose of the whole. The church is not a crowd to which you can add or from which you can subtract without spoiling the idea of the whole. A temple is not the same as a mere pile of stone, brick, wood, or other material, but it is a well-ordered, harmonious, and beautiful whole dominated and determined by one idea. Each part, each stone, each beam, each pillar, each window, and each ornament fits into the whole and serves the beauty of the whole only in its own place. When the temple is finished, it is not possible to insert one more stone or remove one single ornament without marring the harmony of its architecture. The same is true of a body. It is not an arbitrary number of members, but a complete and perfect unity. Every member serves the whole body exactly in its own way and in its own place in the body.

So it is with the church. The church is not an arbitrary number of saved men determined by the will of men, but a beautiful, harmonious whole in which every saint occupies his own place and serves to reveal the idea and purpose of the whole. That purpose is the glory of God in Christ. The number of men who are to enter into this whole is no more determined by the will of men than the number of stones that are fitted into the walls of a temple is determined by the stones or by the desire of the dealer in building material to sell as many stones as possible. It is the will and conception of the divine artificer that determined before the foundation of the world both the idea of the church and the number of its members.

Moreover, according to the teaching of scripture, the church is a living spiritual organism of which Christ is the head and of which all his people are members. This is expressed by the figures of the body, the vine and its branches, and the olive tree. The watch you carry in your pocket or on your wrist is also one whole, but it is a mechanism; it did not grow organically from a common principle. On the contrary, its parts were manufactured separately and afterwards assembled to constitute the watch. But an oak is an organism. The roots, trunk, branches, and leaves were not mechanically put together, but developed from a common principle and grew from within. The church is also a living organism, the body of Christ. Christ is first, and he is the head. In him is all the life of the members of the whole body. From him, through his Spirit, all the members receive their life and energy. He lives in them, and they live out of him. His mind is their mind; his will is their will; his blessings are their

blessings; his resurrection life is their life. Apart from him they are nothing and can do nothing (John 15:5). The church is the beautiful, harmonious, spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all the elect are members, which must serve the purpose of revealing the glory of the life of the triune God through Jesus Christ the Lord.

When we conceive of the church in this light, it is evident that all the elect, and they only, belong to the church. This is clearly expressed by question and answer fifty-four of the Heidelberg Catechism and also very definitely by the Westminster Confession, both of which we have previously quoted.

This truth is also based on Holy Writ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:3–4, 11).

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:4–9).

First, this text implies that God has chosen the church as church, that is, God from eternity willed the organism of the church under Christ her head. Second, God created that church from the beginning of the world organically, that is, within the organism of the human race, which includes the reprobate element of humanity. Third, in time this reprobate shell lives under God's providence in a natural organic relationship with the elect organism, as the chaff with the grain. Elect and reprobate are temporarily one in a natural, organic sense. The reprobate shell serves the organism of the elect, namely, the church. The two are separated along the line of election and reprobation by an ever-continuing process; in the end of the world, the organism of the elect church will be finally and completely separated from the reprobate shell.

## The Supralapsarian Conception of the Church

This is the supralapsarian conception of the church. According to the infralapsarian presentation, God created a perfect and original organism in Adam. This original organism was marred, spoiled, and corrupted by sin. God restored this original organism in the church by re-creation. Our chief objection against this mild Reformed conception is that in reality something fell into the hands of Satan and was lost. The devil gained a victory, although God restored his marred creation and has the final victory.

According to our conception, God from eternity purposed to create a church in Christ. That church, together with the reprobate shell of the human race, God created in the loins of Adam organically. In the line of election and reprobation, God separates the pith from the shell and brings his elect church to glory. Nothing is lost. Sin and Satan must serve the purpose of realizing the church of Christ so that God maintains his counsel.

This is the teaching of Holy Writ:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth (Eph. 1:10).

For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life (Isa. 43:3–4; cf. Col. 1:15–20).

The meaning is that the entire number of the elect, including the elect from the past, in the present, and in the future, together constitutes the church as the body of Christ. From this viewpoint we can distinguish the church as church militant (ecclesia militans), church triumphant (ecclesia triumphans), and church latent or hidden (ecclesia latens).

#### The Church Militant

The church is called *militant* because she has a battle to fight. The deepest cause of this battle is that she represents the cause of the Son of God in the midst of the world that lies in darkness and stands in spiritual alliance with the devil, the prince of this world, in enmity against God, and in opposition to the cause of his Son. In order to understand this battle and the cause of the Son of God, we must remember that God created this world and all things therein for his own name's sake, unto the praise of his glory. He made the world a kingdom with man, who was created in the image of God, as the center and pinnacle, the head and king of all created things. Made in the image of God, man stood in true knowledge of his God, righteousness, and holiness, that he might gather the praise of God reflected in all creation and express it in conscious adoration before the face of the living God, love him with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and consecrate himself and all things to his creator, the sovereign Lord of all. Representing all creation, man was the friend-servant of God. As God's friend and the representative of his sovereignty in complete subjection and perfect obedience of love to his creator, man had dominion over all things. He was king under God, his servant-king. All creatures had to serve him in order that he might serve his God. In serving him, man enjoyed the blessed fellowship of the Most High and tasted the goodness of the Lord.

In this original economy a breach was struck by the fall and disobedience of this friend-servant of God, this representative of God's supreme and only lordship in the visible world. Scripture traces the beginning of the breach to the world of heavenly spirits (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude v. 6). Satan, probably the highest of angels, stumbled over his own glory and, being puffed up with pride, pursued after the insane ideal of his vain and haughty imagination—to be as God. With this most fundamental of all lies, he invaded the world of man and tempted God's friend-servant, the king of the earthly creation, who listened to the lie of the devil. Man violated God's covenant of friendship and concluded a spiritual alliance with the prince of darkness. Man plunged himself and the whole human race into corruption and death; out of him the world develops from the principle of enmity against God, always realizing the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Moreover, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against that world and all its ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18); under the influence of this divine wrath, and impelled by its own evil lust from within, it increases in iniquity until the man of sin, the son of perdition, shall be revealed at the time of antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3).

However, God will give his glory to no other. He is Lord, always Lord, who accomplishes all his good pleasure. Through the vain imagination of Satan and the fall of man, God prepared the way for his Son to come into the world. That Son he had anointed from before the foundation of the world to be the head of the church, the heir of all things, the Lord of lords and King of kings (Eph. 5:23; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 19:16), the everlasting representative of God's lordship over all created things, the eternal servant-king under God, in whom and under whom all things in heaven and on the earth must be united

in the heavenly kingdom of the new creation. This Son of God, this anointed servant of the Lord, was ordained to come into this world, to unite himself with human nature, and to become like unto his brethren in all things. In the world he was to represent God's cause, his eternal covenant, his truth and righteousness, his sovereignty and lordship, his everlasting love and mercy, his glory and honor. He was ordained to redeem and save his people out of the world in the way of perfect obedience even unto death and to form them into a people of God who will live in God's house and extol his praises. He is anointed to overcome all the power of sin and death, to dispossess the devil and the wicked, and finally to destroy them by the breath of his mouth (2 Thess. 2:8). And having overcome all his enemies, he is to submit himself and his kingdom to the Father so that God may be all in all. This is what we call the cause of the Son of God.

#### The Battle of the Ages

The result is a battle throughout the ages. The world hates Christ; all the powers of darkness unite themselves against him to oppose his cause, to bring him to defeat, and to destroy his kingdom. Because it is the purpose of Satan and his hosts—and of fallen man in alliance with them—to retain their lordship over the world in the service of unrighteousness, the world is in principle anti Christ. Most clearly this became evident in the fullness of time when Christ personally came into the world to fight his battle, to reveal himself as the representative of God's righteousness, to overcome the power of sin, to wrest from the prince of this world his usurped power and authority, and to establish the everlasting kingdom of God on the foundation of truth and justice. All the forces of iniquity rose up against him. They opposed and contradicted his word. They despised him and heaped contempt upon him. They persecuted him to the death, yea, the cruel and shameful death of the cross. In and through it all, he fought the battle of Jehovah and was victorious. He revealed and glorified the Father, took away the sin of his own by becoming obedient unto death, overcame the prince of this world, death, and hell, and was raised to glory at the right hand of God. Now he has a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Such was the battle for the cause of the Son of God when he was in the world. The world hated him and his cause. But he overcame the world and its prince.

However, it was not only in the fullness of time, during the few years of our Lord's earthly sojourn, that the Son of God was in the world and that his cause was represented. On the contrary, from the beginning of history throughout the ages, he and his cause are always manifested in the midst of and over against the world that lies in darkness. For from the beginning of the world even until the end, the Son of God gathers his church.[22] That church is his body. In that church he lives; that church he redeems and makes worthy of eternal life; that church he delivers and sanctifies; to that church he gives his word in order that she may proclaim it. He calls her out of darkness into God's marvelous light in order that she may walk in the light. He draws her out of the alliance with the prince of this world and into the blessed covenant of God's friendship. Although calling her out of the world in the spiritual sense, he nevertheless leaves her in the world, that she may represent the cause of God's covenant, the cause of the Son of God, as "sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [they] shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). As Christ thus becomes manifest in the church, the head is represented in and by the body. The body is called by grace to stand for the cause of the Son of God. The word of Christ is realized in her:

but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the world that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also (John 15:18–20).

This is the battle of the church.

### The Spiritual Nature of the Church's Battle

On the part of the church, the battle is purely spiritual. It is by no means superfluous to remind ourselves of this truth. The conflict cannot be compared with the wars and battles of this world. Even as the battle cannot be explained from worldly and historical causes, so it does not aim at natural or earthly ends. It does not aim at world power or world conquest. The battle is not fought for aggrandizement or human glory; the courage of its heroes is not physical, and its victory does not depend at all upon its mighty equipment or upon the numerical strength of the armies that the church may be able muster. This battle, strictly speaking, cannot even be fought with material means and physical weapons. Its mightiest warrior, the captain of our salvation, had no place where to lay his head (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58). He refused in the darkest hour of the battle the help of heavenly hosts and forbade the use of the sword (Matt. 26:52–53). He died on the cross. There he fought the fiercest battle. Paradoxical though it may seem from the viewpoint of the warfare of this world, his death was his victory.

So the battle of the church is spiritual. It has a spiritual cause, the conflict between light and darkness. It has a spiritual purpose and aim, the glory of God and the cause of the Son of God. It is fought by spiritual power and with spiritual weapons, the power of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. For the battle of the church is the Lord's, not man's.

Superficially considered, it may seem as if the battle of Jehovah was different during the old dispensation, especially when the church assumed the form of Israel's national existence, and as if the battle could have been fought with material weapons and physical power. Israel had its battle hosts and fought physical battles against physical enemies with sword and spear, with bow and arrow, and there was much bloodshed connected with these battles of Jehovah.

Yet it is a mistake to think that in the old dispensation the battle was essentially physical, and that it was fought by material means. Although the battle of the church in those days assumed a physical aspect because the line of demarcation between the people of God and the world was national, nevertheless, the conflict was essentially intensely spiritual. Israel was the church. Its kingdom was the kingdom of God. The king on Zion was a type and representative of the Christ. Jerusalem was the city of God. The land of Canaan was typical of the heavenly country in the new earth. The underlying motive of all the hatred of the nations against Israel, of all the battles it fought, and of all the sufferings it endured, was hatred of the cause of the Son of God.

It is noteworthy that although Israel indeed had its battle hosts and fought with sword and spear, on these the outcome of the battle never hinged. Insofar as Israel fought Jehovah's battle, the Son of God, the true captain of Israel's hosts, gave them the victory. One could chase a thousand, and two could put ten thousand to flight (Deut. 32:30). But if they departed from their God, trusted in chariots and horses, and fought their own battles, they were surely defeated and destroyed. Without the strength of arms, Jehovah delivered them out of the land of Egypt. While without faith they could not enter into the land of Canaan, by faith they finally entered, and the Lord literally gave them the land, causing the walls of Jericho to collapse (Josh. 6), raining destruction upon the enemies, and stopping the sun and the moon in their courses (Josh. 10). With three hundred men Gideon gained the victory over the host

of the Midianites (Judges 7). With a sling and a stone a mere shepherd killed the mighty warrior of the Philistines (1 Sam. 17). But when Israel forsook Jehovah and walked after the abominations of the heathen, it was the same God, who otherwise gave Israel the victory, who instead delivered them over into the hands of the enemy. For Israel's war was the battle of Jehovah; they represented the cause of the Son of God.

In the new dispensation, however, the battle of the church no longer assumes a physical aspect whatsoever. It is purely spiritual. No longer is the church a nation in the midst of nations. The church is the gathering of those who are called out of every nation. No longer do mighty battle hosts or valiant warriors represent the cause of the Son of God. The battle of the church can be fought with neither sword and spear or shell and bomb, nor by the strength of unions or associations, by strikes and boycotts. It is the battle between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness, between Christ and Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-15), between the cause of the Son of God and the cause of the dragon. In this battle we must be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might (Eph. 6:10), and not in our own strength: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (v. 12). This spiritual battle we must fight in the world and in every department of life: in the church itself, in the family, in society, in the school, in labor and industry, in business and commerce, and in the state. Always and everywhere the holy, catholic church must live from the principle of the rebirth and according to the word of God. Hence the believer must put on the whole armor of God: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (vv. 10– 17). His strength is faith. His sole weapon is the word of God. And the battle is the Lord's.

### The Church's Sure Victory

If thus the church fights the spiritual battle of the Son of God, it certainly has the victory. The distinction between church militant and church triumphant is not quite correct. Although the church in the world is indeed militant, nevertheless it is also victorious. This does not mean that God's people shall gain this world for Christ or that they shall realize the kingdom of God in this world; that is impossible. On the contrary, measured by the criterion of outward success, they must expect to suffer defeat, for they are small in number and of little strength.

Usually worldly power and worldly means are in the hands of the opposition. Hence the people of God will have to suffer shame and reproach for Christ's sake. In the world they shall have tribulation (John 16:33). The time is coming—and is perhaps not far distant—when they shall be outcasts and shall not be able to buy or sell, unless they consent to receive the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16–17), and when in the literal sense the world shall be turned against them once more. Yet they have the victory, for faith *is* the victory that overcomes the world. In their spiritual warfare they are of the party of the living God, the Potentate of potentates. The Son of God, who has overcome the world, is the captain of their hosts. Literally the whole universe—the heavenly hosts, the stars in their courses, and the groaning creation (Rom. 8:22)—fights on the side of the holy, catholic church in her battle for the cause of the Son of God. For the captain of our salvation is exalted at the right hand of God, is clothed with all power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), and works all things together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28).

#### The Church Triumphant

The church in heaven is called the *church triumphant*. As has been said, the distinction between church militant and church triumphant is only relatively correct, because the church on earth is in principle victorious. The victory of the whole church is in principle already attained; it is a certain victory; it can never fail. Certain this victory is, for God ordained his Son from before the foundation of the world (Heb. 1:2) to be the heir of all things, and the divine decree can never fail. Although the nations rage and the people imagine a vain thing, although the kings of the earth set themselves and rise up against God's Anointed (Ps. 2:1, 2), yea, although all hell break loose and all the spiritual wickednesses in high places (Eph. 6:12) furiously attack the church, he that sits in the heavens shall laugh. His decree concerning his Son shall stand forever (Ps. 2:4, 7).

Certain this victory is, too, because the captain of the host of Jehovah is none other than the mighty Son of God himself, the Lord of heaven and earth, whom even the enemy must serve in the attainment of his victory. God has set his king, his own and only begotten Son, on Zion, and there are no powers in heaven, on earth, or in hell that can ever dethrone him or prevent the ultimate revelation of his glory and power. Already the victory of the church is realized, for the Son of God came in the fullness of time and fought the battle of the Lord alone and to the end. He overcame the powers of darkness. Against the prince of this world he battled until the devil was cast out. Against the dominion of sin he waged his warfare in the way of God's righteousness, assuming the guilt and responsibility for the sin of his own and bearing the wrath of God even unto death. He atoned and satisfied the demands of God's justice. He removed the guilt of sin and obtained for his church everlasting righteousness. By his struggle he deprived sin of its power and forever broke the yoke of her dominion. Already he has the victory, for God raised him from the dead, thereby condemning the world and justifying the cause of the Son of God. God exalted him into the highest heavens at his own right hand and gave him all power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). He has a name above all names (Phil. 2:9). He has dominion over all. By his grace and Spirit our victorious Lord rules in and over his church, and by his mighty power he lords it over the world so that even the powers of darkness are made subservient unto his purpose in spite of themselves. Christ has the victory; he has overcome the world. From his throne on Mount Zion in heaven, he reigns over all things, powers and principalities being subject unto him. The church, both in heaven and on earth, has her victory in Christ.

# Triumphant by Faith

The church on earth is victorious in principle by faith. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). It is true that the church is still in the world. The enemy attacks and persecutes her. She is still lying in the midst of death and of the suffering of this present time (Rom. 8:18). But in the battle she is invincible, and while fighting the good fight of faith she is triumphant in the midst of battle. As long as she is strong in the Lord, as long as she fights the spiritual battle of faith with the spiritual sword of the word of God, no power of darkness can possibly overwhelm her even for a moment. She does not fight against a world that must still be overcome. She fights against a defeated enemy.

Outwardly, the church may suffer defeat; she may be deprived of all earthly means; she may suffer loss of liberty and life; she may become an outcast in the world, but as long as she stands in the righteousness of Christ and has the testimony of the word of God, she has the victory also on earth. Triumphantly she shouts in the midst of the battle,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in

all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:35–37).

The victorious Lord dwells in the church and fights in and through her. Fighting, she has the victory. Battling, she is triumphant. Hoping, she looks forward to the final revelation of her Lord and his victory in the day of his coming.

### **Triumphant in Glory**

Nevertheless, the church in heaven is victorious in a special sense. She is delivered from the battle, the suffering and death of this present time, and dwells in glory. Although it is difficult for us to form any conception of the glory of the church in heaven in the intermediate state (before the resurrection), yet on the basis of scripture we may make a few remarks about it. The saints who have gone before enjoy a state of conscious glory and bliss. They are in paradise, in the house of many mansions (John 14:2), in the house of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1). These glorified saints are delivered from the suffering of this present time (Rom. 8:18). From the battlefield of this world they have been taken into heavenly glory. In that sense they enjoy the victory with Christ more than the church on earth. They are free from sin and are clothed with perfect righteousness. They are free from suffering and sorrow and have entered into heavenly bliss. They are free from death and have received the crown of life (James 1:12). They are with Christ, and they serve God in his holy temple day and night (Rev. 7:15).

However, the glory and victory of the church in heaven are not yet complete, because the church is not perfect until the last elect shall have been redeemed and glorified. The body of Christ must be made full. The church in heaven has a history. There was a time when its members were very few. But all through the ages its numbers were increased and its blessedness enhanced. The fullness of time, and especially the entrance of Christ into heaven, must have wrought a tremendous change in the glorified throng of believers in heaven. At that moment the accuser of the brethren was cast out and the great voice was heard in heaven: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Rev. 12:10). Yet even now the victory of the church in glory is not complete. The saints' bodies still sleep in the dust of the earth. Their brethren in the world still suffer and are persecuted. Their final and public justification before all the world has not taken place. They still cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 6:10)? The final salvation has not yet been revealed to them. They are indeed in glory, but the final victory they have not yet attained. Without the church on earth, they shall not be saved. With the church on earth, they long for the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23) and the final revelation of the glory of Christ.

That day of final glory is sure to come and is always near. It is the day of the Lord, of which scripture speaks so frequently. It is neither in the way of gradual development, nor in the process of constant battle, that the triumph of the cause of the Son of God shall be revealed, but by the final wonder of grace, the personal revelation of our glorious Lord. In that day all his and our enemies shall be consumed by the breath of his mouth and be brought to nought by the very glory of his appearance (2 Thess. 2:8). The last enemy, death, shall be swallowed up, and the whole church shall be raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:26, 52–54). Through Christ our Lord, God shall judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). In that day it shall be made manifest not only before all the world and the angels in heaven, but also before the host of spiritual wickedness in high places and before all who hated the church and her Lord in this world, that the cause of the Son of God is the cause of God, and

that it alone—despite all appearances to the contrary—always did have, has, and shall have the victory forever and ever. Then the church shall reign with Christ forever over all the works of God's hands.

#### The Church Latent

The church as she very really exists in the counsel of God, but must still be born in future ages, realized, and called out of the world is called the *church latent*. For the realization and completion of this church latent the coming of the day of the Lord must wait: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). It is evident that the word "all" in this text does not refer to all men, head for head and soul for soul, for then the day of the Lord and the realization of the promise could never come. But the reference is to the elect. God is longsuffering over them, that is, he waits with their final glory until all his people shall have been gathered and called out of the world.

### **Chapter 32**

# The Gathering of the Church

#### The Necessity of the Gathering of the Church

The church is gathered by the Son of God, through his Spirit and word, from the beginning of the world to the very end. [1] Through that gathering the church becomes the assembly of the true believers and their seed in the world.

We believe a holy, catholic church, the body of Christ, the communion of saints.[2] Conceived in its entirety, this church includes all the redeemed, sanctified, and glorified elect. It exists at present only in the counsel of God, but is gathered in time out of the whole human race, from every nation, tongue, and tribe, from the beginning of the world to the end.

The holy, catholic church is gathered always. In every generation the church exists, the body of Christ is gathered and becomes manifest on earth. The end of the world cannot come until the very last member of the body of Christ—as God determines and foreknows that body in his divine, eternal plan—has been born and gathered into the communion of saints. The body of Christ must be perfected and completed. The temple of God must be finished. The whole church, according to the divine plan, must be gathered out of the whole human race before the end can come. This completed church consists of the fullness of Israel and the fullness of the Gentiles gathered into one flock under one shepherd (Rom. 11:25; John 10:16).

### The Gathering of the Church a Divine Work

This gathering of the church in every generation and from every nation is the great wonderwork of God in history. It is not too much to say that it is more marvelous than the work of creation. It lies beyond the scope of our power and comprehension. Exactly for that reason, through its gathering, God reveals himself as God, as the absolute Lord. This is also true of his work of creation; in creation God calls the things that are not (Rom. 4:17). But consider now his work of gathering the holy, catholic church out of the whole human race. In gathering the church he builds his house out of wholly unfit material; the human race, out of which the church is gathered, is guilty and damnable; but the church is the communion of the justified, the eternally righteous. The human race lies under the wrath of God, but the church is the object of his love and favor. The human race is polluted and defiled; but the church is holy, undefiled, without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). The human race stands in enmity against God, refuses to glorify him and to give him thanks; but the church is a royal priesthood, consecrated to God, offering up spiritual sacrifices of praise and glory to the God of her salvation (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). The human race lies in the midst of death; but the church is the living body of Christ, filled with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). Yet the one is gathered out of the other. It is only through the wonder of grace that God builds his church. It is the work of calling light out of darkness, righteousness out of corruption, heaven out of hell. It is the resurrection of the dead.

We can understand, then, how utterly impossible it is for man to have a share in the gathering of the church, for him to cooperate with God in building his holy temple, and how ridiculous—as well as sinfully absurd and preposterous—it is to conceive of the church as something that comes into existence by the will and through the effort of man. We might as well present the work of creation as

being the product of the cooperation between God and man, as to give any credit to man for the work of gathering the church of Christ out of the whole human race. The church is not a human society that comes into existence by the free will and choice of the members, which society we may join or refuse to join. It is not a school of philosophy, the disciples and adherents of which follow the teachings of a great thinker. It is not to be compared to a religious movement, such as Mohammedanism or Confucianism, initiated by some mighty personality or religious fanatic who died long ago, but whose followers are still inspired by his precepts and example. It is the living body of the living Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, who died and rose again and who himself gathers his church and builds the house of God. The church is not the work of men who join the church. It is not the product of preachers who persuade men to become church members. It is not the result of the combined efforts of God and man. It is the wonderwork of grace, which God alone accomplishes through Jesus Christ our Lord by his Spirit and word.

### The Gathering of the Church by Divine Calling

Through the divine calling the church is gathered out of and separated from the whole human race as the communion of saints. The Greek word that scripture uses to denote the church is  $\dot{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma$ ia, the gathering of those who are *called out*. The holy scriptures throughout teach that the church comes into being through the calling of God by his Spirit and word. Concerning the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, the prophet declares, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1). Through Isaiah the Lord proclaims to Israel:

But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine . . . Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him (Isa. 43:1, 5–7).

Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away (Isa. 41:9).

Picturing Judah as a child born of heathen parents, cast out into the open field, and cared for by none, the word of God through Ezekiel declares, "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live" (Ezek. 16:6).

In the New Testament this divine calling is always emphasized. In the epistles of Paul the church is addressed as the communion of those who are called to be saints (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). Inseparably uniting the church of the old and new dispensations, the apostle Paul writes,

Even us, whom [God] hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles[.] As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God (Rom. 9:24–26).

To the church of Corinth the apostle Paul writes, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). Paul marvels that the Galatians are so soon removed from him who called them into the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6). And he writes to the Thessalonians that God called them by the gospel "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14).

The church is gathered out of the world through the divine calling: "Wherefore come out from

among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17). "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14), for "the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). Christ must gather all his sheep, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. When he calls, "they shall hear [his] voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Therefore, through the divine calling the church is gathered out of the whole human race.

This divine calling, whereby the church is gathered out of the world, takes place through Jesus Christ the Lord. Always God speaks through the Son. Also in creation we hear the voice of the Son of God. However, in that word of God as it comes to us through creation and providence there is no hope, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven over all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Through that word the holy, catholic church could never be called out of the world. God calls his church only through the word of God in Christ. Christ is the Son of God in the flesh, who revealed the Father (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22), who died for the sins of his people, who was raised for their justification (Rom. 4:25), who merited for his church all the blessings of salvation, who is exalted at the right hand of God, who has received the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), and through whose word and Spirit God gathers his church out of the corrupt human race. The Son of God in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, speaks the word of the divine calling whereby the church is gathered out of the world. It is the mighty word of salvation whereby the church is called out of darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9), out of the natural fellowship of the sinful human race into the communion of saints, into the fellowship of his body. The Son of God by his Spirit and word gathers his own church out of the whole human race.

# Divine Calling and the Preaching of the Gospel

This divine calling comes through the preaching of the gospel. This does not imply, however, that here at last the gathering of the church becomes the work of man. Never are the preachers of the gospel co-laborers with God or co-laborers with Christ. When, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 3:9 we read: "For we are labourers together [συνεργοί] with God," the word "together" (the συν in συνεργοί) certainly does not refer to the relation of the preacher of the gospel to God, but to the relation of the preachers of the gospel mutually. They are co-laborers together, not with God, but of God. The gospel is not theirs, but Christ's. It is his word. He revealed it. He is its contents. He speaks it.

This does not change when he delivers the content of that gospel in the holy scriptures or when the preacher of the gospel speaks it. Without his own Spirit and word those scriptures and those preachers are powerless. The work of gathering his church never becomes dependent on man. Even when the Lord commissions and calls prophets, apostles, and evangelists to proclaim his word, or when he gives unto his church pastors and teachers, through whom the church preaches the gospel to all nations, the work of gathering the church does not become dependent on man. Even then it is Christ who calls and prepares the preachers; it is he who sends them whithersoever he will; it is he who speaks through their preaching by his Spirit to gather his church. Although it is through the instrumentality of the preaching and the preacher, the church is always gathered not by men, but by Christ through his Spirit and word.

This divine calling is heard throughout the ages. We dare not object that before the fullness of time Christ was not yet, and therefore he could not gather his church from the human race during the old dispensation. Although in time Christ had not yet been revealed, in God's eternal counsel the Son of God had been anointed the head of his church before the foundation of the world. In the old dispensation the Son of God functioned, revealed himself, and sent his word by his Spirit as the Christ who was to come. Through Christ God sent forth his word of the gospel in paradise immediately after the fall and began to gather his church in our first parents. Through Christ Enoch proclaimed the day of the Lord (Jude vv. 14, 15), and Noah became a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). Through Christ the gospel was proclaimed to Abraham, and he was called out of Ur and Haran (Gen. 12:1–4; Gal. 3:8). Through Christ God called his Son out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15), and he led his church through the desert. He was the Rock that followed them and out of which Israel drank (1 Cor. 10:4). Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4) and is revealed in all the shadows of the old dispensation. Christ spoke through all the prophets, in whom was the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1:10–11). Throughout the old dispensation, Christ gathered his church as a hen gathers her chicks (Matt. 23:37).

In the fullness of time Christ came, and the gospel was realized in his death and resurrection. Today he still speaks by his Spirit and word. He commissioned his apostles, and in them the church, to preach the gospel to every creature and gave them the promise that he would be with them even unto the end of the world. Through his Spirit and word, the exalted Lord still speaks in the preaching of the gospel and gathers his church from every nation, tongue, and tribe. He will do so until the last one of his brethren shall have come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God (Heb. 12:22).

# The Gathering of the Church in the Line of Generations

To the concept of the gathering of the church, we must add that in this world Christ gathers his church in the line of continued generations. When he establishes his church in the world, he does not gather individuals at random, but he gathers families and continues his church in their generations. So it was in the old dispensation. He gathered his church in the line of Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, according to his word: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). The same truth Peter proclaimed at the dawn of the new dispensation on the day of Pentecost: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Hence the church is the gathering of believers and their children who are baptized in the name of the triune God. It is incumbent upon the church in each generation to preserve the truth of the gospel and to deliver it to the next generation. The children of the church must be instructed in the fear of the Lord.

They are not all Israel that are of Israel (Rom. 9:6). There is always carnal seed that corrupts the church. From this carnal seed springs not only the false church, but also the final great apostasy that will be precursory to the ultimate revelation of the man of sin, the antichrist, "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3). Therefore, the church is always called to watch and pray and to put on the whole armor of God, that she may be able to stand in the evil day (Eph. 6:11–13). Doing this, she may be of good cheer, for the gates of hell shall not overwhelm her (Matt. 16:18).

Reformed people confess that the church is gathered from the beginning to the very end of the world. By this confession they stand opposed to the view of those who present the church as an interim, as the body of Christ that is gathered from the day of Pentecost until the fullness of the Gentiles shall be gathered, in distinction from the kingdom people of Israel. Over against this view the Reformed church insists that the church is in the world from the very beginning, that also the saints of the old dispensation belong to the body of Christ, that with the church of the new dispensation they form one people of God, and that for them all there is one and the same promise and the same salvation.

It is not superfluous to demonstrate the scriptural ground on which this assumption rests. Many seem to think that the inception of the church occurred after the first coming of Christ, after his death and resurrection, and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That outpouring of the Spirit really constituted the birth of the church. The nation of Israel, according to this conception, is an altogether different people, separate from the church and occupying a position all its own in the economy of salvation. The Jews are the kingdom people of Christ. For them is meant the separate promise of the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. Therefore, it may be expedient to show from the scriptures the truth that throughout the ages of this world there is only *one* people of God—the holy, catholic church.

To begin, we call attention to the very important scriptural truth that there is only one true seed of Abraham—the elect, the believers, the spiritual children of God, both of the old and the new dispensations. It is true that there are children of Abraham according to the flesh and children of Abraham according to the promise—the true, spiritual children. But this is true of both dispensations, of the old as well as of the new. It cannot be maintained on the basis of Holy Writ that the Jews are the real seed of Abraham in an actual sense, while the church is spiritual Israel, the seed of Abraham in a figurative sense. According to scripture, the Jews *per se*, the carnal descendants of Abraham, are not considered the true seed of Abraham at all; only the children of the promise are counted for the seed. It must be maintained, therefore, that in the days of both the old and the new dispensations, not the Jews, but *believers* are the true children of Abraham.

That believers are the true seed of Abraham is evident from Romans 9:6–8:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

This passage speaks of the Jews, of the nation of Israel, the literal descendants of Abraham. Theirs was the promise. Yet when Christ came and the promise entered upon its fulfillment, the majority of the Jews was lost and did not receive the promise. Hence arose the questions, Did God's promise fail? Has the word of God taken none effect? If the promise of God was given to the seed of Abraham, how must it be explained that so many of the Jews were lost?

In answer to these questions, it is clear that the apostle emphasizes that not all descendants of Abraham, not the Jews *per se*, are counted as Abraham's seed. The promise has not failed. All are not Israel who came from the loins of Jacob. The fact that they are the natural seed of Abraham does not make them children of God. Further, the passage makes plain that in the old dispensation only spiritual Israel, believers, they who were born not of the flesh but of the promise, are counted for the seed. When, therefore, we read that God gives his promise to Abraham and his seed, we must not make the error of applying that word of God to the Jews as such. Scripture does not mean the natural descendants of Abraham at all. Only the children of the promise are counted for the seed. In other

words, although for a time the seed of Abraham were Jews, the Jews *as Jews* were never the seed of Abraham. This is the plain and undeniable teaching of the word of God in Romans 9:6–8.

Further, we note Romans 4:11–16:

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

We need to underscore only those elements in this passage that have bearing upon our subject and are so clear that they cannot be gainsaid. The first point to be noted is that Abraham is here presented as the father of only one seed, whose sole distinguishing characteristic is faith. These children of Abraham are from the Jews, the circumcision, and from the Gentiles, the uncircumcision. Abraham, therefore, is the father of all believers. Second, we note that the Jews, the literal descendants of Abraham, are not counted as the seed, because Abraham is said to be the father of circumcision, that is, of the Jews only insofar as they walk in the steps of the faith of their father. Not all who are circumcised are Abraham's seed. Third, the passage also teaches clearly that to the one spiritual seed of Abraham, gathered from Jews and Gentiles, there is only one promise, namely, that they will be heirs of the world. This promise was never through the law, but is only through the righteousness of faith. Hence they who are of the law, that is, the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, are not heirs of the promise. The fact that they are heirs is of faith, that the promise might be sure to all the seed, the one spiritual seed of Abraham from Jews and Gentiles. There is one father Abraham, one seed of Abraham, and one promise to all the seed, and this one promise can be attained only in the way of faith. The position that the Jews are the real seed of Abraham, while the church of the new dispensation is the spiritual seed, is untenable and must be condemned as contrary to the plain teaching of scripture.

This is also the plain and simple meaning of Romans 2:28–29:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

An outward Jew is he who is a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh, without the faith of his father Abraham. But the text literally denies that he is a Jew at all. He is not counted as the seed. Only he can be called an Israelite who is a Jew inwardly, spiritually, in whose heart has been wrought the spiritual reality that corresponds to the sign of circumcision, that is, faith and the new life. Not the Jews, therefore, but only the circumcised in heart are Abraham's seed.

In the epistle to the Galatians, we find the clearest statement of the unity of the people of God from the old and new dispensations:

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, forseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:7–9).

Paul emphasizes here that the seed of Abraham is the believers. To this it cannot be objected that the

Bible is referring here to the seed of Abraham in the spiritual sense and that no mention is made of the Jews as the real seed. To this possible objection we reply:

First, this distinction is contrary to scripture, as has been shown before. Only the spiritual children of Abraham are counted for the seed.

Second, this passage must be read in connection with verse 16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." From the fact that the singular "seed" (not the plural "seeds") is used, the apostle draws the conclusion that centrally and essentially the seed is Christ. If this is true, it follows that only they who are in Christ, that is, believers, whether they be of the Jews or of the Gentiles, are with Christ the seed of Abraham.

Third, to this seed are all the promises made. They are blessed with Abraham, and they only: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (v. 29).

Fourth, the apostle literally denies all separation of Israel and the church, as if they were two peoples, when he compares the people of God in the old and new dispensations to a growing child. In the old dispensation the church was still a minor, placed under the constant tutorship of the law. In the new dispensation the church has reached the age of maturity and has become a free son. This is evident from Galatians 4:1–7:

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The point is that the child who was a servant is Israel under the law in the old dispensation and that the grown-up child who is free is the church of the new dispensation. Surely, the child who has matured into an adult is still the same person. Therefore, the clear and undeniable teaching of the word of God is that there is only one people of God, the seed of Abraham in Christ, and that this seed is not the Jews, but the believers in Christ, both of the old and the new dispensations. The unity of the church of all ages is incontrovertibly established.

We know the objections of the dispensationalists. They aver that there are many passages in the Old Testament that very clearly apply only to the nation of Israel, that speak of a restoration of that nation, and that promise them specifically the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. They assert further that these passages may not be so spiritualized that they refer to the church of the new dispensation. But this objection surely is not valid, as will be evident if we compare certain passages of the Old Testament with applications of those same passages in the New Testament.

Compare, for instance, Hosea 1:10–11 with Romans 9:24–26. In Hosea we read:

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

The question is, Of whom does the prophet speak? The answer is plain, He speaks of Israel, particularly of the ten tribes. Because of their apostasy and iniquity, to these tribes the Lord had said, "Lo-ammi, ye are not my people," and, "Lo-ruhamah, ye are not the objects of my mercy" (Hos. 1:6–9) Yet these ten tribes, according to the presentation of the Old Testament, will be restored to the

favor of God and will be called the sons of the living God.

The apostle Paul refers to this passage in Hosea and quotes it in application to the church of the new dispensation:

Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles[.] As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God (Rom. 9:24–26).

The apostle is speaking of the church of the new dispensation as it is called from Jews and Gentiles. The significance is clear: a passage from the prophecy of Hosea that plainly refers to the ten tribes is directly and literally applied to the church of the new dispensation. Hence Jehovah's promise to Israel that he would restore them to favor and that the seed of the children of Israel would be as the sand of the sea is fulfilled when God calls his church out of all nations in the new dispensation.

Passages like these can be multiplied. Compare, for instance, Jeremiah 31:31–34 with Hebrews 8:8–12 and Amos 9:11 with Acts 15:13–17.

It is plain, therefore, that the church is one. It is not an interim gathered only in the new dispensation, but is one flock under one shepherd, the one and only body of Christ called out of the world in every age from the beginning of the world unto the end. There are not two different kinds of Abraham's seed, a literal seed of the Jews and a spiritual seed of the church. Only the children of the promise both of the old and new dispensations are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:8). These children of the promise are found in the generations of Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, until the promise is fulfilled in the great seed of the woman, the one seed of Abraham, our Lord Jesus Christ, after which this same seed of the promise is gathered from the generations of all nations. The line of the church runs through the ages. The unity of the Old and New Testaments cannot be broken. The church may not be separated from Israel. There is one God and Father of all and in all, one Lord Jesus Christ rich over all who call upon him, one Spirit of that one Lord dwelling in all, one body of Christ, one kingdom of God, one people of God gathered throughout the ages—the holy, catholic church.

#### One Promise for One People

Besides, according to scripture there is one promise for that one people. Frequently scripture speaks of the promise. In fact, the gospel is the glad tidings concerning the promise. The whole of scripture is the revelation of the promise and its realization. With a promise it begins: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This is the fundamental promise, implying all promises. While the rich implications of its contents and meaning are set forth and unfolded, it is repeated to the patriarchs and prophets and to Israel, Judah, and David. It is visibly proclaimed in the shadows and types of the old dispensation—in temple and altar and sacrifice, in prophet and priest and king, in the land of Canaan and Jerusalem and Mount Zion. It is fulfilled in Christ—in his death, resurrection, and exaltation at the right hand of God—and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is the promise of salvation—of the forgiveness of sins and everlasting righteousness and life, of the adoption unto children of God and perfect justification, of the resurrection from the dead and heavenly glory, of the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and the inheritance of the world, of the eternal kingdom of Christ and the tabernacle of God with men, of the heavenly perfection of

Jerusalem and Mount Zion on which the Lord Jesus Christ shall reign forevermore.

This promise is one and indivisible, meant for the one seed of Abraham, for all the children of the promise, both of the old and new dispensations, for the one people of God, the holy, catholic church. Often the scriptures simply speak of the *promise*, in the singular, to denote its unity, while the plural, *promises*, is also employed to express the manifold riches of the one salvation God prepares for those who love him. However, the promise is always the same for all. There are not two sets of promises—one for Israel and the other for the church, the one earthly and the other heavenly in character. There is one promise for all. The saints of the old dispensation lived by faith in the same promise as do the saints in the new dispensation. They saw the promises afar off, for it was the time of shadows; we behold them as they are centrally fulfilled in Christ. Together we still look forward to the final realization, expecting one and the same revelation of Jesus Christ in the day of his coming.

### Scriptural Proof for One People and One Promise

The unity of the church is the teaching of scripture throughout. Only in the light of this truth, for instance, can we understand the words of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. With a sudden insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of God that before had been dark to him and to his fellow apostles, Peter proclaims to all the house of Israel that the promise has been fulfilled, that God has raised up Jesus and exalted him at his own right hand and has given him the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:22–36). Peter concludes by addressing the house of Israel, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (v. 39). It is clear that the promise mentioned here is the same as that which was proclaimed throughout the old dispensation. That promise, Peter says, is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The same truth the apostle Paul expresses in the synagogue of Antioch:

And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David (Acts 13:32–34).

Here, too, the scriptures speak of the one promise given to the fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the Old Testament patriarchs. This one promise is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which Paul here presents as the fulfillment of the promise concerning the "sure mercies of David." Of these "sure mercies" Isaiah spoke, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3).

If we inquire what is meant by these sure mercies of David and by this everlasting covenant, we will find the answer in 2 Samuel 7:12–16 as well as in Psalm 89. God would establish the seed of David and his kingdom forever:

He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son . . . And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:12–14, 16).

These are the "sure mercies of David."

Of these sure mercies the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary:

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32–33).

Of these same sure mercies the apostle Paul spoke in Acts 13:32–34, as being fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

What conclusion is to be drawn from all of this? First, the sure mercies of David are fulfilled to us, the church of the new dispensation, the children of the fathers of the old dispensation. Second, the sure mercies of David are fulfilled in the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, since the sure mercies of David consisted in the establishment of David's throne forever, the exaltation of Christ means that he now sits on David's throne, and that the church is the house of Jacob over which he reigns. One people of God, one house of Jacob, one throne of David, and on that throne, one king, the risen Lord—such is the plain teaching of Holy Writ. The throne of David is neither destroyed, nor is its glory temporarily obscured, but it is fulfilled and raised to its highest level in the exaltation of Jesus Christ the Lord.

A comparative study of Holy Writ always yields the same result. If we will but interpret scripture in its own light, we will always reach the same conclusion: there is only one people of God, and for that one people there is one and the same promise. There is one holy, catholic church throughout the history of the world. To that one church is promised the glory of the everlasting covenant:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31–34).

It is evident that this promise is emphatically made in the old dispensation to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. Yet if we read Hebrews 8, we will discover that this promise of a better covenant is now fulfilled in the church of the new dispensation, for Christ has "obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (v. 6). To describe that better covenant which is now realized and of which Christ is the mediator, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews quotes the passage from Jeremiah 31. The promise to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah is fulfilled in the church of the new dispensation. There is one people and one promise, the everlasting covenant of God with his church.

Further proof of the unity of the church and the promise is found in the fact that literally all the shadows of the Mosaic institution of the old dispensation are mentioned in the New Testament as having been fulfilled. The entire epistle to the Hebrews is a testimony to the truth that old things have passed away, never to return, and that all things have become new, never to perish (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). That the old things have vanished does not mean they have been destroyed; rather, their old and shadowy form is no more a promise of better things to come; they have now been realized. The Old Testament high priest has had his day; there will never again be room for him. But his office did not simply cease. Rather, it has been realized and raised to everlasting perfection in Christ. He came as the Son over his own house (Heb. 3:6), as the great high priest who is passed into the heavens and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:14–15). He is called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 5:10), who, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood (Heb. 7:24) and is a high priest of good things to come (Heb. 9:11).

The sacrifice of bulls and goats has been forever abolished; never will there be found a place for them again. But the idea and essence of the sacrifice has been fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who by his own blood "entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (v. 12). The Old Testament tabernacle and temple are no more, and they will never be rebuilt to have a place in the economy of salvation, for they have served their purpose. Yet there is nothing lost by the passing away of their old fashion, because they were but shadows of the heavenly things, the pattern after which they were made. Their reality is fulfilled in Christ (Heb. 8:5–6), who "is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). Therefore, we now have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." And we have "an high priest over the house of God" so that we may "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19–22).

Literally, everything foreshadowed in the old dispensation is realized in the new: the temple and the altar, the high priest and the sacrifice, the holy place and the veil. The church is the true house of the Son of God (Heb. 3:6). She is the temple of the living God, and in her is fulfilled the promise: "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. 6:16). The old, earthly city of Jerusalem has been destroyed; yet it was only the material and shadowy fashion thereof that vanished away. "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). The old Mount Zion, on which stood the earthly throne of David, is no more; yet only its form disappeared, while its reality has now gloriously been realized for all the saints:

[They] are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22–23).

On that Mount Zion and in that Jerusalem, Christ, the seed of David, now reigns, and shall reign forever. The promise made to the fathers has been fulfilled to us, their children. For another fulfillment we must not look.

But did not God promise the land of Canaan to Abraham and to his seed forever (Gen. 13:14–15)? We are the last to deny it. We believe without a doubt that God will fulfill his promise. Abraham and his seed shall inherit the land. But we dare not forget that the seed of Abraham includes all believers, all the children of the promise gathered from Jews and Gentiles, as we have abundantly shown. They shall inherit the land of Canaan. If we interpret the land of Canaan in the light of scripture, we will not look for it in the old Palestine on the shores of the Mediterranean; rather, we will look for it in the new earth, for the promise to Abraham and his seed is that they shall be heirs of the world (Rom. 4:13).

In this sense Abraham understood the promise of God. He believed the promise of God, and in that faith he died, although in the earthly land of Canaan he never possessed a foot of ground (Acts 7:5) except the field of Ephron, which he bought for four hundred shekels of silver (Gen. 23:3–20):

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Heb. 11:9, 13).

How could Abraham die in the faith that God would fulfill his promise to him and to his seed of the

everlasting possession of the land of Canaan? Because, while living as a stranger in that earthly land, he understood that the promise referred to a better country:

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:10, 14–16).

The promise of God is sure; it is yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20): Abraham and his seed shall inherit the land of Canaan. All the seed of Abraham, gathered from Jews and Gentiles—the one holy, catholic church—look forward to that possession after the resurrection, when the final word of the promise shall be fulfilled:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God (Rev. 21:1–3).

Then, in the everlasting new creation, Abraham and his seed shall inherit the land forever.

Hence the conclusion is that there is one people, and for that people there is one promise. And that people to whom the one promise applies is the holy, catholic church.

### Chapter 33

# The Attributes and Marks of the Church

#### The Four Attributes

Four attributes of the church are usually mentioned: unity, catholicity, holiness, and apostolicity.

The church's *unity* implies that the church of all ages and from all nations and tribes is essentially one. It is a unity of the body of Christ and, therefore, a unity of her head, of the Spirit, and of faith, according to scripture:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (Rom. 12:5).

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4–6).

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body (Eph. 5:23).

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, has put all things under his feet and has given Jesus Christ to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all (Eph. 1:17, 22–23).

The church's *catholicity* implies that the church is international, gathered out of every tribe, tongue, and nation. The scriptural evidence is abundant:

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on [the Lord Jesus Christ] shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him (Rom. 10:10–12).

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Eph. 2:14–15).

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands (Rev. 7:9).

The church's *holiness* implies, objectively, that the church is holy in Christ her head and, subjectively, that she is holy by virtue of the principle of regeneration and sanctification. For that reason her members can and must be addressed as saints in Christ Jesus:

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth (John 17:19).

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7).

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The church's *apostolicity* does not signify a succession of persons (*successio personarum*), as the Roman Catholics will have it; but, according to scripture, it implies a succession of doctrine (*successio doctrinae*), as Ephesians 2:20–22 teaches:

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

On these attributes of the church, we must elaborate a little, particularly on the unity, the catholicity, and the holiness of the church.

#### The Unity of the Church

By the unity of the church, we mean that there is only one church and that the members of this church are perfectly united together in a bond of spiritual affinity and fellowship so that they form one spiritual body.

We are speaking of the church as an object of faith, as she is according to the eternal purpose of God, as she includes all the elect, as she shall be revealed in all the beauty of her perfection in the day of Christ, and as she is gathered and realized by Christ in every age from the beginning of the world even until the end. On earth we behold many churches. In reality there is only one church. In the world we are confronted with the sorry spectacle of strife and division in what is known as the church. The true church, however, is a perfect unity; its members are in perfect agreement and harmony with one another, spiritually united in the bond of peace.

This truth that the church is one and that her members are actually united by a bond of spiritual fellowship must be maintained, no matter how divided and disrupted the church may appear in the world. Firmly we must take our stand on the basis of this truth, and from this truth we must proceed in order to answer the question how we can seek and work together for the manifestation and realization of this true unity in the church on earth.

We dare not contemplate the strange medley of what calls itself church in the world and proceed from the supposition that all churches—whatever creed, superstition, or human philosophy they may embrace—are still part of the true body of Christ, in order then to devise ways and means to eliminate the differences among them and to unite them all into one gigantic institution. This is indeed the attempt in our ecumenical age. Although this may result in amalgamation, it certainly does not tend to the manifestation of the true unity of the church and is not the unity of the body of Christ.

Rather, we must proceed from the truth of scripture that the church is one. Then we must ask ourselves what is the source and character of this unity and fellowship, in order then to deal with the question how we can best strive for the realization of this unity of the church in the world.

The unity of the church is clearly taught in scripture. This unity follows in principle from the truths that God is one and that the church exists in order that she may be to the praise of the glory of this one God. There is one God and Father over all, through all, and in all the saints (Eph. 4:6). There is one Christ and one Spirit of Christ, and therefore there is only one church.

#### **Unity in Christ**

Concerning the character of this unity of the church, we must emphasize that it has its source in Christ. Christ is its principle. Without Christ this spiritual unity or communion does not exist for a moment, no more than the light exists without the sun. The Christ of the scriptures, the Son of God, who was crucified and slain, who died for the sins of his people, who was raised on the third day, and who is exalted in the highest heavens—this Christ received the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). By this Spirit, Christ dwells in his body, the church, and in all its members. By his Spirit,

Christ is the head of the church, not only in the sense that he represents her, and not only as her Lord who rules over her, but also organically as her unifying principle.

All the members of the church, as members of one body, partake of the one Christ. The one life of the risen Lord pulsates in them all. The members of the church have one mind, the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). They have one will, the will of Christ. One love unites them, the love of Christ. One Spirit quickens them, the Spirit of Christ. One word instructs, enlightens, and directs them, the word of Christ. Just as we may speak of a natural unity and affinity of the whole human race, rooted in God's creation of mankind out of one blood (Acts 17:26), so also there is a spiritual unity and fellowship of the church that has its principle in the truth that there is one Lord and one Spirit, and that this one Lord, through the one Spirit, dwells in the whole church and in all its members (Eph. 4:4–6). Christ is the principle of the unity and communion of the church.

From this principle it follows that the unity of the church is in no sense the work of man. Church unity cannot be established by man. It is neither sustained or continued by man, nor destroyed by man. The unity of the church does not come into existence through the fact that men congregate and agree upon a platform of principles, upon a confession and principles of church government, and upon a certain form of worship. All these may be manifestations and expressions of the unity of the church, but they do not constitute its unity. The fellowship of the church is not established by the will and efforts of men, like that of a mere human society.

Christ alone establishes the church's unity. Men cannot organize a church and establish its spiritual fellowship, except where Christ is pleased to dwell through his Spirit in the hearts of men, and no man has the power to join this communion and make himself a member of this spiritual fellowship. One becomes a member of this union only by the act of Christ whereby he receives one into the organism of his body. The unity of the church is based on the fellowship of the church with Christ. The will of the members neither establishes nor dissolves this fellowship. It is dependent solely on the will of Christ. When, therefore, we confess to believe the unity of the church, the communion of saints, we do not mean that we must strive for such unity, but we mean rather that it actually exists and that its existence rests in the will of Christ, who by his Spirit dwells in all the members of his body.

## **Spiritual Unity**

It follows from this truth that the unity of the church is spiritual.

There is also a natural unity of the human race in Adam, for God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). By virtue of this unity of our race, there is a natural affinity and fellowship of men, which has its center in the family and which expresses itself in various ways. There are ties of natural love between man and wife, between parents and children, between brother and sister. There are relationships of social fellowship and friendship. There is affinity of character. There are common aims and pursuits that unite men. There is the unity of nations that dwell in the same country under a common government and whose citizens speak the same language. However, we must never overlook the fact that this natural unity and fellowship among men is spiritually corrupt because of sin. In Adam the whole human race, in all its natural relationships, lies in sin. Men have become darkness. Their nature is become perverse. They are motivated by enmity against God (Rom. 8:7), and they hate one another (Titus 3:3). They are lovers of self (2 Tim. 3:2), and they pursue the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Hence the natural affinity of the race is corrupted by spiritual hatred and enmity. The result is war, strife, revolution, deceit, covetousness, murder, and destruction.

But the unity of the church is spiritual. It is not the brotherhood of natural men, but the fellowship of the saints in Christ controlled by the Holy Spirit. It is not a unity based on blood relationship or on social standard or on similarity in character or on national or racial affinity. It transcends them all and is based on the oneness of the Spirit of Christ who bestows the fullness of Christ upon the members of his body so that they all partake of the same spiritual blessings. By the Spirit they are called out of the darkness of their natural corruption and death into the marvelous light of righteousness and life (1 Pet. 2:9). The life they receive through the Spirit is not of this world; it is the life of Christ, free from sin, free from corruption, and free from death. It is the resurrection life of their risen Lord. It is life from above. Their life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). The world is crucified to them, and they unto the world (Gal. 6:14).

The Spirit of Christ works in them all the same faith in Christ, the revelation of the God of their salvation; the same righteousness, the righteousness of God in Christ; the same holiness, consecration to God in Christ; the same spiritual knowledge of God, which is life eternal (John 17:3); the same love, the love of God in Christ; the same obedience, whereby they flee from sin and keep the word of Christ; the same meekness, lowliness of mind, humility, repentance, patience; the same hope, for they are begotten again unto a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), and they look for the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). They have one faith, one hope, one love, one purpose—the glory of God in Christ. All these spiritual virtues are wrought and maintained in them all by one and the same Spirit of one and the same Lord, Jesus Christ. The unity of the church is not of this world. It is not a natural, but a spiritual unity. In the good sense of the word, the fellowship of the body of Christ is otherworldly.

### **Unity in Diversity**

This unity is also characterized by diversity. If it were not so, if all the saints were absolutely identical, there would be no body and no fellowship. The members of my body all partake of the same life and are all controlled by the same mind and will, but they are not all alike. If they were, each would be complete and self-sufficient. But they have no significance in themselves; they exist only in union with the whole and to serve the whole. Each member has its own peculiar virtue, place, and function in the body. It is exactly because of this diversity in their unity that together they constitute the organic whole of the body. When a chorus of three hundred voices renders Handel's *Messiah*, the whole choir is a unity, and they sing the same oratorio. Yet there is a diversity of voices. The harmonious blending of all these different voices makes the rendering beautiful. The same is true of the church. Her members are all one in Christ.

They all have the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4). They have one faith, one hope, one love (Eph. 4:4, 5), and they receive the same spiritual gifts. Yet there is among them an endless variety of individual diversity. Although partaking of the same Christ, each one of the members receives grace according to the measure of Christ (v. 7), reflects the glory of Christ in his own way, sings the praises of God in Christ with his own voice, and serves the whole of the body of Christ in his own place. Not one of the members has any significance apart from the body, yet not one of the members can be missed without marring the whole. When the church of which we speak—and which is an object of our faith—will be complete and shall be presented without spot or wrinkle before the face of God (Eph. 5:27), it will be like a grand heavenly choir with millions upon millions of voices blending together in one mighty harmony to extol the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

In what way does the church, living from the faith that she is one, united in Christ, strive for the realization and manifestation of this unity in the world? That the church as we know her, as she appears in the world, is far from being in accord with this confession concerning the spiritual unity of the true church is an undeniable fact. The church on earth is divided not only because of the natural causes of separation, such as distance, language, race, and nationality, but also in regard to doctrine, confession, form of worship, and church government. How must this be remedied? What must be the attitude of the church and of the individual believer concerning this failure of the church to realize her true unity and to manifest one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, and one calling?

Many in our day find the cause of all the dissension and division in the church in too much doctrine and in creeds that are too specific in their doctrinal declarations. They advocate that all these specific declarations of faith, by which each church erects a wall of separation around itself, be forgotten, erased, and eliminated; that the confessions be broadened and generalized; and that on the basis of such a broad declaration of general principles, the various denominations merge and thus realize the unity of the church. However, it should be evident that in this fashion an outward unity may indeed be effected, but only at the expense of the truth and at the cost of the church's faith, which is the same as saying that it is a unity without the Christ of the scriptures. The church is not interested in an outward unity that reveals itself in a mighty human institution, as, for instance, in the World Council of Churches. The church on earth that understands the character of the true spiritual unity of the body of Christ and realizes her calling with respect to the manifestation of this unity can never cooperate with such humanistic, faith-destroying, Christ-despising movements of amalgamation.

The unity of the church is centered in Christ. If the church is to grow in this true unity, she must grow in Christ. She must not have less of Christ, but always more. And her Christ is in the scriptures. Hence she must appropriate the Christ of Holy Writ, which means that she must instruct and be instructed in the truth. She must not seek union in the way of less, but in the way of more and richer doctrine. She must not only put aside all doctrines of men, to be sure, but also she must ever grow in the doctrine of Christ. Let the true church be ever so small in the world. Yet she dare not seek the realization of her unity in any other direction than that of growing in the knowledge of Christ her head, until "we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Only they who strive to approach that stature are really working for the manifestation of the unity of the church, and whatsoever is more than this is of the evil one.

### The Catholicity of the Church

The true unity and the true catholicity of the church are closely related. When we confess that the church is catholic, we do not refer to any particular instituted church in the world that may claim the sole and exclusive right to the name *catholic;* but we are still speaking of the church as an object of faith, the spiritual body of Christ, which is one in Christ her Lord. The church—which, in any period of history, is manifested on earth only imperfectly and in a very small part—is strictly catholic in character and scope. When we confess that the church is catholic or universal in character and in her very essence, we mean that in her very nature she is capable of transcending all natural differences and distinctions: racial, national, social, or sexual. Men and women of every class, standing, race, tribe, and nation she is capable of embracing, of receiving into her communion, and of uniting in a higher, spiritual bond of fellowship. The confession that the church is catholic does not mean that she actually receives all men individually into her communion, for the church is limited by

election from God's viewpoint and by faith on the part of her members. But it does mean that the church extends over the entire world, embraces the whole human race, and is gathered from the beginning of the world even unto the end from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

Out of the organism of the whole human race, the organism of the church, the body of Christ, is gathered, saved, and glorified. In the church the whole human race is saved, although in the way of sin and grace many members of the original human race are cut off and lost. From this fundamental truth we must proceed in order to understand the true catholicity of the church of God. We may compare the race in Adam to a tree with Adam as its root and with his descendants developing into families, tribes, and nations as the trunk and branches. When Adam fell through his willful disobedience and became subject to the wrath of God and death, the whole tree of the human race became corrupt in its root; from the root, corruption and death entered into all its branches so that it could no longer bring forth any good fruit. But this tree of the human race receives a new root; that root is Christ. Grafted onto that new root, the tree is saved and transformed into a far more glorious tree than the original or than the original could ever have become in Adam. But the life of this new root does not flow through or permeate the whole tree. It nourishes only the organism of the body of Christ, that is, the elect. Nevertheless, the tree is saved, while many of the branches are cut off. The church, therefore, is not a gathering of a few or even of many individual human beings, while the race is lost. Rather, the church is the saved human race—redeemed, delivered, sanctified, and glorified, holy unto God—as God conceived of that race before the world was. Only the lost represent the members who are cut off. This is the fundamental idea of the true catholicity of the church.

## **Catholicity in Christ**

Even as the unity of the church is rooted in the one Christ, so the catholicity of the church—the universal, all-embracing, all natural-relations-transcending character of the church—is determined by Christ her head. Christ is strictly catholic, "for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." Therefore, "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek," and "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:12–13). That Lord, rich with salvation for all the nations of the earth, is Christ. In that Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). So catholic, so all-comprehensively universal is our Lord Jesus Christ, that "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:19–20). It is the good pleasure of God's will that "in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:10). That catholic Christ is the head of the church, and in him the church is truly universal.

## The Catholicity of the Church in the Old Testament

In the old dispensation this catholicity of the church did not appear very clearly. In fact, it remained a mystery. It seemed as if the church was destined to be limited to a particular family, to a single line of generations, to one nation. Before the flood the church ran in the line of the generations of Seth. Sharply the sons of God in the generations of Seth were distinguished from the daughters of men in the generations of Cain (Gen. 6:2). Toward the close of the prediluvian period, the church was almost extinguished so that few, that is, eight souls, were saved by the water of the flood (1 Pet. 3:20). After

the flood God indeed established his covenant with Noah and his seed, but the line of Ham was cursed in Canaan, and Shem was singled out as the one in whose generations the Lord would continue his church and covenant (Gen. 9:22–27).

After the organism of the human race was forcibly torn apart into tribes and nations at the time of the building of the tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues and was scattered over the earth (Gen. 11:1–9), God called Abraham out of Ur and Haran (Gen. 12:1–3) and once more separated one family in their generations from all the families of the earth, that in them he might build his church. From Abraham, the father of believers, the line of the covenant ran over Isaac and Jacob into the nation of the twelve tribes of Israel. In Israel it seemed as if the church must remain fixed within the narrow confines of national boundaries, for the church was placed under the law at Horeb, and all the forms in which the church was to become manifest were strictly Jewish. By the shadows—the temple, the altar, the sacrifices, and the priesthood—she was separated from the nations. Salvation was of the Jews and was strictly limited to the Jews. The truth that the same Lord who is rich over all who call upon him, and the truth that in the Lord the church is catholic certainly seem hopelessly in conflict with the reality of the Old Testament.

The fact is, however, that even in the old dispensation the catholicity of the church—the truth that she will be gathered from the whole human race—was never completely hidden. The promise of the gospel is always universal. Immediately after the fall God announced the devil's defeat in the well-known protevangel: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This promise for the seed of the woman was catholic in scope. True, after the flood Shem was separated from the rest of his brethren (Gen. 9:26), but before this God had established his covenant with Noah and his sons and their seed and even had comprehended all creation within the scope of that covenant, giving his bow in the clouds as the visible pledge of this universal promise (Gen. 9:8–17).

With Abraham and his seed God established his everlasting covenant; to him was the catholic gospel preached: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8). The vision of Israel's prophets embraced in its scope the salvation of the Gentiles and looked forward to the day when the mountain of Jehovah would be exalted above the mountains, and many nations would flow unto it to worship the Lord their God (Isa. 2:2–3). Isaiah proclaimed a catholic gospel, although its fulfillment still lay in the future:

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear (Isa. 45:22–23).

Israel of the old dispensation sang of the glorious future when all the earth would worship Jehovah (Ps. 66:4), all the kings of the earth would fall down before the Messiah, all nations would serve him and call him blessed (Ps. 72:11, 17), and the Lord would count the sons of Rahab, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia as being born in Zion (Ps. 87:4–5).

### The Church's Catholicity Realized in the New Testament

This catholicity of the church was realized in the fullness of time when God sent his Son into the world, made of a woman, made under the law, our Lord Jesus Christ. Although Christ was of the Jews, he is not limited to the Jews, but is the Lord who is rich over all who call upon him (Rom. 10:12). He is the end of the law, its fulfillment and termination, and is for righteousness to everyone

who believes (v. 4). Through him the sacrifices of bulls and goats, by which the Jew obtained forgiveness of sins, were abolished, to be replaced by the true sacrifice of reconciliation, bringing remission of sin to all who call upon him, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. The earthly temple in Jerusalem, that center of Jewish worship, is rebuilt by his death and resurrection and by the outpouring of his Spirit upon all flesh. Jerusalem is now above and is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26). The church of all nations is the temple of the living God, where believers are a royal priesthood, with Christ as their high priest, offering up spiritual sacrifices of praise unto the God of their salvation (1 Pet. 2:5).

Mount Zion is no longer a local hill in the land of Canaan, nor is the throne of David a mere symbol of national glory and sovereignty. Both have been realized and universalized in the exalted Lord, whom God has set

at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:20–23).

In the new dispensation the mountain of the Lord's house is indeed exalted above the mountains, and all nations flow unto it to worship Jehovah their God (Isa. 2:2). The old dispensational olive tree has become strictly catholic, and branches from Jews and Gentiles are grafted into it until the fullness of both shall have entered (Rom. 11:16–26). In the new dispensation, believers of every nation have

come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22–23).

On the day of Pentecost, therefore, the church was not born. On the contrary, from the beginning she was in the world. But when the Spirit of the exalted Lord is poured out upon all flesh, the shadows flee away and reality is come, and the church breaks through the limits of her national boundaries to become strictly catholic. She is now universal, not in the sense that all men in the church are saved, for in her universality she is strictly limited by sovereign election. But she is universal in the sense that whosoever believeth in Christ, whether he be Jew or Gentile, "shall be saved" (Rom. 10:11–13).

In that sense the church has a catholic Lord, who is rich over all that call upon him, and a catholic Spirit, who dwells in all the nations of the earth to their salvation. She preaches a catholic gospel, for she is sent forth to preach the gospel to all the nations of the world and to baptize them with a catholic baptism into the catholic death of her catholic Lord. She professes a holy, catholic faith, the faith of that catholic gospel, and bows down in catholic worship before the God of her salvation, the worship of the living God in Spirit and in truth. She has the catholic calling to be holy, even as the Lord her God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15–16). She offers up neither Jewish nor Greek, neither American nor German prayers and thanksgiving, but the catholic prayer for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of his kingdom, and the universal accomplishment of his will on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9–10; Luke 11:2). Such is the meaning of the confession concerning the catholic church of Christ in the New Testament.

#### Catholicity and the Future Glory of the Church

Still, the catholicity of the church is not fully realized. In the world it does not become fully manifest. Often the church is tempted to deny her catholicity when the world would press her into the

service of national interests. But essentially the church is catholic, and she looks forward to a universal hope, the kingdom of heaven in the new creation; for in that kingdom the catholicity of the church and the great multitude that no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, which the Seer of Patmos saw standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9), will be fully realized. In the new heaven and the new earth and the heavenly Jerusalem—in which the tabernacle of God shall be with men, in the light of which the nations of those who are saved shall walk, and into which the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor forever (Rev. 21:1, 3, 24, 26)—the catholicity of the church shall be completely realized. In that catholic hope, with the fervent longing of the bride for her Bridegroom, the church prays, "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).

#### The Holiness of the Church

This church, one and catholic in the Lord Jesus Christ, confesses that she is holy. This holiness is without doubt the chief and most characteristic virtue of the church. The holiness of the church is at the same time her limitation and her catholicity. This spiritual virtue determines her distinctive position and calling in the world, as well as her conflict with the world. It is her limitation, because by virtue of this holiness she is incapable of receiving into her communion whatever and whoever is unholy or profane:

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie (Rev. 22:15).

It makes no difference how what is known as the church on earth may disregard this truth, break through this limitation, and widen her borders to include the profane, in order to become a big and mighty human institution; as the church of Christ she is strictly limited to the sphere of that which is and those who are holy.

At the same time, in this virtue of holiness lies her true catholicity, because holiness is a virtue that is not bound by any natural distinctions or human limitations—racial, national, social, or otherwise. The church is not a communion of white people or colored people, of rich or poor, of masters or servants, of a higher or a lower rank or social plane; she is neither a social, political, or even a charitable institution, nor does she occupy a place next to all these human associations and institutions. She is holy. She is the communion of saints, and as such she is distinct from all other natural fellowships; yet she transcends them all, cuts through them all, and embraces them all. Holiness is neither American nor German, neither social nor political; it is a spiritual, ethical, and therefore a truly catholic virtue. According as a church in the world loses its distinctive virtue of holiness and becomes a mere secular institution, it must forfeit its catholicity.

Precisely this spiritual virtue of holiness causes the church's position in the world to be one of conflict. Because of this attribute she is indeed in the world, but not of the world; for the world is in darkness, while she is in the light. The more faithful she is in her calling not to go out of the world, but in the world to reveal herself as the holy, catholic church, the communion of saints, the more she will be called to fight her spiritual warfare and to be the church militant in opposition to all that is unholy and profane.

#### Faith and the Holiness of the Church

We must constantly bear in mind that when we speak of the holiness of the church, we are thinking of her as an object of faith, as the true spiritual body of Christ, the fellowship of which Christ is the head and that has all its life in and from Christ. Therefore, the confession that the church is holy is not based on experience or on actual observation of the church as she appears on earth. Were we to derive our knowledge of the church from actual experience, it would not be difficult to arrive at the very opposite conclusion and to insist that she is very unholy indeed, for there is much carnality in the church, and this carnality becomes manifest in many ways. But the confession that the church is holy is based on and derived from God's own revelation in the scriptures. The word of God teaches—and therefore believers confess—a holy, catholic church, the communion of saints.

Moses was instructed by Jehovah to address the people of Israel, the church in the wilderness: "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Every part of the Mosaic institution was designed to remind the nation that they were a people holy unto the Lord.

The same truth is emphasized with respect to the church of the new dispensation. To the church of Corinth the apostle Paul writes,

Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

God has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:3–4). The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20–21). Christ reconciled us in order to present us "holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight" (Col. 1:22).

Believers are addressed as "elect of God, holy and beloved" (Col. 3:12) and as "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). They are admonished, "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" (1 Pet. 1:15–16). Believers are said to be lively stones that "are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). They are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," that they might show forth the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (v. 9).

Besides, it is well-known that the apostle Paul in his epistles uniformly addresses the church as the communion of saints: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," he writes in Romans 1:7. Again: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2); "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia" (2 Cor. 1:1). The church as she appears in the world is the communion of saints, no matter how much sin and pollution may disfigure her and mar her appearance. Strongly, the scriptures emphasize the holiness of the church.

#### The Meaning and Source of the Holiness of the Church

What is meant by this holiness of the church? What is its source? In what sense is the church holy? What follows from this virtue with respect to the calling of the church in the world?

Let us begin by reminding ourselves that holiness is pre-eminently a virtue of God. The Bible

emphasizes that the holiness of the church finds its ground and reason in the holiness of God: "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). God is the Holy One. This implies that he is the implication of all infinite goodness, of righteousness and justice and truth, of knowledge and wisdom and power, of mercy and grace and love. He is a light, and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5). As the highest and the only good, God is consecrated to himself only. He wills himself and loves himself; he seeks his own glory in himself and in all created things in heaven and on earth. It follows that holiness in the creature is the virtue according to which that creature is consecrated not to himself, but to the living God, desires him as the only good, seeks him with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, and finds his delight in praising him and showing forth his glory.

When we confess that the church is holy, we mean positively that both as to her calling and in respect to her nature, she is consecrated to God. She is set aside for the service of God as a holy priesthood, and unto this service of the living God she is spiritually prepared. Her mind is consecrated to the Lord, to know him. Her will is attuned to will his will. Her heart is motivated by the love of God. To dwell in his house, to taste that he is good, to sacrifice herself with all things unto him, and to declare his praises, is her delight. In that sense she is holy unto God.

This holiness is entirely a gift of grace. Neither in regard to her holy calling, nor in respect to her spiritual virtue of holiness dare she glory in herself. The church is holy only in Christ Jesus her Lord. It is especially from the viewpoint of her holiness that she is indeed the church, the company of those who are called out. In herself the church has neither the right nor the power to be separated and consecrated unto God. By nature she lies, with the whole human race, under condemnation and in the power of sin, pollution, corruption, and death. She is guilty and damnable and has no right to dwell in the house of God and to stand before his face. She is defiled and impure, dead through trespasses and sins, wholly incapable to know God, to will his will, to love him, and to do anything that is pleasing in his sight. But God, who is rich in mercy, formed her into a holy nation, a royal priesthood unto himself (1 Pet. 2:9).

From before the foundation of the world, he ordained his Son to be the head of the church. In the fullness of time, he sent him into the world (Gal. 4:4). Her place Christ assumed in God's judgment. Her sin he bore on the accursed tree. Her guilt he removed and blotted out. For her he obtained eternal righteousness, the right to be God's people and to dwell in his house forever. God raised Jesus from the dead, exalted him at his own right hand in glory, and fulfilled in him the promise of the Holy Spirit; through that Spirit of holiness Christ now dwells in the church which is his body. Hence the holiness of the church is only in Christ. The holiness of Christ is imputed to the believers, as if it were their own. By his Spirit he also actually imparts his holiness to all the members of his body. The holiness of the church is therefore a gift of pure grace, constantly depending upon the union of the body with its head, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Therefore, the holiness of the church is not only the positive virtue of consecration to God, but also a negative or antithetical disposition or attitude, a separation from and opposition to all that is unholy and profane. It is light out of darkness, righteousness out of unrighteousness, holiness out of corruption. It is resurrection from the dead. Out of the depths God causes his people to cry unto him. The result is that their holiness assumes the form of hatred and opposition to corruption. It is a crying for forgiveness, a longing for deliverance, a fleeing from sin, a crucifying of the flesh, a condemning of the works of darkness, a separating from the world in the spiritual, ethical sense. It is putting off the old and putting on the new man (Col. 3:9, 10). It is the holiness of the antithesis between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness, between Christ and Belial, between the temple of God and the temple of idols (2 Cor. 6:14–15). Such is the character of the holiness of the church.

### Holiness and the Calling of the Church

Always under this tension between light and darkness, the church in the world must fulfill her calling to be holy as the Lord her God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). This must never be forgotten. Always there have been and still are those who separate themselves from the church because she is not perfectly holy and because within her there always appear carnal and profane men, those who are not of her. Those who separate themselves seek to establish in the world the church of only the elect, without spot or wrinkle. This is a serious error. In this world the church is never perfect in holiness, except in Christ. This is true because believers themselves have only a small beginning of holiness in their hearts. The motions of sin are always in their members (Rom. 7:5). Besides, all is not Israel that is of Israel (Rom. 9:6). Hypocrites and openly ungodly men continually appear in the church. They join themselves to the church from without, and they develop and grow from within, for not all the children of believers are spiritual seed. Tares are always sown among the wheat (Matt. 13:24–30). The church in this world is never perfect in holiness.

The result is that the holiness of the church assumes the form of a continual conflict, of the tension between light and darkness. Just as the individual believer is admonished in the word of God to put off the old man and to mortify the motions of sin in his members, so also the church must constantly be on the alert and put off the work of the flesh that would deprive her of her holy nature and calling. As church she is indeed holy and has a holy calling. She has a holy ministry to fulfill, the ministry of the word of God as it has been delivered to her in the holy scriptures, and she is called to administer the holy sacraments. That word she must preserve. The truth of that word she must appropriate and develop. The gospel of her Lord she must proclaim. The good confession she must make. She must administer the holy sacraments to those who are of Christ and guard the sacraments against being profaned.

Precisely in this, her holy calling, she is opposed by the flesh. The carnal element within her hates the pure word of God, opposes it, prefers the vain philosophy of men, and therefore sets itself against the preaching of the word to corrupt it. The same carnal element hankers after the things of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; it brings the world into the church and would profane God's covenant. But the holy, catholic church cannot yield. She must and does oppose the flesh; she puts off the operations of sin and fulfills her holy calling.

Not only within the walls of the holy city is there this tension and conflict between light and darkness, but the same conflict also appears wherever the church through the walk and confession of her members becomes manifest in the world. These members of the body of Christ are in the world. They have no calling to go out of the world and to organize a colony of saints in some secluded spot. On the contrary, they must be in the world and live its whole life in all its relationships—in home, in school, in state, in society, in labor, in industry, in business, and in commerce.

In all of these different relations and departments of life, they are called to reveal themselves as members of the body of Christ, the holy church, the communion of saints. They must be holy in all their walk and conversation. They are called to be holy in the home, in the education of their children, in the state, in the relation of employer and employee, in store and office and shop—in all of life. They represent the cause of the Son of God and walk according to the will of their Lord Jesus Christ. This means that in the spiritual, ethical sense they can never be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). Especially because of the church's holiness, she must expect conflict, opposition, hatred, and suffering for Christ's sake. The time is coming when she shall be hated of all nations (Matt. 24:9) and when her faithful members shall not be able to find a place in the world. But

she must not fear. The Lord not only foretold her that she would have tribulation in the world, but also left her this comforting word: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Presently the new Jerusalem, as a pure and holy bride adorned for her husband, will descend from God out of heaven (Rev. 21:2). That event is the end of all conflict and suffering and is the perfect victory for the church of Jesus Christ.

### The Obligation to Join the True Church

It is the sacred obligation of every believer to join himself to the true church. However, the question arises, Where is that true church of Christ? The fact is that in the world there are many churches, and they differ from one another, not merely in regard to accidentals such as differences in nationality, race, color, and language, but also in respect to those things that pertain to the very essence of the church—matters concerning the truth, the confessions, church government, and form of worship. Especially since the Reformation of the sixteenth century, when the church liberated itself from the Roman hierarchy, denominations have multiplied and scores of confessions of faith have been written and adopted.

Even if we leave out of consideration those so-called churches that openly repudiate the scriptures as the infallible word of God and deny the very fundamentals of the Christian faith—the trinity, the divinity of Christ, the atonement through the blood of Christ, and the resurrection of our Lord—there is sufficient difference in doctrine and confession among the rest of the churches in the world to make it impossible for them to live under one roof, unless they arbitrarily deny their own confessions and amalgamate. Not infrequently the churches sharply oppose one another in regard to such important truths as absolute predestination, the sovereignty of the grace of God, the total incapability of the natural man to do any good, infant baptism, the Lord's supper, and the second coming of the Lord. We believe one holy, catholic church, but the unity of this one church is by no means apparent in the world; the church appears to be hopelessly divided.

Therefore, the question is urgent, What must be our attitude? What is the proper scriptural position to assume in this situation? Must we take the stand of those who would have the various churches simply break down the confessional walls of separation, forget their differences, and unite on a very broad platform of a few general principles, hardly expressive of the true Christian faith?

Such is the attitude of many—even of the majority—of those in our ecumenical age who still call themselves church. Nevertheless, such an attitude can be taken only by those churches and by those believers who have long forgotten to take their own confessions seriously. They are ready officially to relinquish their doctrinal standards, which for them are no more than dead traditions and which no longer have a place in their conscious faith and practical spiritual life. No church that takes its confessions seriously could lend its support to such a movement or assume such an attitude. Hence the question arises again, What, in the face of the actual phenomenon of so many different churches, must be the position of the believer who is desirous to join himself to the true church in the world?

Our Reformed fathers have always emphasized that the believer must join himself to the true church in the world:

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assemblage of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them. And that this may be better observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not

belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it; yea, though they should suffer death or bodily punishment.

Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.[1]

At the same time the Reformed Fathers have mentioned the distinguishing marks whereby that true church may be known:

We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true Church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church.

But we speak here not of the company of hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true Church must be distinguished from all sects who call themselves the Church.

The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.[2]

#### The false church they have described as follows:

As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the Sacraments as appointed by Christ in his Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry. These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other. [3]

#### The same marks of the true church are mentioned in the Scottish Confession of Faith:

The notes of the true Kirk, therefore, we believe, confess, and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the Word of God, in which God has revealed Himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, with which must be associated the Word and promise of God to seal and confirm them in our hearts; and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished. Then wherever these notes are seen and continue for any time, be the number complete or not, there, beyond any doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ, who, according to His promise, is in its midst. [4]

#### The Marks of the True Church

The confessions make clear the position of the Reformed churches. The Reformed fathers emphasized that the true church has certain distinguishing marks by which she can be discerned.

They insisted that the true church cannot be distinguished by its size or numbers, as if the majority can decide the question. The entire history of the church, both in the old and in the new dispensation, condemns that position. Frequently—in fact, usually—carnal Israel constituted the majority in the history of the old covenant people; and the true church was represented by the "seven thousand" who had not bowed the knee to Baal, the small number of the remnant according to the election of grace (1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4–5). The same is true of the new dispensation. As the church grew large and prosperous, she usually became apostate and corrupt, while the small minority, the weak and despised according to the standard of the flesh and the world, usually represented the true church.

The true church also cannot be discerned from the false by the decrees and acts of its councils, for these have frequently corrupted the truth and persecuted the true church. Official Jerusalem, the council of the Jews, persecuted and killed the prophets and ultimately nailed Christ to the accursed tree. This history was repeated frequently in the new dispensation.

The true church also cannot be determined by its antiquity. A church that can boast of centuries of history may have become corrupt and departed from the orthodox Christian faith, while a church of more recent origin may stand on the basis of the apostolic faith and represent the continuation of the true church in the world.

All these characteristics our fathers of the Reformation found incapable of serving as distinguishing marks of the true church. Instead, they pointed to three infallible signs by which the true church is recognizable: the pure preaching of the word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of Christian discipline. Where these three marks are present, there is the true church. Where they are wanting, there the church is not, no matter how mighty and imposing the institution may be that calls itself by that name. And where these signs are corrupted, there the church must either repent or die.

Concerning these three distinguishing marks, we must note that although each of them is important and must be present to indicate the true church of Christ in the world, they are nevertheless not to be viewed as three separate marks of equal importance and without connection with one another. On the contrary, in a sense they are all comprehended and implied in the first mark, the pure preaching of the word of God. The reason is that the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of Christian discipline have no meaning without the preaching of the word. They are subservient to the preaching. In the sacraments, holy baptism and the Lord's supper, the word of God is present in visible and tangible form, and the very power of true Christian discipline is the word of Christ and its preaching. Besides, where the word of God is purely preached in all its fullness, there the sacraments are not likely to be profaned, and such preaching is already in itself the exercise of Christian discipline. Hence we may say that the one all-important distinguishing mark of the true church is the pure preaching of the word of God. Where the word of God is preached and heard, there is the church of Christ. Where that word is not preached, there the church is not present. Where that word is adulterated, the church must either repent or die.

The reason that the preaching of the word of God is the all-important distinguishing mark of the true church is not difficult to discern. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Another foundation no man can lay (1 Cor. 3:11). That foundation upon the apostles and prophets is precisely the word of God as contained in the holy scriptures. Whoever—although he occupies the place of a minister of the word—proclaims another gospel, the word of mere man, does not build upon the one foundation. What he builds is not the true church of Christ, but a mere human institution. Besides, it pleases Christ to call, preserve, and build his church through the preaching of the word. He gave to his church in the world apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–12).

Only where the word of God is preached according to the scriptures is heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, calling his sheep by name (John 10:3). There the sheep follow him (v. 4), and there he gives to them eternal life (v. 28). Where the word is not preached, there Christ does not speak his word of salvation, and there the church is not gathered. The pure preaching of the word is the all-important mark whereby the true church in the world may be distinguished. We may also put it succinctly in this form: the church is where Christ is, and Christ is where the word is preached and maintained in all its purity. Hence it is the calling of all true believers to join themselves to the purest manifestation of the body of Christ, a manifestation that may be known by the marks of the true church, namely, the pure preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline. Of these three, the preaching of the word is the very heart.

### **Chapter 34**

# The Power and the Government of the Church

#### The Autonomy of the Local Church

From the principle of the unity of the church follows her calling to manifest this unity as much as possible in the world. Therefore, the calling of the local congregations is to unite themselves as much as possible in a denominational organization on the basis of their common confession. This denominational unity, however, cannot be imposed upon the local churches from above, but must arise spontaneously and organically from the local congregations themselves. The church is not a worldly association that has its different branches in different places. On the contrary, the local church itself is a manifestation of the body of Christ. It is autonomous. This autonomy of the local congregation the church must never deny or surrender; if she does, she soon will be under the yoke of a hierarchical power.

That the local church is autonomous is evident from scripture, especially from the book of Acts. The church in Jerusalem was not an association that established various subdivisions in different places—in Antioch, in Asia Minor, and finally in Greece and Rome. On the contrary, the apostles established local congregations that originally were without even any formal or outward connection with one another. These local congregations had their own officebearers and ministry of the word and sacraments, maintained their own government, exercised their own discipline, and took care of their own poor. These churches were, therefore, completely autonomous. But in the nature of the case, and according to the principle of their spiritual unity in Christ, these various churches sought to establish communion with one another.

From the communion of various churches arises denominational unity. Such unity and fellowship of autonomous churches with one another have their principle origin in the common life-root and common life of the churches in Christ Jesus their Lord. They seek such fellowship and unity also because they always are being attacked by a common enemy, against whom they must defend themselves in life and doctrine and because of whom they participate in a common tribulation. Their seeking of fellowship and unity is motivated also by the practical need they have of one another; in unity there is strength. They need one another to establish a theological seminary for the training of ministers of the word, to develop their common confession, and to fulfill their mandate to do mission work. It stands to reason that these autonomous churches seek and establish communion with one another based on their common confession.

It should be obvious that dogmatics is not the proper discipline in which to develop the principles of church polity. But we may call attention to the various systems of church government that have arisen in the course of history, and, second, to the principles that must govern every sound system of church government.

#### **Erastianism**

There is the system of church government named after Erastus, although it is very doubtful whether Erastus actually maintained the system of church government that now bears his name. Thomas Erastus was born at Baden, Switzerland, on September 7, 1524. He studied theology and philosophy

at Basel and later at Pavia and Bologna, where he graduated as doctor of medicine. In 1560 and 1564, he attended the conferences of Lutheran and Reformed theologians at Heidelberg and Maulbronn on the Lord's supper. At these conferences he defended the Zwinglian view of the Lord's supper. The same conception of the Lord's supper he maintained in a treatise, *Gründtlicher Bericht, wie die Wort Christi, Das ist mein Leib*.[1] His name is chiefly known because of his views on church government and especially on excommunication. Erastus considered it an unwise policy for the Protestants to cut off members from their own communion. About this question he carried on a controversy, in which he was violently opposed by Dathenus as well as by his friend Beza.

Erastus adopted the general principle that ecclesiastical censures are not the proper method of punishing crimes, but that the execution of the penal law should rest with the temporal magistrates. According to him, vice or immorality could not be the ground for prohibiting a person from receiving the sacraments. The church was to decide who belonged to its members and who were proper partakers of the sacraments, but she was not entitled to take upon herself the punishment of offenses by withholding the privileges of the church or by inflicting any other punishments on the ground of moral misconduct.

It is not clear, as Professor Berkhof states, if Erastus himself regarded the church as a society that owes its existence and form to regulations enacted by the state. [2] Nevertheless, it has become the general view that Erastianism maintains as its leading principle the authority of the civil magistrates and their control of all ecclesiastical bodies in both doctrine and discipline. Thus Erastians are commonly known as those who teach that it belongs to the function of the state to govern the church, to exercise discipline, and to excommunicate. Therefore, church censures are really civil punishments, although the application may be entrusted to the legal officers of the church.

It stands to reason that Erastianism, thus conceived, is a denial of the kingship of Christ over his church and that it does not maintain the proper separation between church and state.

# **Prelacy**

The Roman Catholic system of church government is the episcopal system, with its theory of apostolic succession and the distinction between higher and lower clergy, culminating in the pope. The theory of the episcopacy, according to Roman Catholic writers, is based upon the Romish doctrine of a visible church. This visible church needs a visible sacrifice; this visible sacrifice needs a priest; and a priest needs special divine consecration to his office. He is supposed to receive the internal consecration from God through the external consecration of the church. That is to say, he receives the Holy Spirit by the imposition of hands. Hence the very establishment of the visible church, according to Roman Catholicism, requires an ecclesiastical ordination directly originating with Christ and perpetuated in uninterrupted succession, so that as the apostles were appointed by Christ, the bishops, in turn, were ordained by the apostles. These bishops, in turn, have appointed their successors until the present day. The real successor of the apostles, however, is the person of the pope, for if the bishops are supposed to be a perpetual corporation, they need a center or head authorized to exercise jurisdiction over them. Hence the episcopacy of the Roman Catholic Church

Thus the Roman Catholic Church is really an absolute hierarchy—we might almost say an absolute monarchy—ruled by an infallible pope. The laity has absolutely no voice in the appointment or calling of its own officebearers. It is true that not all Roman Catholic divines are entirely in agreement on this question. Some favor what is called the papal system, according to which the pope

finds its culmination in the pope.

is the sole bishop by divine right, and all other bishops exist only through him and derive their superiority to the lower clergy only from the pope. Others maintain what is called the episcopal system, which claims an independent divine right on the part of each bishop. This view maintains that the bishops, superior to the lower clergy by divine appointment, are the rightful governors of the church, and the pope is *primus inter pares* (*first among equals*) in relation to other bishops. But in principle this distinction makes no difference; besides, the papal system view is prevalent throughout almost the entire Roman Catholic world.

The hierarchical view of church government cannot be maintained either on the basis of scripture or in the light of history. From a historical viewpoint there is no proof that the pope is a direct successor of Peter and of the apostles. And as far as scripture is concerned, the Bible certainly recognizes that the church has a voice in the calling of its own officebearers.

#### **Episcopacy**

We must briefly discuss the Episcopalian system of church government, which has much in common with the conception of the Roman Catholics. The Episcopalians, both in England and in the United States, hold that there are three orders of officebearers in the church: bishops, priests, and deacons. There is some difference in this respect between the high church and the low church of England. The high church maintains that the episcopacy is absolutely essential unto the existence of the church, while the low church denies this and holds that there is nothing in the confessions of the church that makes the episcopacy essential to the church. But the general doctrine of the Episcopal church is that there is a superior order of officebearers who are the successors of the apostles and who possess in their own persons the right of ordination and jurisdiction. These superior officebearers are called the bishops (*episcopoi*); they are the overseers not only of the members of the church but also of the inferior officebearers, the priests and deacons. Priests and deacons receive from the bishops their ordination as well as power to preach and to administer the sacraments, but they have no right to ordain others to the sacred office. Although the priests and deacons are set over the people, they are themselves under the government of the bishop.

This system, which makes of the officebearers a separate class, in whose calling and ordination the church has no voice, is also contrary to scripture.

#### Independentism

The congregational system of church government is characterized by independentism. Its fundamental principle is that the local congregation is independent from any other churches and is complete in itself. The government is strictly democratic. It gives the right to vote to all adult male members, and there is no power of veto in the clergy. By the vote of the congregation, members are admitted or dismissed and censures are passed. The permanent officebearers are the pastors and the deacons, the pastor being an ordained minister chosen by the church and subject to dismissal by the church.

As far as communion with other churches is concerned, the local churches stand in sisterly relation to other congregational churches. There are no standing higher or broader gatherings, although on occasion such a broader gathering may be called to settle certain matters pertaining to the general welfare of the churches. The decisions of such broader gatherings, however, are never binding, but only declarative.

This system also is derogatory to the headship of Christ as king over his church, since independentists make their officebearers entirely dependent on the will of the congregation.

#### **Reformed Church Government**

The Reformed system of church government is probably the most difficult to understand. On the one hand, it maintains the autonomy of the local church. On the other hand, it attributes a certain power to the broader gatherings. There always has been and still is a difference of opinion regarding the relation of the autonomous congregation to the broader gatherings of classes and synod. This dispute concerns especially the question whether or not the broader gatherings can depose officebearers—ministers, elders, and deacons. According to some, in these broader gatherings the delegates are assembled by virtue of their office as pastors and elders, in which case the broader gatherings have judicatory authority and the power to depose. According to others, the officebearers can function officially only in their local congregations, and they assemble in the broader gatherings merely as delegates, not as officebearers; they have merely advisory power, and the power to depose is vested only in the consistory and in the local congregation.

The various assemblies in this Reformed system of church government are the consistory, classis, and synod. In the Netherlands the churches also have particular synods between the classes and the general synod. The consistories consist of ministers and elders, to which in small congregations the deacons are added. The minister, elders, and deacons together form a church council. From a nomination presented by the consistory, the congregation usually votes these officebearers into office. The classis, which is not a permanent body but is constituted and dismissed at each gathering, consists of two delegates, usually the pastor and an elder, from each congregation. The general synod, which also is not a standing body (although it is assembled at regular stated times), consists of delegates from each classis.

In the *Church Order of Dordt*, which is the general basis of church government in the Reformed churches, some articles, including Article 30, refer to the relation between the autonomous church and the broader gatherings:

In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted, and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common. [3]

The question is whether the last clause may be so interpreted that the major assembly may itself initiate matters that belong to the major assembly in common, or whether the assembly is strictly limited to its own agenda.

Another article that is a serious source of difference of opinion in the Reformed churches is Article 31:

If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by a general synod. [4]

The question concerns especially the last clause of this article, "unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order." The question is chiefly whether the article means that the person who disagrees with a decision of the major assembly must prove to the major assembly that the decision conflicts with the word of God or the *Church Order*, or whether that person may consider the decision to be in conflict with the word of God or the *Church Order* before his own conscience.

Another cause of frequent dispute is Article 36:

The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the particular synod has over the classis and the general synod over the particular.[5]

It is generally granted that this article does not state that the major assemblies have the same jurisdiction over the minor assemblies as the consistory has over the congregation. Nevertheless, those who hold that the major assemblies have judicatory power appeal to this article, which plainly states that the classis has jurisdiction over the consistory.

It certainly would be expedient if some of these matters that pertain to the government of the churches would be definitely settled.

#### The Supreme Headship of Christ

The main principle of Reformed church polity that must always be remembered and maintained is that Christ is the head and the king over his church and that he rules his church by his Spirit and word. Christ is king supreme over *all things*, according to scripture:

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18).

For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him (1 Cor. 15:27).

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:20–21).

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11).

More specifically, Christ is head and king over *his church*: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6). "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22).

Christ has power over all things in heaven and on earth; while in a specific sense, he is the king over his church, which he rules by his grace and Spirit and word. The relation between this power over all things and his sovereignty over his church is that Christ employs his universal rule for the preservation and salvation of the church. From this principle of the headship or kingship of Christ over his church, it follows that no church or group of churches may ever subject themselves under any other yoke than Christ's, whether it is the yoke of the state or the yoke of the pope. Only the word of Christ is law in the church.

#### The Offices in the Church

Christ maintains and executes his power and authority over his church through the instrumentality of men. He has appointed officebearers in his church:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of

healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13).

These regular and abiding officebearers in the Reformed churches are ministers, elders, and deacons.

It is clear from scripture that the office of the ministry of the word arose out of the office of elder. Evidently, some elders devoted themselves more particularly to the work of the ministry of the word of God: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17). This is also plain from the letters addressed to the seven churches in Asia Minor recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. The angel of the church to whom each epistle is addressed must be the elder who labored in the word and doctrine, that is, the minister of the word.

The elders, together with the ministers, have the calling to feed and care for the flock, as well as to rule over them and to keep watch over them by word and deed:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:6–8).

The office of deacon was instituted in the church upon the occasion of a complaint about the care of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1–6). The deacons represent Christ more particularly as the merciful high priest. Their task is the care and comfort of the poor and indigent. It is a different office from that of the minister and elder, but may not be regarded as a lower office.

Instructions concerning the necessary qualifications of the officebearers are found in 1 Timothy 3:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?). Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless (vv. 2–5, 8–10).

#### Office and Calling

In order to function in a certain office, one must be called by the king of his church. This is necessary because no one may encroach upon an office. To function in a certain office, it is essential that an officebearer be appointed officially so that he can also function officially, that is, with the authority of him who sent him and called him to the office. Further, this calling is necessary both subjectively and objectively because of the difficulty and the responsibility of the task of an officebearer. He who serves in the church of Christ as an officebearer and takes his task and calling seriously bears a very heavy burden. Still more, this calling and the consciousness of this calling are necessary in order to remain steadfast against all opposition from within and from without, both in the congregation and in the world. In the midst of all such opposition, nothing but the certain conviction

that Christ himself has called him to his office can make an officebearer steadfast and immovable.

The calling to a certain office in the church is subjective and objective, internal and external. To the internal aspect of the calling belongs the abiding desire to serve the Lord in his vineyard as

officebearer, a desire that must have its root in the fear of God. To the internal aspect of the calling also belongs the consciousness of a certain measure of gifts, both natural and spiritual. To the external aspect of the calling belongs the fact that the Lord himself opens the way to reach the fulfillment of the desire to serve in a certain office. Above all, the opening of the way must finally be sealed by the calling of the church. Without the calling by the church there is no calling to any office whatsoever. The apostles were called and sent directly by the Lord. However, after the period of the apostles, the power to send and to ordain officebearers rests only in the church of Christ. Therefore, no matter how strong the desire of anyone may be to function in a certain office, he cannot consider himself to be called by the Lord unless he is called and ordained by the church.

#### The Threefold Power of the Church

Christ has endowed his church with power. We can say that Christ exercises his power through the church, particularly through the officebearers instituted in the church. The officebearers, therefore, do not receive their power and authority from the members of the church, although it is through the instrumentality of the congregation that they are called and ordained as officebearers. But they receive their authority to function in the office only from Christ. This power is usually distinguished as threefold.

First, it is a *potestas docendi*, the power to teach. To this power belongs the ministry of the word, both in the local congregation to the edification of the church, as well as in all the world, to the ingathering of the elect. To the ministry of the word in the local church belongs the administration of the sacraments. To this calling of the church also belongs the preservation of the truth and its maintenance over against all who oppose it. Hence it belongs to this particular power of the church to formulate its faith in specific confessions, by which the truth may be preserved in generations, officially proclaimed to all who are without, and defended over against all heretics. Finally, it belongs to this *potestas docendi* of the church to prepare ministers of the word of God by establishing seminaries for the cultivation of theology, that the truth may be maintained and become ever richer in the consciousness of the church.

Second, the power of the church consists in what is called the *potestas gubernandi* or *gubernationis*, the power to rule. This power is sometimes distinguished once more as the legislative power (*potestas ordinans*) and judicial power (*potestas judicans*). To the legislative power belongs the authority to make certain ordinances based upon the word of God for the ruling of the church as embodied, for instance, in the *Church Order of Dordt*. To the judicial power belongs the actual oversight of the local church, as well as over the individual members of that church in Christian discipline. This discipline is always of a spiritual character. Its purpose must always be the glory of God, the well-being of the church, and the salvation of the sinner.

Third, there is the *potestas misericordiae*, the power of mercy in the name of Jesus Christ. This power of mercy concerns first those who are of the household of faith. The church must take care of her own poor and not leave that care to all kinds of worldly associations. Although this power concerns first the members of the church themselves, there is no reason that also in the midst of the world the mercy of Christ may not be revealed as far as this is possible.

### Chapter 35

## The Means of Grace

### The Concept of Means

The means of grace are usually discussed in connection with the doctrine of the church because they are given to the church. Several questions must be asked and answered in our discussion of the means of grace: What are *means* in general? What are *means of grace*? How is the word a means of grace? In what sense are the sacraments a means of grace, and what is their relation to the preaching of the word?

What is meant by *means* in general? We may define *means* as elements taken from the world of our experience, from the outside world in which we live, and that are adapted to our human existence and nature. For instance, food and drink are elements from the world in which we live, which are so adapted to our nature that they can nourish and sustain our bodies. We call them *means* because God must use them for the purpose to which they are adapted, that is, to nourish and strengthen our bodies. We must remember that things are nothing in themselves, but they exist and are sustained by the almighty and omnipresent power of God that we call providence. However, it pleases God to use these means always in the same way and for the same purpose. Because of this uniform use of means for the same purpose, we can also use them. Bread always sustains and nourishes our bodies. God never uses bread to poison us. Because we have this confidence in God, we also are able to use those means. If God would use bread one day to poison us and another day to nourish us, it would be impossible for us to use the means of bread. *Means*, therefore, are elements taken from the world in which we live, the world of our experience, which are always used by God in the same way and which for that very reason we can and do use.

#### The Meaning of Grace

Now the question concerns means *of grace*, the means that the Holy Spirit employs to bestow grace upon the elect. Because the Holy Spirit always uses those means for the same purpose, the church and the individual believers can also use them.

More specifically, the question is, What is the meaning of *grace* in the term *means of grace*? As we have explained in the first locus of dogmatics in describing the attributes or virtues of God, the word *grace* in scripture may have a variety of connotations, and we will not repeat them here in detail. We may, however, briefly enumerate these various meanings.

- 1. *Grace* as an attribute of God has the fundamental meaning of pleasantness, attractiveness, and gracefulness. God is the perfection of all beauty and attractiveness and gracefulness, because he is the implication of all infinite perfection of goodness in the ethical sense. God is perfectly lovely and beautiful.
- 2. *Grace* in scripture denotes the attitude of graciousness or pleasantness, the gracious disposition of God to the creature. This is undoubtedly the meaning of the phrase, "to find grace in the eyes of the L<sub>ord</sub>" (Gen. 6:8; Gen. 19:19).
- 3. In close connection with the preceding, the word grace has the meaning of undeserved or

forfeited favor. In this case the favorable attitude of God is accentuated and enhanced by the condition of the subjects who receive this grace of God. The word of God uses the term *grace* as standing opposed to obligation and, therefore, as being opposed to works.

- 4. The word *grace* frequently is used in scripture to denote the power of God whereby the sinner is actually saved and delivered from the bondage of sin and corruption, whereby he is regenerated and sanctified, and thus is made pleasant in the sight of God. It also includes all the spiritual blessings and virtues that are bestowed upon the objects of God's favor.
- 5. *Grace* is used in the sense of thanks, as we read in the original of 1 Corinthians 15:57: "Grace be to God, who giveth us the victory." The meaning is most probably that grace is ascribed to God by those who are the objects and recipients of the power of God's grace, in order that he may receive praise and adoration as the only God of all grace.

In the term means of grace, the word grace refers to the fourth connotation mentioned above. Means of grace, then, are means that the Holy Spirit employs to bestow the power of God upon the sinner, whereby he is actually delivered from the bondage of sin and corruption, regenerated, sanctified, and made pleasant in the sight of God, and whereby God also bestows upon the objects of his favor all the spiritual blessings and virtues that are in Christ their Lord. They are means that the church employs and the believer uses for the same purpose.

#### The Principal Means of Grace

These means of grace are two: the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments. It is possible to speak of means of grace in a wider sense. In a certain sense all things are means of grace for the elect. It is plain that the Holy Spirit can use the simple reading of the Bible to bring one of the elect to a living faith in Christ. The godly conversation of believers among one another or the biblical discussion in our societies can be used for the edification and strengthening of the faith.

Dr. Charles Hodge includes prayer in the regular means of grace:

By means of grace are not meant every instrumentality which God may please to make the means of spiritual edification to his children. The phrase is intended to indicate those institutions which God has ordained to be the ordinary channels of grace, *i.e.*, of the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit, to the souls of men. The means of grace, according to the standards of our Church, are the word, sacraments, and prayers.[1]

We can use the term *means of grace* in still a wider sense: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). When the word of God teaches here that all things work together for good, the meaning is that they all work together unto the salvation of the children of God. This is especially true of those things that we consider to be evil in themselves—the temptation of the devil, of the world, and of our flesh, as well as the suffering of this present time in general (v. 18)—and more particularly, our suffering for Christ's sake.

That all these things are employed by the Holy Spirit unto the salvation of the elect and to cause believers to grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is very evident from the word of God:

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope (Rom. 5:2–4).

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience (James 1:2–3).

Speaking of the "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," Peter writes,

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (1 Pet. 1:6–9).

These passages plainly teach that in a sense all things are means of grace and that God, especially through tribulation and suffering, causes his people to grow in the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, in faith, hope, and love. Even as a young oak, when it is tossed by severe storms, strikes its roots deeper into the ground, so by the grace of God tribulation and suffering have the effect that the believer strikes his roots of faith deeper into Christ and grows in grace.

Although this is true, it is not the meaning of the term *means of grace* in Reformed theology. We must remember that without the preaching of the word, by which believers are called and through which they receive the knowledge of Christ, and without the sacraments, which are added to the word of God as signs and seals of the promise, all of these other and general means have no meaning and no effect. Therefore, *means of grace are especially those means that the Holy Spirit uses as they are officially instituted in the church, to be administered by her, to be received from her and through her, and to be used by individual believers.* Understood in this sense, there are only two means of grace: the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.

#### The Relation between Preaching and Sacraments

Of these two, the preaching of the word is the more important, because the preaching of the word is indispensable. The Christian, if need be, can live without the sacraments; but never can he live without the preaching of the word. Without the word of God, he cannot come to a conscious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has no knowledge of Christ and cannot appropriate him by a true and living faith. Through the preaching of the word the Holy Spirit works faith in the believer's heart. Besides, the preaching of the word is not only the means by which the Holy Spirit works faith in him, but it is also the main means for the strengthening, upbuilding, and sustaining of his faith. The sacraments are also used to strengthen his faith, but in a different way from the word of God. They are really added to the word. They signify and seal the promise of God in the gospel. Nevertheless, chiefly through the word of God the believer increases in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Upon the preaching of the word the sacraments are dependent; without the preaching they are meaningless and have no content.

This would not be true if the Roman Catholic conception of the sacraments were correct. According to the Romish Church, the sacraments have power to work in themselves, even without the preaching of the word. Grace is not really worked in the heart of the believers *through* the sacraments, but the sacraments *are* grace. Just as the theory of common grace really proceeds from the idea that things in themselves are grace, so also the Romish Church teaches that grace is in the sacraments.

Even the Lutheran Church never entirely abandoned this erroneous notion. According to the Lutherans, baptism works regeneration, and in the Lord's supper one really eats and drinks Christ with his physical mouth. If this were true, we really would not need the preaching of the word, but we would need the church and the priest as the dispenser of grace.

In distinction from Romanists and Lutherans, the Reformers, and Protestants in general, have



### **Chapter 36**

# The Preaching of the Word as a Means of Grace

#### The Importance of Preaching

We must now emphasize that the word must be *preached*. Only as the word is preached is it a means of grace. Many either deny or completely ignore this truth and belittle the importance of preaching. They simply speak of the word, or even of the Bible, as the means of grace.

Hodge really ignores the preaching when he speaks of the Bible as the means of grace:

The word of God, as here understood, is the Bible. And the Bible is the collection of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments . . . .

There can, therefore, be no doubt that the Scriptures teach that the Word of God is the specially appointed means for the sanctification and the salvation of men. This doctrine of the Bible is fully confirmed by the experience of the Church and of the world . . . .

It being admitted as a fact that the Bible has the power attributed to it, the question arises, To what is that due? To this question different answers are given . . . .

Christians then do not refer the saving and the sanctifying power of the Scriptures to the moral power of the truths which they contain.[1]

From this it is evident that Hodge refers to the Bible as the means of grace rather than to the preaching.

The same is true of Dr. Bavinck:

But out of this affinity of the covenant of grace and the gospel, it follows . . . that grace is not dependent, as presented by the Romish Church, on the institute of the church or priest and sacrament. The relation between Scripture and the church is defined by the Protestants in an entirely different way than by the Roman Catholics. According to the latter, the church precedes the Scriptures. The church is not built on Holy Scripture, but Scripture proceeded out of the church. The church, therefore, for her being in existence does not need the Scriptures; but the Scriptures for their origin, collection, preservation, and explanation are in need of the church. The Reformation, however, reversed this relation. She placed the church on the foundation of the Scriptures and put the latter far above the church. Not the church, but the Scriptures, the word of God, became the means of grace par excellence. Even the sacraments were subordinated to the word and had no meaning or power without that word. But that word was able, therefore, to operate and did operate also without the institute of the church. It is true that God entrusted the word of God to his church in order that it might be explained by her, preached, and defended. But that word is not given to the church in such a way that without her it would have neither existence nor power. On the contrary, that word is directed to all men; it is of value in all circumstances and for all spheres of life. And it derives its power and operation by no means only from the fact that it is being preached by an official person in the gathering of believers. It operates also then when it is being read and studied in the home, when it is being narrated by parents or teachers, when it is brought to the knowledge of men no matter in what form. Everyone—who, what, and wherever he be-who accepts that word in faith is a partaker of God's promise, of grace in Christ, and of the entire blessing of salvation. He does not need to wait for the church, a minister, or for the sacrament. Whoever believes has eternal life.[2]

It is perfectly true that the word as a means of grace is not dependent on the church, if by the church is meant the institute of the Roman Catholic Church, and salvation is not dependent on a Romish priest. However, that does not alter the fact that the means of grace are given to the church. No Reformed man so belittles the institute of the church as to think or teach that he can partake of the sacraments, whether baptism or the Lord's supper, in his own home or in any gathering of believers without the institute of the church. The preaching of the word also is not a means of grace apart from

the institute of the church. It is true that the church is founded on the word of God, and that the word of God was first, not the church; but it is not true that the Bible as we now have it was before the church. Long before there ever was a Bible, there was preaching of the word of God. Comparatively speaking, only very recently the Bible as we now have it came into existence and became accessible to all. For many centuries the church existed without any written word whatsoever. For many more centuries only the Old Testament canon was gradually written and finally completed. For centuries afterward the church waited for the completion and closing of the New Testament canon. Even then, many more centuries elapsed before the Bible was accessible to every believer. This had to wait for the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, for the general distribution of the Bible, and for the general education of the masses to be able to read and write. But always the church had the commission to preach the gospel, and always the preaching of the word was a means of grace.

### **Preaching Defined and Explained**

What is preaching? In answer we may give the following definition: *Preaching is the authoritative proclamation of the gospel by the church in the service of the word of God through Christ*. In this definition we call attention to especially four elements. Preaching is authoritative proclamation. Preaching is the proclamation of the gospel, the whole word of God, as revealed in the scriptures. Preaching is proclamation of the gospel by the church: only the church is able to send the preacher. Preaching stands in the service of the word of God through Christ: only Christ, through the Spirit, can make the preaching of the word powerful and efficacious as a means of grace.

We wish to elaborate somewhat on this definition and on these four elements. The last mentioned element, that preaching stands in the service of the word of God through Christ, is undoubtedly the most important. Through the preaching it pleases God through Christ, the exalted Lord, the chief prophet of God, who alone gathers his church, to speak to his people unto salvation. This is evident from Romans 10:14, which, according to the original, asks, "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?" Through the preaching, therefore, you do not hear about Christ, but you hear him. The difference is easily understood. When you hear about or of someone, he is not present. You do not hear his own voice, but the voice of someone else who tells you something about him. But when you hear someone, you hear his own voice. He is present with you. He is addressing you personally. This is the sense of Romans 10:14, which teaches that you cannot believe in Christ unless you have heard him speak to you, unless you have heard his word addressed to you. This is exactly the meaning of the words, "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?"

This is corroborated by other passages of Holy Writ:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. (John 5:24–25).

Of the shepherd and his sheep, whom the Father has given him, the Lord says,

To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:3–4, 27).

The word of man is not sufficient to serve as a means of grace or as a basis for that certain knowledge whereby we know that all our sins are forgiven and for that perfect confidence whereby

we rely in life and death on our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. What we must hear is not the word of man, but the word of God:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12–13).

We must hear Christ himself addressing us personally. But how shall we hear this word unless we hear it by the voice of Christ himself? And how shall we hear this word without the preacher? This is the point of Romans 10:14–15.

Anyone can tell you about Jesus, about his word and work, about the cross and the atonement, and about the resurrection and justification. To be a witness of Christ is certainly the calling of every believer. The Christian must be a witness for Christ in the world, must confess his name, must extol his name, and must tell all about him. But this does not make anyone a preacher, and this does not make his word a means of grace in the accepted sense. A preacher is not a person who merely speaks concerning Christ, but one through whom it pleases Christ himself to speak and to cause his own voice to be heard by his people. What matters in any sermon is whether we hear the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest" (Matt. 11:28); whether we hear him say, "Repent and believe" (Mark 1:15); whether his voice resounds in our deepest soul, "Your sins are forgiven, and I give unto you eternal life" (Matt. 9:2; John 10:28).

Therefore, the contents of the message that a preacher brings to the church or to any audience in the heathen world may never be anything else than the word of Christ, for the Lord will not speak through anything but his own word. This word he gave directly to the apostles, as Paul declares: "[He] hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). It was in the way of putting his own word in them that Christ made preachers out of the apostles. Just as an ambassador from one government takes the word of his government along when he delivers a message to another government, so also Christ gave his word to the apostles. This same word of Christ is committed unto the church in the holy scriptures. As to its contents, preaching is strictly limited to the word of Christ in the Bible. The preacher has nothing of his own to deliver, strictly nothing. When he delivers a message of his own, apart from the word of Christ, he ceases to be a preacher. A preacher, therefore, must proclaim the whole counsel of God unto salvation as contained in Holy Writ.

Hence the word of the preacher is authoritative. Preaching is authoritative proclamation of the gospel. The word for *preaching* in the New Testament really means "to speak as a herald." The preacher must bring Christ's message, nothing more, and he must deliver it in the name of Christ and with authority. He must clearly leave the impression that the audience is under obligation to hear and to do the word that is preached, that they and he together must bow before that word because it is the authoritative word of Christ. He must say, "Thus saith the Lord." Man's word has neither power nor authority. The preacher's word has both power and authority, because he both is and speaks as an ambassador.

#### **Preaching the Calling of the Church**

We must also call attention to the fact that the preacher must be *sent*; therefore, strictly speaking, only the church is authorized to preach. It is very essential that a preacher be sent. This is true of all preachers, whether they proclaim the word of God in the established church or preach the gospel of

peace in the heathen world. In the strict sense all preachers are missionaries: they must be sent. This is emphasized in Romans 10:15, where the apostle asks, "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" The sending is indispensable to the preaching. Without the sending the preaching is impossible. One may witness for Christ. One may have an answer to anyone who asks him a reason for the hope that is in him. One may confess his faith. One may tell others all about Christ. But one may not preach unless he is sent. Such is the plain implication of the question that the apostle asks in Romans 10:15. This indispensable requisite of the sending is easily understood if only we bear in mind that preaching is the authoritative delivery of the word of God—the gospel of peace, the glad tidings of good things—and the vehicle upon which it pleases Christ to carry his own word to his people. Therefore, it is certainly indispensable that the preacher be sent by Christ.

The question then becomes, How is the preacher sent? With respect to the apostles, this question is easily answered. Their very name expresses that they were sent and that they received their calling and commission from Christ directly and in person. The chief distinguishing mark of an apostle was that he was directly and immediately called by the Lord. This is strongly emphasized especially by the apostle Paul, for instance, in Galatians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.)" The apostles, therefore, were directly sent. They received from Christ's own lips their commission to preach. They had the promise of the Spirit. Christ put his own word in them and sent them whithersoever he would, his Spirit leading them and sometimes preventing them from going to one place and directing them to another. With respect to the sending of the apostles, then, there is no difficulty: they had their commission directly from the Lord.

More specifically, the question is whether also today a minister of the word is sent by Christ to preach. Here also the answer must be in the affirmative. This sending of the preacher is no longer direct and immediate, as it was with the apostles. Nevertheless, the sending of a preacher is just as real and peremptory as it was with the apostles, although the way of sending is now different. We must remember that when he was about to be taken up into heaven, Christ gave to his church in the world the commission to preach, according to the well-known words of Mark 16:15: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." To be sure, he was addressing the apostles directly when he spoke these words. But this commission to preach the gospel cannot possibly be limited to the *persons* of the apostles. The commission to preach was given to them as *representatives* of the New Testament church in the world and must be extended to the church even unto the end of the world. This is evident from the fact that the apostles personally could not fulfill the task of preaching the gospel in all the world. And the promise, which the Lord added to this injunction, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20), cannot be limited to the lifetime of the apostles.

Therefore, the commission to preach the gospel was given neither to the apostles only, nor to believers individually. Rather, to the New Testament church through the apostles, who were its representatives, the Lord addressed the command, "Preach the gospel." The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. To the church the Lord entrusted his word. The church must keep the word, receive it, interpret it, confess it, and preach the gospel in the world. She has the commission authoritatively to speak the word of Christ, for the promise of the Spirit that will lead her into all the truth was fulfilled in her. It is appropriate that this be properly emphasized. Neither the individual believer, apart from the church of Christ in the world, nor all kinds of groups of believers, societies, boards, sects, or movements are the pillar and ground of the truth and have the commission to preach the word. Whatever influence for good such groups extraneous from the church may appear to have,

we should never forget that their existence and labor in separation from the church is disobedience, and the ultimate effect of their work can only be detrimental to the cause of the truth.

The church as an institute through its ministry must fulfill this task of preaching. Christ gave to his church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–12). Through the ministry the church carries out the commission she has received to preach the gospel. Not the person of the minister has the commission to preach, but the church. She fulfils her task through the ministry. Hence only they whom the church separates unto this ministry can properly feel that they are sent by Christ. Therefore, the calling by the church is the all-important factor in the determination of whether one is sent by Christ to preach the gospel. Only when a man is called by the church to stand in the position of the instituted ministry and when in that position he strictly adheres in all he delivers to the word of God as revealed in the scriptures, can he rightfully claim that he is a preacher.

### The Primacy of Preaching

This preaching in that very specific sense is meant when Reformed theologians say that the word is a means of grace. The preaching of the word is indispensable to faith in Christ.

This does not mean that we must minimize the value of all other means of instruction in the truth. Least of all must we underrate the great significance of Bible reading and Bible study by individual believers or by societies. We certainly believe the perspicuity of holy scripture. We believe that all believers have the unction of the Holy One. Yet all these means cannot and may never be separated from the work of Christ through the church as an institute, especially through the ministry of the word of God. If there had been no ministry, no official preaching of the word of God through all the ages of the new dispensation, there certainly would be no Bibles, and there certainly would be no translations of the Bible in many languages. There would be no confessions in which the truth is preserved from generation to generation. There would be no commentaries and other books that interpret Holy Writ. There would be no instruction in home and school and church. Thus the official preaching by the church is of central importance. It is the preaching of the word that is the primary means of grace.

### **Mediate versus Immediate Regeneration**

Here we may ask the question, Is all grace, as it is applied to the elect and wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, mediate? Does the Holy Spirit always work through the means of the preaching of the word and of the sacraments, or is the very first beginning of God's marvelous work of grace an immediate work of the Holy Spirit?

About this question there has been and still is much difference of opinion in the Reformed churches. On the one hand, there are those who insist that all grace applied to the sinner by the Holy Spirit, including regeneration, is mediate: the Holy Spirit always works through the means of the preaching of the gospel. They present the soteriological order of the various steps in the application of salvation to the heart of the elect as beginning with the calling. The preaching of the word, according to them, is necessary first. On the other hand, there are those who strongly oppose this view and insist that regeneration is first and is immediate.

The question is very important because it has implications for the problem of the regeneration of the children of believers. It is true that this difference of opinion can be reduced to a minimum. All Reformed theologians certainly emphasize that the sinner by nature is completely dead in sin and misery, that he is so blind that he cannot see the things of the kingdom of God, that by nature he is so deaf that he cannot spiritually hear and understand the truth of the gospel, and that his heart is so filled with enmity against God and his Christ that he will never come and embrace the Christ of the scriptures on his own accord and by his own free will. Hence they one and all oppose the doctrine of the Arminians, which presents the work of regeneration as a matter of moral persuasion effected by the external preaching of the gospel.

All Reformed theologians emphasize that regeneration is wholly a powerful and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit, a work that is wholly effected without the will of man. They all must admit that logically preceding all other works of grace is the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration—the opening of the eyes to see and of the ears to hear and the implanting of the seed of the new life in the heart of the elect. Whether or not we maintain that regeneration takes place through the preaching of the gospel, it is certain that all Reformed theologians, unless they want to swing over to the Arminian camp, must admit that in a certain sense regeneration is always immediate because it logically always precedes every other work of grace in the heart of the sinner.

This is plain from the description of the work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit given in the Canons:

But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit he pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.

And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead; a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is nowise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation that, after God has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose hearts God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but, in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore, also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received. [3]

The Canons call regeneration a new creation and compare it to the resurrection from the dead. The Canons do not speak of mediate regeneration, although when once the work of regeneration is accomplished in the heart of the sinner, regeneration does not exclude, but requires the use of means:

As the almighty operation of God, whereby he prolongs and supports this our natural life, does not exclude, but requires the use of means, by which God of his infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert his influence; so also the beforementioned supernatural operation of God, by which we are regenerated, in nowise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. Wherefore as the Apostles, and the teachers who succeeded them, piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to his glory and the abasement of all pride, and in the mean time, however, neglected not to keep them by the sacred precepts of the gospel, in the exercise of the Word, the sacraments and discipline; so, even to this day, be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the Church by separating what he of his good pleasure hath most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is his work advanced; to whom alone all the glory, both of means and their saving fruit and efficacy, is forever due. Amen.[4]

It is plain from these articles that the meaning cannot be that regeneration in the narrower sense—the implanting of the seed of the new life in the heart—is effected by the preaching of the gospel. The

Canons call regeneration a new creation and compare it with the resurrection from the dead. Creation, as well as the resurrection from the dead, is effected immediately by God without any human means. It is God alone who calls the things that are not as if they were and raises the dead (Rom. 4:17). But even as the sustenance of our natural life requires means, so also the new life, which is immediately created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, requires the means of the preaching of the gospel in order to cause the seed of regeneration to flourish into a conscious faith in Christ, to sustain, strengthen, and nourish it.

#### Immediate Regeneration in the Reformed Writers and Creeds

That the work of grace called regeneration in the narrower sense is immediate—not effected by the preaching of the gospel—is the view of all truly Reformed writers.

Dr. Bavinck seems to be inclined to the view that somehow the work of regeneration is always connected with the gospel, but that regeneration *per se* is always immediate:

Although joined with the external call through the gospel, this grace [of regeneration] is nevertheless not shut up in the word of the gospel, but it penetrates into the heart of man, touches, so to speak, man in his most secret being immediately and renews him in principle according to the image of God without his knowledge and will. It is absolutely independent of any consent of the mind or of any act of the free will of man. Nothing intervenes between this operation of grace and man as he is regenerated: no word, no sacrament, no church, no priest, no act of the intellect or of the will. The Holy Spirit works in the heart of the elect the grace of regeneration (of faith, of conversion, or however one may call this first moment) directly and immediately, irresistibly.

To adduce proofs from Reformed theology for this truth may be deemed superfluous. Anyone can find them with every Reformed writer about the internal calling and in every Reformed symbol. It is true that the internal calling, or regeneration, or the gift of faith, is seldom called immediate; almost without exception theologians confine themselves to circumscribe this work as efficacious, irresistible, and most delightful. Nevertheless, there is not the least doubt that the grace which works the very first principle of the new life in the heart of the sinner may be called immediate in this sense that, whether joined with the word or not, it works in man directly, without intervention and without being dependent upon man's intellectual consent or any act of the free will of man.[5]

#### Dr. Bavinck writes further:

That is the judgment which the Synod of Dordt placed over against the sentiment of the Remonstrants. A prevenient, moral, persuasive grace is altogether insufficient to bring man to faith and conversion. To the power which is exercised by the word must be added another, internal, hidden work of the Holy Spirit by which is granted, in the first place, the power of faith and of conversion, and which, in the second place, translates with infallible certainty that power into the act of faith and conversion.

This operation of the Holy Spirit is circumscribed in different ways, both by the Synod of Dordt and by the different foreign and native delegates. It is called an internal, hidden, mysterious, powerful, efficacious, supernatural, almighty, inconquerable, irresistible, gracious, and delightful grace.

But the term *immediate grace* or *immediate regeneration* was not used. It is, indeed, used, as we shall see later, by some Reformed theologians. And, understood in a good sense, this circumscription is not to be disapproved; but it is probably intentionally avoided by the Synod of Dordt and by many theologians because it can easily lead to misunderstanding and be used in favor of a certain objection of the Remonstrants, which we will mention later.

It is nevertheless established that according to Reformed doctrine the Holy Spirit does not work faith and regeneration in man in such a way that he remains bound to the means of grace or works through them. On the contrary, he penetrates into the most secret recesses of the heart of man. He opens the closed heart; he works the quickening within us without us; he comes to dwell in man with his divine power and infuses into the mind, the will, and the inclinations new properties so that the darkness, the unwillingness, and the unrighteousness is removed and replaced by enlightenment, willingness, and uprightness.[6]

#### Dr. Bavinck concludes:

There may be a difference of opinion about the question whether this operation of the Spirit can be called immediate without misunderstanding. But about the matter itself all difference is excluded. It touches the heart of Reformed theology, the very marrow of Holy Scripture, in respect to the doctrine of the application of salvation.[7]

Beyond doubt, it is very important in Reformed theology that whether or not the term *immediate* is used, the idea itself must be strictly maintained. Regeneration is an efficacious work of God alone, wrought in principle without our knowledge.

### **Immediate Regeneration in Scripture**

Immediate regeneration is certainly the teaching of Holy Writ.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:3–8).

We must note that the Greek word for *regeneration* used here means not only "born again" but also "born from above," as we read in verse 3: "Except a man be born again [ $\alpha v \omega \theta \epsilon v$ ], he cannot see the kingdom of God." Again in verse 7: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again [ $\alpha v \omega \theta \epsilon v$ ]."

We may say that there is a threefold difference between our first birth and our second birth. The first birth is in corruption, in unholiness and unrighteousness; the second birth is in holiness and in righteousness. In the first birth we are mortal in our entire nature, body and soul; in our second birth we become immortal and receive eternal life in principle. Through our first birth we become earthly and bear the image of the earthy; through our second birth, however, we become heavenly so that we seek the things above.

The text plainly indicates that this wonderful second birth, which is in holiness and immortality and which is heavenly, is not wrought through the preaching of the gospel, but is immediate. Notice that the Lord says to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again [ $\alpha v \omega \theta v$ ], he cannot see the kingdom of God." Not only does man without regeneration not enter into the kingdom of God, but he cannot even *see* it. This implies without a doubt that the grace of regeneration is absolutely first and must have precedence over any other work of grace wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. Without it man has no contact whatsoever with spiritual things and cannot even see the kingdom of God.

Note, too, that to the question of Nicodemus, "How can a man be born when he is old?" (v. 4), Jesus answers, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (v. 5). The expression "born of water" can only refer to the water of baptism, for the baptism of John must have been well-known to Nicodemus. To be born of water, therefore, refers to the forgiveness of sins and to justification. A man must be objectively justified before God before he even has a right to regeneration. The expression "born of the Spirit" refers to the new birth itself, without which a man cannot even see the kingdom of God. What must be noted especially is that in this work of regeneration wrought in the heart of man, the gospel is not even mentioned. A man who is reborn is not born through the gospel, but simply of the Holy Spirit.

This is also evident from verse 6, where the Lord says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Also here the preaching of the gospel as a means

through which this wonderful rebirth is effected is entirely left out of consideration.

That rebirth is not accomplished by the preaching of the gospel but by the work of the Holy Spirit is also clear from verse 8: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Here the Lord compares the one who is born of the Spirit with the wind, which "bloweth where it listeth," but of which one cannot tell "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." The second birth, the birth from above, is mysterious in origin. One who is conscious of the operation of the Spirit and the workings of the new birth in his heart begins to see the kingdom of God, to hear the preaching of the gospel, and to seek the things above; but why he is thus spiritually affected he cannot understand or explain. It is simply the mystery of being born of the Spirit.

Certainly, it is plain from John 3 that regeneration in its deepest sense is immediate and not wrought through the preaching of the gospel.

We may also refer to John 5:24-25:

Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, Verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

In verse 24 the Lord says that he who hears and believes "hath everlasting life [ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον]." This implies that one has eternal life before he hears; to have eternal life means that one has been regenerated. Regeneration, therefore, precedes the word of Christ. The hearing of which the Lord speaks evidently refers to the hearing of the gospel. That this hearing of the gospel follows the work of regeneration is also evident from the last part of verse 24, where the Lord says that one who is regenerated "is passed from death unto life [μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωήν]." The perfect, "is passed [μεταβέβηκεν]," undoubtedly denotes that the passing from death into life has been finished before one heard the preaching of the gospel.

This is quite in accord with John 3:3, where it is said that one cannot see the kingdom of God except he is born again. Just as the seeing of the kingdom presupposes regeneration, so also here the hearing of the word of the gospel presupposes rebirth.

The reference in John 5:25, however, is not to the preaching of the gospel, but to the efficacious word of the Son of God himself. The work of the Holy Spirit in the heart is never separated from the efficacious word of the Son of God. While the seed of regeneration is implanted into the heart of the sinner, it is by the efficacious word of the Son of God that the eyes are opened to see the things of the kingdom of God, the ears are opened to hear the word, and the heart is quickened to become receptive for the things of the kingdom of heaven.

Hence in verse 25, regeneration is presented as a resurrection from the dead through the mighty voice of the Son of God. That the text here does not speak of the final resurrection is evident from the clause "and now is." The reference is to spiritual resurrection or to regeneration. That regeneration is effected by the voice of the Son of God. In themselves men are dead, but "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." By the voice of the Son of God, then, regeneration is immediately effected. It may be true that especially in adults the work of regeneration as a whole is effected by the implanting of the new principle, by the quickening of that new principle by the voice of the Son of God, and finally by the preaching of the gospel. Nevertheless, the hearing of the voice of the Son of God is something that logically precedes the hearing of the gospel.

#### **Passages That Appear to Teach Mediate Regeneration**

Among the passages that have frequently been quoted in favor of mediate regeneration is 1 Peter 1:23–25:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

The proponents of mediate regeneration argue that it is plain from this text that regeneration is wrought only through the means of the preaching of the gospel. This interpretation is based on the fact that the apostle in verse 23 refers to the word of God through which we are reborn; in verse 25 that word of God is referred to as the word "which by the gospel is preached unto you."

However, such an interpretation of the text fails to distinguish properly and sharply between the different concepts of the text. Especially important are the two prepositions "of" (ἐκ) and "by" (διά) in verse 23. The elect are regenerated *of* an incorruptible seed (ἐκ σπορᾶς φθαρτῆς), and at the same time they are regenerated *by* the living and abiding Word of God (διὰ λόγου ζῶντος Θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος).

Regeneration is presented as developing out of a seed ( $\dot{\epsilon}\kappa$   $\sigma\pi\sigma\rho\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma$ ). This seed is the principle of regeneration wrought immediately in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is wrought in our hearts not only without our will or effort, but also even without our consciousness. In that seed as a principle of the new life, the whole of the new life, even unto glorification, is implied. Just as the acorn is the principle of the oak, so that nothing is added to the acorn in order to develop the oak, so also this seed of regeneration implies all that will ever develop into the new man in Christ.

The development of the new birth out of that incorruptible seed takes place "by the word  $[\delta i \hat{\alpha} \lambda \hat{\sigma} \gamma \sigma v]$  of God, which liveth and abideth forever." This Word is certainly not the same as the scriptures or the preaching of the gospel, but is the ever-living and abiding Word of God. The scriptures or even the preaching of the gospel cannot be said to be either living or ever-abiding. This description can be applied only to the causal, creative Word of God that is wrought efficaciously in the heart. By that powerful, efficacious Word of God the heart is opened to hear the word of truth, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14). This implanting of the seed of regeneration and the influence of this efficacious, living, and abiding Word of God are both in themselves immediate and therefore can be applied to the smallest infant as well as to the adult. In verse 25, Peter writes that this living and ever-abiding Word of God is also preached.

Conceiving of the work of regeneration as a whole, we may distinguish three stages. First, the seed of the new life is implanted in the heart immediately by the Holy Spirit. Second, by the Word of God, living and abiding forever, this seed of regeneration is developed into the new birth. Finally, through the preaching of the gospel men are externally called, and in connection with the gospel they are brought to consciousness of regeneration through the power of the same living and abiding Word of God.

Those who teach mediate regeneration also refer to Ephesians 5:14: "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The reference is certainly not to the preaching of the gospel as such, but to the same powerful, ever-living, and efficacious Word of God through Christ, whereby men are quickened and given ears to hear and eyes to see the things of the kingdom of God. Here, too, the work of regeneration is presented as a resurrection from the dead. This resurrection from the dead is certainly a wonderful work of God, which is effected without the means of the preaching of the gospel.

The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 and Luke 8 is frequently adduced as a proof of mediate

regeneration. The seed, so it is said, is the word preached, for in his own explanation of the parable the Lord tells us, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). It is argued that the word as preached is the seed of regeneration. Again, we must make careful distinctions in order to understand the true meaning of the parable. If by regeneration is meant the first development of the new life into conscious activity, we have no objection to explaining the seed as being the word of God. Nevertheless, that this is not the whole of regeneration is plainly taught by the parable of the sower and many other passages of Holy Writ. This seed of the word of God falls on three different kinds of spiritual soil without bringing forth proper fruit: the soil represented by the wayside, the soil represented by the rocky ground, and the soil represented by the ground full of thorns and thistles. Only those who are represented by the good ground "are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

It ought to be very clear that the soil in nature is not prepared by the seed, but rather for the seed. The preparation of the soil is entirely independent of the action of the sowing. This is no less true in the spiritual sense. The heart is not prepared by the gospel, but for the gospel and independently of its preaching, that is, by the direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit connected with the living and abiding and efficacious, powerful Word of God. Thus conceived, it ought to be very plain that the parable of the sower teaches not a mediate but an immediate regeneration. The preparation of the heart in the work of regeneration precedes the preaching of the gospel as the seed that must fall into good ground in order to bear fruit.

### **Regeneration Logically Distinguished**

When we distinguish regeneration as a seed and its development, as regeneration in the narrower and wider senses, or as the generation and the birth of the new life, we are using a logical rather than a temporal distinction. Some maintain that the seed of regeneration implanted in the heart of man may lie dormant for many years before it develops into conscious and active life. They claim that it is possible for a man to be under the influence of the gospel all his life, although he does not have any living part with it and is not able to see the things of the kingdom of God; he lives in sin and iniquity and continues in this state for forty, fifty, or sixty years, while all this time he has the seed of regeneration within his heart. Thus it is possible for a person to be converted at seventy or eighty years of age, although he has been regenerated from infancy.

With this we cannot agree. It may very well be that a seed in nature can continue to live for many years without any contact with the soil whatever, but it is quite inconceivable that a seed can be implanted in the soil and be under the influence of rain and sunshine without sprouting into life and bringing forth fruit. The same may be said of the seed of regeneration that is implanted in the heart and that comes under the influence of the preaching of the gospel. Regeneration will certainly reveal itself in faith and conversion, and without delay. The work of God throughout is characterized by perfect wisdom. It would be foolish to suppose that the seed of regeneration could lie dormant and inactive for many years without ever showing any signs of life. Therefore, when we make a distinction between regeneration in the narrower and wider senses, it must be understood that this is a logical distinction and not a distinction in time. The distinction may never mean a separation between regeneration and the word of God.

### The Regeneration of Infants

Finally, a word must be said about the regeneration of infants. Those who insist that regeneration is always effected through the preaching of the word do not really have an explanation for the salvation of little children. According to some, little children are not regenerated, because regeneration presupposes conscious faith, and conscious faith presupposes the hearing of the preaching of the gospel; therefore, regeneration cannot be present in infants. They claim that infants must be saved in some other inexplicable way. Some even suggest that after death infants are no more infants and are regenerated in glory. However, others who also hold that regeneration is mediate—always taking place only through the preaching of the gospel—allow an exception in the case of infants. According to them, infants are regenerated immediately.

We respond that either this is true only with those infants who die in early infancy or that the seed of regeneration is implanted in all the children who are reborn in early childhood. In the case of infants who die very young, it would seem strange that God would make an exception only with respect to them. If God is able to regenerate some children, what possible reason can there be that in the case of others he would wait until they can understand the preaching of the word to implant in them the seed of regeneration? However, if it is maintained that the seed of regeneration is implanted in *all* the children who are reborn in infancy, it may well be regarded as an established rule that infants in the line of the covenant are regenerated before they are able to hear the preaching of the word. In that case there is very little room left for mediate regeneration.

This is the Reformed view. In the line of the covenant, the seed of regeneration is implanted in the hearts of the elect children in very infancy. This does not mean that we base our view of immediate regeneration on the presupposition that children are regenerated. On the contrary, the conception that regeneration is an immediate work of the Holy Spirit, independent of the preaching of the word, is founded on scripture. Just because scripture teaches this truth and presents the rebirth of God's people in the narrower sense of the implanting of the seed of regeneration as an immediate work by the Holy Spirit, it ought to be evident that also the littlest infants can receive the grace of regeneration. Because we believe on the basis of scripture that regeneration must be conceived as an immediate work of the Spirit, and because for that very reason the regeneration of infants is possible, we regard it as a common rule that in the line of the covenant the elect children are reborn from infancy.

### **Preaching in the Covenant**

Then we can understand the real significance and operation of the preaching of the word as a means of grace in the sphere of the church and in the line of the covenant. Means require conscious action. They presuppose life. They are elements that God uses and that we also use: bread is used by God to nourish our bodies, and we eat it. Thus the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the word to work faith and to strengthen it; we also use it and are even responsible for the use of the word of God.

Only the living can possibly use means. The dead can neither eat nor drink. The spiritually dead do indeed react to the preaching of the word, but only to reject it. They never come to repentance and faith. To them the preaching is a savor of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16). Just as the physically living are able to use the means that God provides for the sustenance of their earthly life, so also the spiritually living are capable of using the means that the Holy Spirit provides for the working, the development, and the upbuilding of faith. Therefore, we maintain that regeneration is before all the work of grace and is immediate. Life is first. In regeneration the Holy Spirit implants the principle of life and with that principle of life, the power or the faculty of faith, so that those who are regenerated are potentially believers even before they come to the conscious activity of faith. Exactly in order that

infants in the line and sphere of the covenant and of the church may have contact as early as possible with the preaching of the gospel in all its forms, the Lord God in his wisdom implants the seed of regeneration in the hearts of the elect children, potentially giving them eyes to see and ears to hear by the powerful, efficacious, ever-living, and abiding Word of God. In other words, God immediately regenerates elect children from infancy.

In the sphere of the covenant, conscious faith and repentance are wrought gradually in little children through the influence of the preaching of the word. It stands to reason that the influence of the preaching is not limited to the official ministry in the church on Sunday and on the mission field. It includes many other activities, such as the work of the theological school, where young men are trained for the ministry of the word and where the truth of the word of God is further developed, defended, and maintained over against all errors. There is the labor of preserving and translating, as well as interpreting scripture—a labor that shows its fruit not only in many works on textual criticism, but also in hundreds of commentaries. Then there is the calling of the church to establish and formulate the truth of the word of God in her confessions, not only to defend the truth over against opponents and gainsayers, but also to preserve it in generations. But of all these labors, the official ministry of the word as a means of grace by the church of Christ in the world is the very center and heart.

In the sphere of the church, God in his infinite wisdom and mercy causes the covenant child to be born and to be placed from very infancy under the influence of the preaching of the word in its widest sense. This influence the church exerts in the administration of baptism when it exacts from the parents the promise to bring up their children "in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein." [8] The parents are asked to acknowledge that this doctrine in which the children must be instructed, "is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and . . . is taught here in this Christian Church, to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation." [9] The influence of the word of God upon the child is also exerted in the covenant home. This is continued in the Sunday school, through the ministry of the word directly in catechism, and in the midst of the congregation through the preaching. Moreover, the influence of the preaching of the word in the sphere of the church is felt in many other ways, such as the reading of the Bible in the home, the conversation of the saints among one another, and the study of scripture in various societies that are organized within the church. But the very heart of this sphere and influence is the preaching of the word as a means of grace.

### The Development of Covenant Children under the Preaching

No one can say at how early an age the Holy Spirit and the living and abiding Word of God can and do quicken the seed of regeneration and bring the faculty of faith to a more or less conscious activity. Worldly educators realize clearly that the whole outside world streams in upon the consciousness of a child from earliest infancy and makes its impression upon that consciousness. Modern educators stress the importance of surrounding the child, even in its cradle, with objects, sounds, shapes, colors, and smells that make the most favorable impression upon the infant. Why then cannot the Holy Spirit, in connection with the living Word of God, impress the little child with all the influences of a truly covenant home—singing psalms or hymns, playing sacred music, a parent's prayer uttered at the cradle, folding the infant's little hands in prayer at the table in the highchair, and many others—to bring the faculty of faith into conscious activity? We know very little of an infant's life, but it is certain that long before what is usually considered the age of discretion there can be and is a decided

influence of the Word of God upon the covenant child.

According to our conviction, it is especially for this reason that children of the covenant are regenerated from earliest infancy. Why should God, according to the rule of the covenant, bring little children under the influence of the preaching of the word from their earliest infancy if they are not regenerated? The dead certainly cannot use means, and there is no proper reaction to the preaching of the word by those who are spiritually dead. Only those who are living are capable of using the means that the Holy Spirit provides for the working of faith and for the development and upbuilding of that faith. We believe that as a rule the elect children of the covenant are regenerated from earliest infancy. As the child grows up in the sphere of the covenant, he gradually comes to conscious faith, receives the promise, and assumes his part of the covenant, which, according to the "Form for the Administration of Baptism," consists in being

admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.[10]

When the child of the covenant reaches the age of discretion, having always walked in the way of the covenant, he is not and cannot be expected to be conscious of any sudden or remarkable change or conversion in his life. To be sure, the change that we call conversion must surely take place. The covenant child must be able to give account of himself and must be conscious of true conversion, which consists of the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man. He must be conscious of a sincere sorrow of heart that he has provoked God by his sins. He must be cognizant of a desire to hate and flee from sin. He must be conscious of a sincere joy of heart in God through Christ and of a sincere delight to live according to the will of God in all good works. But in the way of the covenant, this conversion is not sudden or marked, but gradual. The question is not when and where the covenant child was converted or how that change was effected in him, but whether he knows his conversion and reveals it by a walk in the way of continued conversion in the midst of the church and in the world. [11] This entire change is wrought through the preaching of the word.

The preaching of the word in the sphere of the covenant must be both distinctive and upbuilding. It cannot proceed from the assumption that all the children of the covenant, that is, all those who are born in the sphere of and under the covenant, are elect and regenerated. The theory of presumptive regeneration, according to which it is presumed that all of the children born under the covenant are regenerated, is certainly not scriptural: all are not Israel that are of Israel; not the children of the flesh, "but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6–8). It cannot even be said that those who are under the covenant, but who are and remain carnal and never come to saving faith or true conversion are the exception rather than the rule. The history of the Old Testament church teaches quite the opposite. Always the carnal seed abounded in the covenant of the old dispensation, and only a remnant according to the election of grace was saved.

Nor does this appear different when we look at the church of the new dispensation in general. If we consider baptized Christendom as a whole, it would seem that those who have apostatized from the faith are far more numerous than the faithful believers are. Always there is the carnal seed in the church. The theory of presumptive regeneration, which teaches that all the children born in the covenant are elect, is not only unscriptural, but also dangerous. Dangerous it is, not because, as the popular saying goes, it tends to let people go to hell with an imaginary heaven. That is quite impossible, at least where the truth is preached. But the danger is that because it presumes what is not true according to scripture, it leaves the carnally minded in the church, so that the church of Christ is

corrupted. Therefore, the preaching must be directed not only to the elect, but also to the reprobate; not only to the godly, but also to the ungodly. It must be so distinctive that under its influence the reprobate and ungodly cannot remain, but will reveal themselves as haters of the truth of God and his Christ.

Moreover, even the elect and regenerated are not perfect; even regarding them there is much flesh in the church. Daily they have to strive with the desires and lusts of the flesh, so that they must be admonished to walk steadfastly in the way of the covenant, to hate sin, to fight against it, and to flee from it.

The preaching in the sphere of the covenant must always be distinctive. This does not necessarily mean that it must divide the church into elect and reprobate, converted and unconverted, and address them separately. Rather, it means that the whole church, as it organically exists in the world, must be brought under the influence of the very same preaching: the same word must be directed to all. All must be exhorted to be converted and to convert themselves, to repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). All must be admonished continually to walk in the way of sanctification and to live antithetically as being of the party of the living God in the midst of the world. Such preaching will be a savor of life for those whom God has chosen unto everlasting salvation, but at the same time a savor of death unto death for the rest (2 Cor. 2:16). Only under such preaching will the church be built up and will believers be edified.

### **Chapter 37**

## The Idea of the Sacraments

#### The Term Sacrament

The term *sacrament* is not derived from scripture but from the Latin word *sacramentum*. This term originally denoted a sum of money as a pledge between two parties in litigation. The purpose of this pledge seems to have been a propitiatory sacrifice to the gods. In the Vulgate the term *sacramentum* is a translation of the Greek μυστήριον (*mystery*). Although the term *sacramentum* is not scriptural, the church of the new dispensation has used it for many centuries to denote the signs and seals of the new covenant.

#### The Sacraments in the Reformed Creeds

In all of the Reformed confessions the sacraments occupy a very important place. The Heidelberg Catechism defines the sacraments in general as

visible, holy signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof he may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the Gospel; namely, that he grants us out of free grace the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.[1]

The Belgic Confession describes and defines the sacraments as follows:

We believe that our gracious God, on account of our weakness and infirmities, hath ordained the Sacraments for us, thereby to seal unto us his promises, and to be pledges of the good will and grace of God toward us, and also to nourish and strengthen our faith, which he hath joined to the word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses, both that which he signifies to us by his Word, and that which he works inwardly in our hearts, thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which he imparts to us. For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means whereof God worketh in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. Therefore the signs are not in vain or insignificant, so as to deceive us. For Jesus Christ is the true object presented by them, without whom they would be of no moment.

Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of Sacraments which Christ our Lord hath instituted, which are two only, namely, the Sacrament of Baptism, and the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ.[2]

In both of these descriptions of the sacraments, we find the following elements:

- 1. Sacraments are instituted to strengthen the faith of the believer, and therefore they presuppose faith
- 2. Sacraments are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, and God has joined them to the word, the preaching of the gospel, "the better to present to our senses, both that which he signifies to us by his Word, and that which he works inwardly in our hearts, thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which he imparts to us."[3]
- 3. Sacraments are ordained and instituted by God. There are many signs, and there may be many seals. But in order to be sacraments, signs and seals must be definitely and especially ordained and appointed by the God of our salvation.
- 4. Sacraments signify and seal unto us the promise of the gospel, namely, that God grants us freely the remission of sin and life eternal for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.

The First Helvetic Confession describes the sacraments as follows:

The signs, which are called sacraments, are two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are significant, holy signs of sublime, secret things. However, they are not mere, empty signs, but consist of the sign and substance. For in baptism the water is the sign, but the substance and spiritual thing is rebirth and admission into the people of God. In the Lord's Supper the bread and wine are the signs, but the spiritual substance is the communication of the body and blood of Christ, the salvation acquired on the Cross, and forgiveness of sins. As the signs are bodily received, so these substantial, invisible and spiritual things are received in faith. Moreover, the entire power, efficacy and fruit of the sacraments lies in these spiritual and substantial things. [4]

The emphasis in this article falls on the fact that the sacraments, considered as a whole, do not merely consist in the signs and seals, but include the things signified.

The Second Helvetic Confession has a very long article on the sacraments, of which we quote only a part:

God even from the beginning added unto the preaching of the Word his sacraments, or sacramental signs, in his Church. And to this does the Holy Scripture plainly testify. Sacraments are mystical symbols, or holy rites, or sacred actions, ordained by God himself, consisting of his Word, of outward signs, and of things signified: whereby he keeps in continual memory, and recalls to mind, in his Church, his great benefits bestowed upon man; and whereby he seals up his promises, and outwardly represents, and, as it were, offers unto our sight those things which inwardly he performs unto us, and therewithal strengthens and increases our faith through the working of God's Spirit in our hearts; lastly, whereby he does separate us from all other people and religions, and consecrates and binds us wholly unto himself, and gives us to understand what he requires of us.[5]

The Second Helvetic's description not only contains substantially the same elements as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, but also emphasizes that the things signified belong to the sacraments. Moreover, it adds that belonging to the sacraments is the word of God, which it even mentions first.

That the word of God is an essential element in the sacraments is even more clearly expressed in the following quotation:

And as in the old Church the sacraments consisted of the word, the sign, and the thing signified; so even at this day they are composed, as it were, of the same parts. For the Word of God makes them sacraments, which before were none: for they are consecrated by the Word, and declared to be sanctified by him who first ordained them. To sanctify or consecrate a thing is to dedicate it unto God, and unto holy uses; that is, to take it from the common and ordinary use, and to appoint it to some holy use. For the signs in the sacraments are drawn from common use, things external and visible. As in Baptism, the outward sign is the element of water, and that visible washing which is done by the minister; but the thing signified is regeneration and the cleansing from sins. Likewise, in the Lord's Supper, the outward sign is bread and wine, taken from things commonly used for meat and drink; but the thing signified is the body of Christ which was given, and his blood which was shed for us, or the communion of the body and blood of the Lord. Wherefore, the water, bread, and wine, considered in their own nature, and out of this holy use and institution of the Lord, are only that which they are called, and which we find them to be. But let the Word of God be added to them, together with the invocation upon his holy name, and the renewing of their first institution and sanctification, and then these signs are consecrated, and declared to be sanctified by Christ. For Christ's first institution and consecration of the sacraments stands yet in force in the Church of God, in such sort that they who celebrate the sacraments no otherwise than the Lord himself from the beginning has appointed, have still, even to this day, the use and benefit of that first and most excellent consecration. And for this cause, in the administration of the sacraments, the very words of Christ are repeated. [6]

According to the same article, the thing signified in the sacrament belongs with the signs and seals:

And as we learn out of the Word of God that these signs were appointed unto another end and use than the common one, therefore we teach that they now, in this their holy use, do take upon them the names of the thing signified, and are not still called bare water, bread, or wine; but that the water is called "regeneration, and washing of the new birth" (Tit. 3:5), and the bread and wine "the body of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:16), or the pledges and sacraments of his body and blood. Not

that the signs are turned into the things signified, or cease to be that which in their own nature they are (for then they could not be sacraments, which should consist only of the things signified, and have no signs); but therefore do the signs bear the names of things, because they are mystical tokens of holy things, and because the signs and the things signified are sacramentally joined together; joined together, I say, or united by a mystical signification, and by the purpose and will of him who first instituted them. For the water, bread, and wine are not common, but holy signs. And he that instituted water in Baptism did not institute it with that mind and purpose that the faithful should only be dipped in the water of Baptism; and he which commanded the bread to be eaten and the wine to be drunk in the Supper did not mean that the faithful should only receive bread and wine without any further mystery, as they eat bread at home in their houses: but that they should spiritually be partakers of the things signified, and by faith be truly purged from their sins, and be partakers of Christ also.

#### In the French Confession of Faith we read the following on the sacraments in general:

We believe that the sacraments are added to the Word for more ample confirmation, that they may be to us pledges and seals of the grace of God, and by this means aid and comfort our faith, because of the infirmity which is in us, and that they are outward signs through which God operates by his Spirit, so that he may not signify any thing to us in vain. Yet we hold that their substance and truth is in Jesus Christ, and that of themselves they are only smoke and shadow.[8]

According to this article, the word of God is always the main means of grace, and the sacraments are added to the word for more ample confirmation. The sacraments are pledges and seals of the grace of God. The sacraments are an aid and comfort to our faith, implying that faith is presupposed. The sacraments are outward signs through which God operates by his Spirit. The sacraments of themselves, as mere signs, are nothing but smoke and shadow; their substance and truth is in Christ.

Later, the French Confession emphasizes that the sign and the thing signified belong together in the sacraments:

We believe, as has been said, that in the Lord's Supper, as well as in baptism, God gives us really and in fact that which he there sets forth to us; and that consequently with these signs is given the true possession and enjoyment of that which they present to us. [9]

The Scottish Confession of Faith also emphasizes that the sacraments are instituted for the confirmation and strengthening of the faith of believers, to seal unto them the assurance of the promise of God and the most blessed communion, which the elect have with their head, Christ Jesus. They are not "naked and bare signs," but they are so efficacious "that by Baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of His righteousness" and of the forgiveness of sins. And by the Lord's supper, "Christ is so joined with us that He becomes the very nourishment and food for our souls." All of this is effected through the sacraments by the power of the Holy Spirit,

who by true faith carries us above all things that are visible, carnal, and earthly, and makes us feed upon the body and blood of Christ Jesus, once broken and shed for us but now in heaven, and appearing for us in the presence of His Father. [10]

Moreover, the confession teaches that the sacrament is effectual not only at the moment it is administered or when the believers partake of it, but also that

afterwards it shall bring forth fruit, being living seed sown in good ground; for the Holy Spirit, who can never be separated from the right institution of the Lord Jesus, will not deprive the faithful of the fruit of that mystical action.[11]

Finally, the confession emphasizes, "all this . . . comes of that true faith which apprehends Christ Jesus, who alone makes the sacrament effectual in us." [12]

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England speak of the sacraments in general as follows:

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain

sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.[13]

#### The confession speaks of the sacrament of baptism as follows:

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God. [14]

#### Concerning the Lord's supper the confession teaches:

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ. [15]

Also according to this confession, faith is presupposed in the administration and the use of sacraments. Without faith no one can really or essentially receive the sacrament properly:

The Wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as Saint Augustine saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ; yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing. [16]

#### The Irish Articles of Religion speak of the sacraments in the following words:

The Sacraments ordained by Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather certain sure witnesses and effectual or powerful signs of grace and God's good will towards us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him. [17]

This confession also emphasizes the truth that the sacraments are not only unto salvation for the believer, but also unto judgment and condemnation for the unbeliever. The sacraments must not be carried about, but should be properly used. "And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect and operation; but they that receive them unworthily, thereby draw judgment upon themselves." [18]

#### According to the Irish confession:

[Baptism is] a Sacrament of our admission into the Church, sealing unto us our new birth (and consequently our justification, adoption, and sanctification) by the communion which we have with Jesus Christ. [19]

The Lord's Supper is not only a sign of the mutual love which Christians ought to bear one towards another, but much more a Sacrament of our preservation in the Church, sealing unto us our spiritual nourishment and continual growth in Christ.[20]

#### The Irish confession describes the Lord's supper as follows:

In the outward part of the holy Communion, the body and blood of Christ is in a most lively manner *represented;* being no otherwise present with the visible elements than things signified and sealed are present with the signs and seals—that is to say, symbolically and relatively. But in the inward and spiritual part the same body and blood is really and substantially *presented* unto all those who have grace to receive the Son of God, even to all those that believe in his name. And unto such as in this manner do worthily and with faith repair unto the Lord's table, the body and blood of Christ is not only signified and offered, but also truly exhibited and communicated.[21]

Here, too, the sacrament is presented as including the sign and the thing signified.

Further, that faith is required and presupposed in the partaking of the Lord's supper is evident:

The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Lord's Supper only after a heavenly and spiritual manner; and the mean whereby the body of Christ is thus received and eaten is Faith.[22]

The Irish confession emphasizes concerning those who are wicked and have not faith, although they carnally and visibly eat and drink the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ: "yet in nowise are they made partakers of Christ; but rather to their condemnation do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing." [23]

Finally, we quote from the Westminster Confession of Faith:

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word. [24]

The Westminster Confession includes in the sacrament both the sign and the thing signified:

There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and the effects of the one are attributed to the other.[25]

The whole of the sacrament is neither effectual in itself, nor does its efficacy depend on the intention of him who administers the sacrament, "but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers." [26]

The sacrament of baptism is not only for the solemn admission of the baptized person into the visible church, "but also [is] unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life." [27]

The Westminster states that the sacrament of the Lord's supper, should be

observed in his Church, unto the end of the world; for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body. [28]

Concerning the relation between the sign and the thing signified in the Lord's supper, the confession states:

The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly, and only, bread and wine, as they were before.[29]

The Westminster Confession also emphasizes that the sacraments are efficacious only to believers; in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, faith receives and feeds upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death. The wicked, however, can receive the sacrament only to their condemnation:

Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they

unworthy of the Lord's table, and can not, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.[30]

#### The Sacraments Defined

Sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals instituted by God through Christ, administered by the church, and received by believers and their seed, whereby God in Christ signifies visibly the invisible grace of his covenant and seals it unto believers and whereby he gives to his church ensigns and banners of his covenant, in order to separate and distinguish believers from the world.

#### The Sacraments as Signs

Signs in general serve the purpose of visibly representing something that is in itself invisible. Numerous are such signs in the life of men, who apparently have need of expressing the spiritual and invisible by a visible and material token. Secret police bear badges of their invisible authority and power. Members of secret societies and unions wear buttons to denote their membership and their unity with the fraternity to which they belong. A ship raises its flag as a sign of its nationality.

The same is true of signs in the word of God. The word itself is really a sign, because language serves the purpose of expressing in visible and audible form that which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which has never been conceived in the heart of man (1 Cor. 2:9). Also in creation there are many visible signs of the invisible and heavenly things.

In a very general sense all things are signs and symbols of heavenly things. When the creator of the universe called into existence the present world, he had respect unto the world to come. Mere earthly things did not constitute the ultimate realization of his eternal good pleasure. He provided some better thing for his people: the glory of the heavenly kingdom. When he made earthly things, he had heavenly things in mind; so he made the earthly to be the image of the heavenly. So it happens that all things are signs and that the things of the kingdom of God, according to the word of Christ, take place in parables (Mark 4:11). The sun, the moon, and the stars, shining and sparkling in the firmament; the rainbow that spans the heavens; the beasts of the field and the flying birds; the cedars of Lebanon and the noble vine; the thorn and the thistle; the lamb and the serpent; the mystery of numbers and the manifold beauty of the colors; the earthly square, the heavenly cube, and the eternal circle; the sparkling diamond and the softly shining pearl; the sand by the seashore, the restless ocean, and the mighty mountains; the bare desert and the fertile field; the seed that falls into the earth and dies in order to live again; the fierce tempest and the gentle zephyr; the roaring thunder and the flashing lightning; the light of day and the darkness of the night—all things are signs, speaking a language of their own, pointing upward, and groaning in hope.

This is not all that must be said. There are also signs that the Lord God himself has separated out of his creation and that he has especially designated as signs to draw the attention of his people. The tree of life in the first paradise was more than a sign insofar as Adam could achieve the perpetuation of his earthly life through the means of that tree (Gen. 2:9; Gen. 3:22–24). Nevertheless, that tree was also a sign. As it stood in the midst of the first paradise, it was a token between God and Adam of the life of the friendship of God, an image of the eternal life in the new paradise that was to come. The same was true of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was a sign to Adam—and between God and Adam—of the antithesis, a sign that in the way of either obedience or disobedience he could attain a certain knowledge of good and evil. In the way of obedience, Adam would be established in that positive knowledge according to which he would hate evil and love good, while in the way of

disobedience, he would plunge himself into the darkness in which he hated the good and loved the evil.

There are many other signs in scripture, all of which are centrally connected with the covenant and its realization. The rainbow is a sign of the invisible faithfulness and grace of God's eternal covenant in its universal dimension, as it embraces all creation (Gen. 9:13–17). The sand by the seashore and the innumerable multitude of stars in the firmament are signs of the innumerable seed of Abraham (Gen. 15:5; Gen. 22:17; Gen. 32:12). The flood is called a sign of baptism (1 Pet. 3:20–21), as is the passage through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1–2). The miracles performed by the Savior during his earthly ministry—healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, strengthening the lame and halt, changing water into wine, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead—all were signs manifesting the power and authority of Christ to redeem and to renew all things in the eternal kingdom of heaven.

Distinct from all these, however, are the signs of the sacraments. They are distinct especially because they are *instituted* signs. They are instituted in the church, are to be administered by the church, and are to serve as distinguishing marks for the church. Nevertheless, the sacraments are first of all *signs*. There are in the sacraments the visible tokens—water, bread, and wine. These visible tokens represent the invisible grace of God's covenant, the blood of Christ, forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification, entrance into God's covenant, incorporation into the body of Christ, and nourishing grace received out of Christ. Because the sacraments are signs they also serve as ensigns and banners, separating and distinguishing the people of God from the world, and designating them as being of the party of the living God.

#### The Sacraments as Seals

The sacraments are also seals, as is plain from Romans 4:11:

And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

A seal is a sign of the authority of its author—in this case, God. It is a seal that cannot be violated or broken. It is a solemn pledge or oath. The significance of the seal is indicated in Hebrews 6:16–18:

For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

Especially in connection with the sacrament of baptism, these questions are often asked: What is sealed by the sacraments? Does God assure everyone who receives the outward sign that his salvation is sealed to him? In other words, is the sacrament a seal of God upon every person who receives the sacrament?

It is sometimes alleged that the sacrament of baptism seals the internal grace of God to everyone who is baptized. This, however, is impossible. There are many who partake of or receive the sacrament without believing or without having faith. Not all who receive the sacraments are saved.

Others try to make the distinction between the objective bequest or objective promise of God and the subjective reception of it. According to them, through the seal and sign of the sacrament, God

assures everyone who receives the sacrament that he will grant salvation out of free grace, on condition of faith and obedience. This means about the same thing as the well-meant offer of salvation to all who hear the gospel. Just as the promise of salvation in the well-meant offer of the gospel is intended for all who hear it, so also God objectively promises grace, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life to all who outwardly receive the sacrament. Whether or not the sacrament is applicable to and valid for him who receives it depends upon the recipient's acceptance of God's gracious bequest.

This view of the sacrament is the conception of William Heyns, professor for many years in the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church. It is also the view of the Liberated in the Netherlands, those who belong to the Reformed Churches under Article 31 of the *Church Order of Dordt*. According to this view, the essence of the covenant is the promise of God, and the distinction is made between God's objective bequest of salvation and the believer's subjective acceptance of that bequest. In his interpretation of the "Form for the Administration of Baptism," Heyns makes the distinction between the work of the Father and the Son on the one hand, and the work of the Holy Spirit on the other.[31]

In the sacrament of baptism:

God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit . . . the Son sealeth unto us, that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God. [32]

All of this, according to Heyns, belongs to God's objective bequest of grace and salvation. The promise of God is applicable to all who receive the sacrament. Whether or not those who partake of the sacrament will also actually receive the promised salvation depends upon the subjective state of him who receives the sacrament, that is, upon the faith of the believer and upon his acceptance of the bequest and the promise of God. Heyns then wants to read the part of the baptism form that speaks of the application of salvation and of all its blessings in Christ by the Holy Spirit in such a way that this application is dependent upon the choice and will of man. God the Father and God the Son objectively grant and bequeath all that is included in the promise of salvation to everyone who receives the sacrament of baptism. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit, Heyns emphasizes that the baptism form does not say that the Spirit *does* dwell in us, but that he *will* dwell in us and *will* apply unto us all that we have in Christ. But this is impossible, because it really excludes from the objective bequest or from the promise of God the work of the Holy Spirit and the application of all the blessings of salvation to the elect. That this smacks of Arminianism and Pelagianism goes without saying.

We must maintain that sacraments seal neither the *persons* who receive the sacrament, head for head and soul for soul, nor an *objective bequest* or a *promise of salvation* to everyone who receives the sign of the sacrament. But, according to scripture, they seal the *righteousness which is out of faith*. The seal, therefore, can only be meant for the believer and thus for the elect. That is why the element of faith was emphasized in all the quotations from the Reformed symbols that we have already cited. In the sacrament, God assures with an oath that he reckons faith unto righteousness. Through the sacrament he assures the believers in Jesus Christ that he will surely grant unto them the grace of his covenant and the salvation promised to them.

In other words, the sacraments, like the preaching of the gospel, are not general but particular. Even as the promises of the gospel are particular and are only for the believers—in last analysis, for the elect—so also the seal of the sacrament is a particular seal. The sacrament sets the inviolable seal of

God upon the unbreakable connection between faith and righteousness, without the works of the law. This is evidently the meaning of Romans 4:11: "And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." Sacraments have no positive value and meaning except for the believer. Without faith one can never appeal to the outward sign of the sacrament as a proof that he is saved. The sign indeed has significance also for the unbeliever who receives the sign, but it is to his condemnation.

This does not mean that through the sacrament God ever lies. The sacraments never lie, for they testify that they are seals of the righteousness which is of faith. No more than the promise of the gospel lies when it declares that all those who believe in Jesus Christ shall have eternal life, do the sacraments lie when they seal the very promise of the gospel. Exactly because faith is required in the true participation of the sacraments—and faith is not of man but is the work of God through the Holy Spirit, the author of faith—the sacraments as well as the gospel are ultimately only for the elect. Just as for the unbelieving reprobate the gospel is a savor of death unto death, so also the sacrament, whether of baptism or of holy communion, is a savor of death unto death for those who have not the faith. To the believers, and therefore to the elect, God in the sacraments seals his salvation.

#### The Institution of the Sacraments

The sacraments are signs and seals instituted by God in the church. God ordained them and separated them unto the purpose of sacraments. Water, bread, and wine are adapted in creation to be signs of the grace of Christ, but in themselves they are not sacramental signs. They become sacramental signs through God's separating and ordaining them specifically to be signs of his salvation. This implies that the church receives the sacraments in order that they should be observed and administered by her, as is evident from scripture.

That God instituted circumcision in the old dispensation as a sign and seal of the righteousness which is by faith is evident from Genesis 17:9–11:

And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

The same is true of the passover, which definitely was instituted by God for the church of the old dispensation: "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever" (Ex. 12:14).

That baptism was instituted by God through Christ is also clear from scripture: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19).

The apostle Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 11:23–27 of having received the ordinance of the Lord's supper as a special revelation:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.



### **Chapter 38**

# The Sacrament of Baptism

### **Baptism in the Reformed Creeds**

All of the Reformed confessions emphasize the significance and the importance of the sacrament of baptism. The First Helvetic Confession denotes this significance as follows:

According to the institution of the Lord, baptism is a bath of regeneration which the Lord offers and presents to His elect with a visible sign through the ministry of the Church . . . We baptize our children in this holy bath because it would be unjust if we were to rob of the fellowship of God's people those who have been born us for a people of God, for which they had been intended by the divine Word and of whom it may be assumed that they have been elected by God. [1]

We may note especially four elements in the confession. On the basis of Titus 3:5, baptism is designated as a washing of regeneration; baptism is a visible sign administered by the church; baptism is such a sign only for the elect; children are baptized because they belong to the people of God, and are presumed to be elect.

The Second Helvetic Confession explains the significance of baptism as follows:

There is but one baptism in the Church of God; for it is sufficient to be once baptized or consecrated unto God. For baptism once received does continue all a man's life, and is a perpetual sealing of our adoption unto us. For to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance, of the sons of God . . . to be purged also from the filthiness of sins . . . by the blood of his Son, and in him adopt[ed] to be his sons, and . . . [to be] inwardly . . . regenerated, purified, and renewed of God through the Holy Spirit.[2]

The Belgic Confession teaches that baptism is instituted instead of circumcision. By baptism we are received into the church of God and separated from the whole world, so we may wholly belong to God. By baptism God testifies that he will forever be our gracious God and Father. Baptism is a sign of the washing away of the filth of our souls and of regeneration from children of wrath unto children of God. This is not effected by the external water, but by the grace of God, "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."[3]

The French Confession of Faith teaches that baptism is a sign and seal of our incorporation into the body of Christ and, therefore, of our receiving its resulting benefits, that is, the washing away of our sins and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This grace of baptism is not limited to the moment of baptism, but continues throughout our whole life.[4]

The Scottish Confession of Faith does not contain a separate article on the sacrament of holy baptism, but it speaks of sacraments in general and says concerning the sacrament of baptism, "We assuredly believe that by Baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of His righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted." [5] This article teaches that baptism is a sign and seal of our incorporation into the body of Christ and of the washing away of our sins.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England present baptism as a sign whereby the people of God are distinguished from the world. Baptism is also a sign of regeneration or of the new birth. Baptism is an instrument whereby they who rightly receive the sacrament are grafted into the church

of Christ. We note here that the creed emphasizes that only those who rightly receive the sacrament are thus ingrafted into the body of Christ. Baptism is a visible sign and seal of the promises of the forgiveness of sins and the adoption unto sons of God by the Holy Ghost. Baptism is a means of grace for the confirmation and strengthening of our faith. [6]

The Irish Articles of Religion add nothing to the teaching of the confessions cited above, nor does the Westminster Confession of Faith, except that by implication it repudiates the theory that baptism is based on presumptive regeneration, and it seems to imply that the efficacy of baptism is experienced only by the elect.[7]

#### The Baptism of John

A word must still be said about the institution of baptism for the church of the new dispensation by calling attention to the significance of the baptism of John.

The Roman Catholic Church rejects the idea that the baptism of John is essentially the same as Christian baptism: "If any one saith, that the baptism of John had the same force as the baptism of Christ: let him be anathema." [8]

Even among Reformed theologians there are those who deny the identity of the two baptisms. They point to the fact that Acts 19:1–7 clearly speaks of twelve men who were baptized by John and rebaptized by Paul:

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesised. And all the men were about twelve.

We will not go into this question in detail, but only remark that to say the least, it is very questionable whether this interpretation is the correct and only possible interpretation of this passage. The question is whether the address of Paul to the men of Ephesus who were baptized by John must be understood as ending in verse 4 or as including verse 5.

If Paul's address ends in verse 5, we may translate the passage as follows: "Then Paul said, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying only to the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus; and those who heard John were indeed baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." If this is true, the text does not refer to any rebaptism by Paul, but rather tells us that Paul instructed those twelve men that the baptism of John had the same significance as the baptism of Jesus, so that when John baptized them, they were at the same time baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

In favor of this interpretation is also the fact that Paul is not presented as taking any action until the sixth verse, which informs us that when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. If the text had meant to teach that Paul rebaptized those men, it would undoubtedly have read as follows: "And when Paul had thus spoken to them, he baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he had laid hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied."

Baptism was not formally instituted until the glorification of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Only then do we read definitely that Jesus commands the disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach

all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Besides, at the time when John was baptizing, circumcision was still a sign and seal of the righteousness which is by faith (Rom. 4:11). Baptism had not yet replaced the sign of circumcision. John, the greatest of all the prophets, stood on the threshold of the kingdom of heaven; nevertheless, he belonged to the old dispensation. For that reason John baptized only Israelites and adult Jews. As far as we know, John did not baptize children.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the baptism of John had essentially the same significance as the baptism of Jesus, because it was the baptism of the remission of sins: "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:5–6); "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). The baptism of John was certainly divinely ordained: "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost" (John 1:33). From Matthew 21:23–27, it is evident that the Lord himself set his seal of authority upon the baptism of John. Besides, we must not forget that for a time Jesus and John baptized simultaneously. All these facts show that the baptism of John was essentially the same as the baptism of Jesus.

# Christ's Baptism

In the context of John's baptism, the question may be asked, Why was Christ baptized? If the baptism of John was a sign of the remission of sins and could be received only upon the repentance of the candidate, how was it possible that Christ could be baptized? Christ knew no sin. He was the person of the Son of God in human nature. He was holy and undefiled, separate from sinners. He had no consciousness of sin. How then could be properly receive the sign of forgiveness?

This seems to be a paradox. Yet in reality it was very proper and necessary that Jesus should be baptized. If we look upon him as a person, he had no need of baptism. However, it is different as soon as we conceive of him as the head of his church. With that church he was legally one, representing them before the face of God. The sins of all his people were upon him. As being under the law he was circumcised; as being the end of the law, it was necessary that he should be baptized. His baptism was unique in the sense that it was a sign of baptism in his own blood. This was his real baptism, of which the baptism of John was but a sign. Baptism is a sign of submerging into death and bearing the punishment of sin, of submerging into death in such a way that the justice of God is fully satisfied. It is also a sign of rising again unto a new life. Thus Jesus was baptized into his own death. He descended into the depths of God's wrath and into the deepest darkness of death, tasted death for all his people, and rose again in the glorious resurrection, justified by the very sentence of God upon him.

Of this baptism into his own blood and into his own death, he received the sign when John baptized him. He was about to enter upon his public ministry. In that ministry he was to announce the kingdom of heaven. He was to announce that he would establish and bring that kingdom. He is the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14), the king, the anointed of God, the life (John 11:25; John 14:6), the bread of life (John 6:35), the water of life, the door (John 10:7), and the way into the everlasting tabernacle of God. He was to enter into the sheepfold and lead out his sheep (vv. 2–3). All of this was concentrated around his death. If he would not die, he would be none of these things. His death was the essential element of his whole ministry. Therefore, it was very proper that he should be baptized of John as a sign of his ultimate baptism into death. Christ descended into Jordan as a pledge that as the obedient

servant he would fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15) and presently descend into the Jordan of his own death. Hence in Luke's account of Jesus' baptism, we read that as Jesus descended into the Jordan, he was praying—no doubt consecrating himself as the servant of the Lord—and praying, too, for the Spirit of God without measure (Luke 3:21–22). The great importance of this occasion was emphasized by the voice of God from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

We conclude, therefore, that the baptism of the new dispensation commenced with the baptism of John, for God sent John to baptize, and to be baptized by him had essentially the same meaning as to be baptized into Jesus Christ. The baptism of John was sealed by Christ when he came to John to be baptized of him. And the institution of baptism was sealed for the whole church of the new dispensation by the specific command of Christ: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19).

# The Baptism Formula

The baptism formula used by the church is based upon Matthew 28:19. It is essential that this formula be retained; nothing else may be substituted for it. In fact, only baptism administered in the name of the triune God is recognized by Reformed churches. In the original we read of baptism  $\varepsilon i \zeta \tau \delta$  ovoµ $\alpha$  (*into the name*). This does not mean "upon the authority of the name of the triune God," but rather "into the fellowship of God triune as he has revealed himself in the name of Jesus Christ."

The name of God in scripture has a very important significance, as we well know. It denotes God or Jehovah as he reveals himself to us, is known to us, and is near to us. God is God, the infinite and eternal one, who is himself invisible. But he made himself a name. He revealed himself. By this name he comes down to us, is known to us, is near us, and surrounds us on every side. This name of the Lord in general is in all the works of his hands. The psalmist sings in Psalm 8:1, 9, "O Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" All creation is the handiwork of God, and all creatures spell his name, for they are created by the Word of God, the *Logos*. Not only did he call them into being, but he is also in them and upholds them by his almighty and omnipresent power, sustaining and governing them in all their existence and operation. All that is and all that occurs in creation and in the history of the world declares the name of the Lord, is a revelation of the living God, who is always near. Therefore, the psalmist sings, "Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare" (Ps. 75:1).

Nevertheless, that name of the Lord as it is revealed in creation is not sufficient to know him as the God of our salvation. Even more, that name reveals his wrath upon all the workers of iniquity. We could never know that name of the Lord in all the works of his hands unless we behold those works in the light of another name by which the Lord has made himself known to us. That name is in the scriptures. And that name is *Jesus*. Only when we behold the glorious name of the Lord from the standpoint of the name *Jesus* does it become the name of the God of our salvation. Apart from that one name revealed in scripture, the revelation of God in creation brings the name of God to us not only as a name of power and might, but also as a name of wrath that loudly proclaims that God is angry with the wicked every day, and that he will visit the workers of iniquity with his just punishment in time and eternity (Rom. 1:18–32). But there is another, a new and altogether wonderful revelation of the name of Jehovah, the name *Jesus*. From the viewpoint of the name *Jesus*, we behold the entire name of the Lord, the name of the triune God, as a name of mercy and grace, as a name of salvation.

Jesus is the name of Jehovah, the name of the triune God as the God of our salvation, into which

we are baptized. It is the name that was revealed in the fullness of time, when God sent his only begotten Son into the world, made of a woman, made under the law. It was revealed in the entire ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, for by his word and work God spoke to us as the God of our salvation. It was revealed as the name of *reconciliation* in the cross of Golgotha, for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). It was revealed as a name of everlasting *righteousness* in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, for he "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). It was revealed as a name of *glorification* in the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and his exaltation at the right hand of God. And it will be revealed in all the fullness of its saving power in the day of Christ, when he shall make all things new, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men forevermore (Rev. 21:3).

The name *Jesus*, the name of God declared unto us by the Spirit and through faithful witnesses, is preserved in the holy scriptures and is still proclaimed by the church. Into that name, that is, into the fellowship of that name, and into the covenant fellowship of the triune God in Christ Jesus our Lord, we are baptized. From this idea it is very clear that baptism is a sacrament, an institution of God through Christ, to be observed by the whole church in the new dispensation.

### The Meaning and Mode of Baptism

If we consult the Reformed confessions, we find that they attribute a very rich meaning to the sacrament of baptism. According to them, baptism includes the reception into the covenant of God and the inheritance of the sons of God. Baptism signifies not only being purged from the filthiness of sin, but also being endued with the manifold grace of God. Baptism means that we are adopted unto children of God and that we are enriched with various gifts unto a new life. Baptism signifies not only the remission of sins, but also regeneration, purification, and renewal.

There are Reformed theologians who emphasize that baptism signifies exclusively the washing away of sins. According to them, being buried with Christ into his death and being raised again into a new life has nothing to do with the essential meaning of baptism. But it is clear that their purpose is chiefly to defend the mode of sprinkling over against those who insist that immersion is essential and necessary for baptism.

Reformed theologians have always insisted that immersion is certainly not the only proper mode of baptism, but that pouring or sprinkling is also quite sufficient. On the basis of Holy Writ, we also hold this position. Even if the original word for baptism,  $\beta\alpha\pi\tau$ ( $\epsilon$ iv, signifies "to dip or to immerse"—a meaning which is contested by some Reformed theologians—we would still insist that sprinkling is quite sufficient, simply because it belongs to the sign and not to the essence of baptism. Because it is not essential, but belongs to the outward form and symbol, sprinkling or pouring must be considered quite sufficient. Even as the common cup in distinction from the individual cup at the Lord's supper—even granted that the common cup was used in the institution of that sacrament—is not essential to its significance, but belongs only to the mode of its celebration, so also immersion in distinction from sprinkling or pouring is certainly not essential to the meaning of the sacrament of baptism.

Besides, there are plenty of indications in scripture that a mode of baptism other than immersion was employed. It is hardly reasonable to conceive of the possibility that John the Baptist baptized by immersion into the Jordan River the multitude that came to him. It is certainly impossible to believe that the three thousand who were baptized on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem were immersed. Nor does the baptism of Cornelius and his household leave the impression that sufficient water was

brought into the house for all to be baptized by immersion. The jailer at Philippi was evidently baptized in or near the prison, and he and his house were certainly not led to the river to be immersed.

Not only so, but also sprinkling is at least suggested in scripture, although the references are not directly to the sacrament of baptism: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you" (Ezek. 36:25). Hebrews 10:22 admonishes, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." That immersion as a sign of baptism is not necessary to express the essential idea of the sacrament may also be gathered from Jesus' footwashing of his disciples, which he performed in the upper room where he was gathered with them to celebrate the last supper (John 13:4–10). After Peter objected to Jesus' washing his feet, and after the Lord answered that Peter would have no part with the Lord if he did not wash Peter's feet, then the apostle rushed to the other extreme and said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (v. 9). Then the Lord said to him, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (v. 10). Surely, in the bodily sense, one is not entirely clean by having his feet washed; but if bodily washing is a symbol and sign of a spiritual reality, footwashing is entirely sufficient, according to the words of the Lord. Based on all these passages of scripture, it certainly seems evident that immersion is not necessarily the only correct mode of baptism.

# The Significance of Baptism

According to scripture, baptism does not signify only the washing away of our sins, although this is naturally the fundamental and basic element. That baptism implies much more is evident from Romans 6:3–6:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

It is true, as some Reformed theologians emphasize, that this passage does not speak of the sacrament of baptism, but of spiritual baptism. However, it is also true that it speaks of this spiritual baptism under the figure of baptism itself. It teaches very plainly that baptism signifies our incorporation into Christ, so that we are planted together in the likeness of his death and resurrection. The text tells us that when we are baptized into Jesus Christ, we are baptized into his death. It teaches us that baptism is the symbol of our being buried together with Christ into his death and of our being raised with Christ in newness of life.

The same is taught in Colossians 2:11–12:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

We note that this passage teaches plainly that baptism is come in the place of circumcision. But this passage, like the one from Romans 6, emphasizes that baptism signifies our incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

That baptism signifies more than the mere forgiveness of sins may also be gathered from Titus 3:5:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

It is questionable whether "washing" in this text refers directly to baptism, or whether regeneration itself is called a "washing." But there can be no doubt that the text at least refers to baptism. This means that this passage is plain proof that baptism signifies not only the remission of sins, but also regeneration and renewal by the Spirit of Christ.

This also is the meaning of the great types of baptism in scripture, namely, the flood and the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea. Of the flood we read in 1 Peter 3:21:

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the ark "few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (v. 20). Baptism, therefore, is typified by the water of the flood. Not the ark, but the water of the flood saved the eight souls. They were saved *in* the ark, but not *by* the ark. The meaning is that the flood separated the church in the ark from the wicked world and from total destruction. This deliverance is effected in reality by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The flood as a type of baptism is also mentioned in the prayer before baptism in the baptism form.

[9]

The form also mentions the second type of baptism, the passage of Israel through the Red Sea. [10] Of Israel's passage we also read in 1 Corinthians 10:1–2:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

Egypt was a type of the bondage of sin and of fellowship with the world. Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, was a type of Christ. The passage through the Red Sea was a type of the separation of the church from the wicked world, of her deliverance from the bondage of sin, and of our baptism into Christ as the mediator of the new covenant.

That baptism signifies much more than the washing away of our sins—although this benefit of salvation is always fundamental—is also plain from the doctrinal part of the baptism form:

Holy baptism witnesseth and sealeth unto us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ . . . God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit.

And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us, that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God.

In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us, that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal."[11]

The entire promise of God, sure and unconditional to the elect, is sealed and signified in the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism has a very rich significance. The water of baptism signifies the death of Christ into which we submerge and from which we arise unto newness of life. The water in baptism signifies the blood

of Christ. That blood means that he voluntarily laid down his life, satisfied God's righteousness, and thus made atonement for sin. In that blood we have remission of sins, removal of the guilt of sin, and cleansing from all defilement and pollution of sin. The water of baptism symbolizes not only justification, but also regeneration and sanctification. Through the death of Christ, we pass through baptism. On this side of that water of baptism is the guilt of sin, death, the pollution of corruption, the world, and damnation. But as we pass through the water of baptism, we find on the other side righteousness with God, peace, perfect freedom, and the favor of friendship with God in life eternal in his everlasting covenant.

### The Sacramental Operation of Baptism

It needs to be emphasized that the sacrament of baptism is not effective ex opere operato (through the act performed), which means that grace is not conferred upon him who is baptized, that is, grace is not conferred through the rite of baptism administered by the church. This theory of ex opere operato was developed very early in the history of the church, especially in connection with the baptism of infants. Even Augustine held this theory. Baptism, according to him, was absolutely necessary unto salvation because it removed the guilt of original sin. Later the Roman Catholic Church fully accepted the theory expressed in the term ex opere operato. Not only in the case of infants, but also in the baptism of adults, the outward sign is always effective. The church expressed this officially:

If anyone saith, that by the said sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred through the act performed, but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace: let him be anathema. [12]

In other words, Rome declared him accursed who denies that the sacraments do not confer grace through the act performed upon him who receives them, but who insists that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace. The same view is expressed in the following words:

If anyone saith, that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or, that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto; as though they were merely outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession, whereby believers are distinguished amongst men from unbelievers: let him be anathema. [13]

According to the Romish Church, the grace bestowed upon him who is baptized delivers *ex opere operato* from the guilt of original sin and of all actual sins committed up to the time of baptism. It also delivers from the corruption or defilement of sin and from eternal punishment. It incorporates the one who is baptized into the communion of saints and effects spiritual renewal by the infusion of sanctifying grace.

This teaching the Reformed churches have always rejected. The mere fact that one has received the outward sign of baptism by the church does not mean that his sins are washed away. It is very well possible that one is externally baptized and is received as an external member of the church in the world, yet he has no part with Christ and all his benefits. As the apostle Paul writes:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28–29).

The blood of Christ alone is able to cleanse us from all sins. No other remedy can cleanse us from

sin, except the act of perfect obedience accomplished by Christ when he shed his blood and poured out his life for us.

The application of the blood of Christ is effected upon the sinner by the Holy Spirit of grace. The Spirit of Jesus Christ takes our souls into that bloodbath and washes away the guilt of sin to justify us, and the pollution of sin to sanctify us. The Spirit takes the blood of Christ and pours it over our souls, completely cleansing us from all iniquity. The Spirit of Jesus Christ applies unto us the death of the Savior and causes us to partake of and appropriate that deed of Christ, whereby he poured out his life as a sacrifice for sin, so that it becomes our own by a true and living faith. Of this power of the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse away our sin and of this grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby he brings our souls into a saving contact with that blood of Christ, baptism is a sign and seal.

### **Baptist Arguments against Infant Baptism**

Who are the proper candidates for baptism? The Reformed churches always have answered: Not only all adults who have not been properly baptized and who profess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also all children of believers.

Baptists of every color, be they Arminian Baptists or so-called Calvinistic Baptists, most emphatically deny that infants of believers have the right to baptism. One of the most emphatic of the so-called Calvinistic Baptists is Dr. John Gill, from whom we quote the following arguments against infant baptism. He argues that children are not included in the church of Christ:

Not their infants with them; who were neither baptized nor admitted to membership in the churches; no one instance of either can be produced in scripture: they are not members by birth; for *that which is born of the flesh*, *is flesh*, carnal and corrupt, and unfit for church-fellowship: nor do they become such by the faith of their parents; for even their faith does not make them themselves church-members, without a profession of it, and giving up themselves to a church, and received by it into it: men must be believers before they are baptized; and they must be baptized before they become members; and they cannot be members till they make application to a church, and are admitted into it. Infants, as they are born, are not meet for membership, being unregenerate, unholy, and impure by their first birth, and must be born again ere they are fit for the kingdom of God, or a gospel-church-state; their federal holiness, talked of, is a mere chimera, and is unsupported by 1 Cor. 7:14. [T]hey are not capable of understanding and of answering questions put unto them; nor of giving up themselves to a church; nor of consent and agreement to walk with it, the nature of which they are unacquainted with, and of what belongs to a member of it, either as to duty or privilege; nor are they capable of answering the ends of church-communion, the mutual edification of members and the glory of God: and such who plead for their membership, make a poor business of it; not treating them as members, neither by admitting them to the ordinance of the supper, nor by watching over them, reproving, admonishing, and laying them under censures, when grown up, and require them, were they members. [14]

#### Gill argues particularly against infant baptism as follows:

[A]nd so not the infants of any, be they born of whom they may; and to whom the above characters, descriptive of the subjects of baptism, do by no means belong; with respect to their first birth, though born of believing parents, they are carnal and corrupt, and children of wrath, as others; *That which is born of the flesh is flesh;* and they must be born again, or they cannot see, possess, and enjoy the kingdom of God, or have a right to be admitted into the church of God now, nor will they enter into the kingdom of God, into heaven hereafter, unless born again; their first and carnal birth neither entitles them to the kingdom of God on earth, nor to the kingdom of God in heaven, be it taken in either sense; for the baptism of such there is neither precept nor precedent in the word of God. [15]

Gill then attempts to prove that there is neither precept nor precedent for infant baptism in the word of God. He refers to Matthew 19:14, which speaks of Christ's blessing the little children, and tries to show that in these words there is no precept whatsoever for infant baptism. His arguments are as follows:

1. Let the words be said to or of whom they may, they are not in the form of a precept, but of a permission or grant, and signify not what was enjoined as necessary, but what was allowed of, or which they might be;  $Suffer\ little\ children$ , etc. 2. These children do not appear to be new-born babes. The word used by the evangelists, neither  $\pi\alpha\iota\delta(\alpha)$  nor  $\beta\rho\dot{\phi}\eta$ , do not always signify such; but are sometimes used of such who are capable of going alone, and of being instructed, and of understanding the scriptures, and even of one of twelve years of age . . . 3. It cannot be said whose children these were; whether they belonged to those who brought them, or to others; and whether the children of believers, and of baptized persons, or not; and if of unbelievers, and of unbaptized persons, the Pædobaptists themselves will not allow such children to be baptized. 4. It is certain they were not brought to Christ to be baptized by him, but for other purposes . . . 5. This passage rather concludes against Pædobaptism than for it, and shews that this practice had not obtained among the Jews, and had not been used by John, by Christ, and his disciples; for then the apostles would scarcely have forbad the bringing of these children, since they might readily suppose they were brought to be baptized . . . 6. The reason given for suffering little children to come to Christ, for of such is the kingdom of heaven, is to be understood in a figurative and metaphorical sense; of such who are comparable to children for modesty, meekness, and humility, and for freedom from rancour, malice, ambition, and pride . . . [16]

Next, Gill argues from Matthew 28:19 to prove that also in this text there is no precept for infant baptism:

Thereupon, Gill refers to the baptisms of John and the apostles and proceeds to show:

There is no precedent for the baptism of infants in the word of God. Among the vast numbers who flocked to John's baptism from all parts, we read of no infants that were brought with them for that purpose, or that were baptized by him. And though more were baptized by Christ than by John, that is, by the apostles of Christ, at his order, yet no mention is made of any infant baptized by them. [18]

He also refers to the three thousand persons who were baptized on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) and argues that there was not a single infant among them. He asserts that in all the accounts in Acts of baptism in different parts of the world, there is no mention of a single instance of infant baptism. He admits that mention is indeed made of baptized households or families, but there is no certainty that there were any infants in these families and that they were baptized or else must be baptized. He argues that there certainly were no infants in the household of the jailer at Philippi (Acts 16:32–33), but only adult persons,

for the apostle spoke the word of the Lord to *all* that were in his house, which they were capable of hearing, and it seems of understanding; for not only he *rejoiced* at the good news of salvation by Christ, but *all* in his house hearing it, rejoiced likewise; which joy of theirs was the joy of faith; for he and they were believers in God, Father, Son, and Spirit.[19]

The same, he argues, is true of the household of Stephanus (1 Cor. 1:16). His household also "consisted of adult persons, believers in Christ, and very useful in the service of religion; they were the first fruits of Achaia, the first converts in those parts, and who *addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.*" Therefore, they must be adult persons, and not infants.[20]

Gill contends further that no "infant-baptism [is] to be concluded from any things or passages

#### recorded either in the Old or in the New Testament."[21] He maintains:

Baptism being an ordinance peculiar to the New Testament, it cannot be expected there should be any directions about the observance of it in the Old Testament; and whatever may be gathered relative to it, from typical and figurative baptisms, under the former dispensation, there is nothing from thence in favour of infant-baptism. [22]

#### Dr. Gill makes several attempts to prove his proposition.

It is not a fact, as has been asserted, that the *infants of believers* have, with their parents, been taken into covenant with God in the former ages of the church, if by it is meant the covenant of grace; the first covenant made with man, was that of works, made with Adam, and which indeed included all his posterity, to whom he stood as a federal head, as no one ever since did to his natural offspring; in whom they all sinned, were condemned, and died; which surely cannot be pleaded in favour of the infants of believers! After the fall, the covenant of grace, and the way of life and salvation by Christ, were revealed to Adam and Eve, personally, as interested therein; but not to their natural seed and posterity, and as interested therein; for then all mankind must be taken into the covenant of grace, and so nothing peculiar to the infants of believers; of which not the least syllable is mentioned throughout the whole age of the church, reaching from Adam to Noah. [23]

#### He makes a similar argument with regard to the covenant of God with Abraham:

The next covenant is that made with Abraham and his seed, on which great stress is laid, Gen. 17:10–14. [A]nd this is said to be "the grand turning point on which the issue of the controversy very much depends; and that if Abraham's covenant, which included his infant-children, and gave them a right to circumcision, was not the covenant of grace, then it is confessed, that the *main ground* is taken away, on which *the right of infants to baptism* is asserted; and consequently the principal arguments in support of the doctrine are overturned." Now that this covenant was not the pure covenant of grace, in distinction from the covenant of works, but rather a covenant of works, will soon be proved; and if so, then the main ground of infant's baptism is taken away, and its principal arguments in support of it overturned: and that it is not the covenant of grace is clear. [24]

#### For this proposition Dr. Gill offers the following arguments:

1. From its being never so called, nor by any name which shews it to be such; but the covenant of circumcision, Acts 7:8. Now nothing is more opposite to one another than circumcision and grace; circumcision is a work of the law, which they that sought to be justified by, fell from grace, Gal. 5:2-4. Nor can this covenant be the same [as] we are now under, which is a new covenant, or a new administration of the covenant of grace, since it is abolished, and no more in being and force. 2. It appears to be a covenant of works, and not of grace, since it was to be kept by men, under a severe penalty. Abraham was to keep it, and his seed after him; something was to be done by them, their flesh to be circumcised, and a penalty was annexed, in case of disobedience or neglect; such a soul was to be cut off from his people: all which shews it to be, not a covenant of grace, but of works. 3. It is plain, it was a covenant that might be broken; of the uncircumcised it is said, He hath broken my covenant, Gen. 17:14, whereas the covenant of grace cannot be broken; God will not break it, and men cannot; it is ordered in all things, and sure, and is more immoveable than hills and mountains, Psal. 89:34. 4. It is certain it had things in it of a civil and temporal nature; as a multiplication of Abraham's natural seed, and a race of kings from him; a promise of his being the Father of many nations, and a possession of the land of Canaan by his seed: things that can have no place in the pure covenant of grace, and have nothing to do with that, any more than the change of his name from Abram to Abraham. 5. There were some persons included in it, who cannot be thought to belong to the covenant of grace; as Ishmael, not in the same covenant with Isaac, and a profane Esau: and on the other hand, there were some who were living when this covenant of circumcision was made, and yet were left out of it; who nevertheless, undoubtedly, were in the covenant of grace; as Shem, Arphaxad, Melchizedek, Lot, and others; wherefore this can never be the pure covenant of grace.[25]

The next argument of Gill is rather silly. He argues that the covenant that could not be disannulled by the law (Gal. 3), could not have been the covenant of grace, but must have been some other covenant, because "the distance of time between them does not agree, but falls short of the apostle's date twenty-four years."[26]

Gill's next argument is also of little significance:

The covenant of grace was made with Christ, as the federal head of the elect in him . . . if the covenant of grace was made with Abraham, as the head of his natural and spiritual seed, Jews and Gentiles; there must be two heads of the covenant of grace, contrary to the nature of such a covenant, and the whole current of scripture. [27]

The same is true of his next argument: The covenant with Abraham could not have been the covenant of grace, because it was made with Abraham and his carnal seed and, therefore, included such men as Ishmael and Esau. [28]

His next argument is of a similar nature: The covenant with Abraham could not have been the covenant of grace, because it would then have excluded some persons who belonged in that covenant and who were still living at the time when the covenant was made with Abraham, such as Shem, Arphaxad, Lot, and others. [29]

Also, his next argument is rather silly and defeats its own purpose. He tells us that the covenant with Abraham was not made with children, but with adults; for it was made as the covenant of circumcision, and children certainly could not circumcise themselves. [30]

Gill argues next from the fact that the New Testament gives no command to baptize infants. He concludes, therefore, that to baptize infants could not possibly be the will of God. Under this argument he has several sub-arguments, which we will not relate because they are too well-known. He then refutes some of the arguments from the New Testament that baptism is come in the place of circumcision, such as the arguments from Acts 2:39, Romans 11:16–17, and 1 Corinthians 7:14, in order to show that the New Testament contains no grounds for infant baptism. Finally, he refutes some arguments that are objections against adult baptism exclusively. He argues especially from the word βαπτίζειν (to baptize) to show that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism.[31]

### The Grounds for Infant Baptism

We will not reply in detail to all of these arguments of Dr. Gill and of the Baptists in general. The crux of the question is whether or not children belong to the covenant and church of God and, therefore, should be baptized. This, in turn, is based on the question whether or not the covenant is the same throughout the ages of the old and new dispensations and whether, therefore, circumcision is essentially the same as baptism.

The Heidelberg Catechism mentions three grounds for infant baptism: Children are included in the covenant and church of God; the promise of the covenant, redemption, and the Holy Ghost is for children as well as for the adult; baptism as a sign of the covenant, like circumcision, must therefore be applied to infants as well as to adults.[32]

The Belgic Confession mentions virtually the same grounds for infant baptism:

Therefore, we believe that every man who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal ought to be but once baptized with this only Baptism, without ever repeating the same; since we can not be born twice. Neither doth this Baptism only avail us at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life. Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who, we believe, ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as the children in Israel formerly were circumcised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And, indeed, Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for adult persons; and, therefore, they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ hath done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law, that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ's suffering and death shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, which was a sacrament of Jesus Christ. Moreover, what Circumcision was to the Jews, that Baptism is to our children. And for this reason Paul calls Baptism the *Circumcision of Christ*. [33]

The "Form for the Administration of Baptism" follows essentially the same argument:

And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge, partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ; as God speaketh unto Abraham, the Father of all the faithful, and therefore unto us and our children (Gen 17:7), saying, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." This also the Apostle Peter testifieth, with these words (Acts 2:39), "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Therefore God formerly commanded them to be circumcised, which was a seal of the covenant, and of the righteousness of faith; and therefore Christ also embraced them, laid his hands upon them and blessed them (Mark 10).

Since then baptism is come in the place of circumcision, therefore infants are to be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God, and of his covenant. And parents are in duty bound, further to instruct their children herein, when they shall arrive to years of discretion.[34]

The question naturally arises, Why are children included in the covenant of God? The answer must be: Because God establishes his covenant in the line of continued generations.

This leads us to what may be considered the chief ground for infant baptism: There is only one covenant, one people, and one sign of the covenant throughout the ages of history, although the sign was circumcision in the old dispensation and baptism in the new.

The deepest reason that all Baptists reject infant baptism is their failure to recognize the truth that the people of God are one and the same throughout all ages, and that in the old and new dispensations the same covenant is established with them and with their children throughout their generations. This failure is also apparent from all the arguments that Gill produces to combat infant baptism.

### One People of God

The word of God knows of only one people, one seed of Abraham—the spiritual seed, the elect, the children of the promise. This is true of both the old and new dispensations. It is by no means correct to say that in the old dispensation the Jews were the seed of Abraham, while in the new dispensation believers are his seed. The Jews as such never were the seed of Abraham. It is indeed correct to say that for a time the seed of Abraham were found exclusively among Abraham's descendants, as they are found now among all nations. However, scripture never identifies Abraham's descendants with the seed of Abraham. The seed of Abraham, the children of the promise, are at all times only the believers. In the old dispensation they are in the generations of Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, and Israel. In the new dispensation they are among all nations, there being no difference any more between Jew and Gentile. But wherever they are found, the children of the promise, named after Abraham as the father of believers, are always the true children of God, the believers, the elect. These and these only are the seed of Abraham.

That this is true can be proved from many passages of Holy Writ.

In Romans 9:6–8 we read:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

First, it is evident from the context and from the text itself that the apostle is here speaking of the Jews of the old dispensation. Second, the apostle makes a distinction between those who are of Israel and those who are Israel. The people as such, the nation, were all of Israel; but even in the old dispensation all were not Israel. Third, only spiritual Israel—believers, they who were born of the promise, by the power of the promise, as Isaac was—are counted for the seed. The Jews per se were never the seed of Abraham, although the seed of Abraham for a time were confined to the nation of

Israel.

The same truth is taught in Romans 4:11–16:

And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

From this passage it is very clear that not the Jews as such, but only believers in both the old and new dispensations are the true seed of Abraham. Abraham is here called the father of all those who believe, both of those who are of the circumcision—the Jews—and of those who are of the uncircumcision—all nations. Hence they who believe are the seed of Abraham, whether they are of the Jews or of the Gentiles.

Further, only in the sense that he is the father of believers is Abraham the father of circumcision. Not all of the circumcision are the true seed of Abraham, but only those among them who believe. He is the father of circumcision "to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised" (v. 12).

Finally, to this one spiritual seed there is one and the same promise, the promise that they should be heirs of the world. They who are merely of the law and of the flesh are not heirs of the promise at all, but only they who are of the faith of our father Abraham, who is the father of us all. The clear teaching of Romans 4:11–16 is one father Abraham, one seed of Abraham, one promise, and one way to obtain the promise—the way of the righteousness which is by faith.

The same truth is also taught in Romans 2:28–29:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

This passage very plainly teaches that the mere Jew was never the seed of Abraham. Only he was a true Israelite in whose heart was present the spiritual reality corresponding to the sign of circumcision, that is, faith. Believers only, therefore, are the true seed of Abraham.

That the people of God in both the old and new dispensations are one people, the epistle to the Galatians very plainly teaches:

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:7–9).

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made: and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore

the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:16–29).

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 4:1–7).

First, from the above passages it is abundantly clear that only believers in both the old and new dispensations are the real seed of Abraham. Centrally, the seed of Abraham is Christ and he only. The apostle even draws an argument from the fact that the singular, *seed*, is used instead of the plural, *seeds*. The seed of Abraham, therefore, is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Second, if Christ is centrally the seed of Abraham, it stands to reason that only they who are in Christ can be seed with him, whether they are of the old or of the new dispensation (v. 7).

Third, Galatians 3 emphasizes that there is only one promise for the one seed of Abraham and that, therefore, believers are the only heirs of the promise (v. 29).

Fourth, the apostle compares the church of all ages, of both dispensations, to a growing child. In the old dispensation the heir was still a child and was therefore under the tutorship of the law. In the new dispensation the child has grown into an adult, a son, and has received the inheritance. The point is that the church of both the old and new dispensations is likened unto one person. When a child grows into an adult, he does not become an altogether different person, but is the same individual. The clear teaching of the word of God is that there is only one people of God; that this people of God is called the seed of Abraham in Christ; and that therefore the seed of Abraham is neither the Jews as such, nor the Gentiles as such, but the believers of both Jews and Gentiles with faithful Abraham.

The same truth will be evident in a comparison of Hosea 1:10–11 with Romans 9:24–26. Hosea 1 speaks of the ten tribes of Israel and prophesies of a great and glorious restoration, in which the state of Israel will be changed from being called "Loruhamah" (*Not my son*) into being called the sons of the living God. In Romans 9, the apostle Paul does not hesitate at all to interpret the prophecy of Hosea in such a way that it applies to the church of the new dispensation. One could never make such an application of the text in Hosea except on the scriptural basis of the unity of the church of the old and new dispensations.

The same truth will be apparent in a comparison of Jeremiah 31:31–34 with Hebrews 8:6–13. In Jeremiah 31, the prophet speaks of the new covenant that the Lord will make with Israel and Judah. Hebrews applies this passage from Jeremiah to the church of the new dispensation. Again, such an application can be understood only on the basis of one and the same church in both the old and the new dispensations.

The unity of the old and new dispensations and of the people of God in both dispensations is also clear from a comparison of Amos 9:11–15 with Acts 15:13–17. The passage in Amos certainly gives the impression of being nothing more than a prophecy of a literal restoration of Israel to their own land. Yet Acts 15 applies this passage to the church of the new dispensation. Amos prophesies of the restoration of the tabernacle of David, of Israel's possession of all the heathen, of the return of Israel to their own land, and of their everlasting possession of it. James in Acts 15 explains that this restoration of the tabernacle of David is fulfilled in the new dispensation when the Gentiles enter into

the fellowship of Christ.

So it is throughout scripture. Always the word of God knows of only one people of God and of one and the same covenant. How otherwise could Isaiah say that Christ is in possession of the keys of the house of David (Isa. 22:22; cf. also Rev. 3:7)? Jerusalem and Mount Zion are not destroyed, but they are realized in the new dispensation, while the shadows of them are gone forever (Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; Gal. 4:24–26; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 21:2, 10). The same is true of the temple, the altar, the holy place, the sacrifice, and the high priest (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19–22; Heb. 9:1–12, 21–24; Heb. 10:19–21; Rev. 3:12).

The land of Canaan is indeed the land promised to Abraham and his seed as their everlasting possession. However, this land does not refer to the earthly country near the Mediterranean Sea, which is only the shadow of the true country, but refers to the heavenly country that is to come, when the new Jerusalem shall come down upon the earth. Such was the hope of the saints of the old dispensation (Heb. 11:8–10, 13, 16).

The whole word of God teaches the unity of the people of God and of all that pertains to them. All the promises are in Christ, and through him they are for the true seed of Abraham of all ages, that is, to believers only.

# One Sign of the Covenant

There is more. Not only are the people of God in the old and new dispensations the same, but also the sign of the covenant, although different in form, is the same in both dispensations. Those who maintain the baptism of infants have always called attention to this truth, and correctly so, for it is an important and necessary link in the chain of the scriptural argument for infant baptism.

The objections that Baptists love to make against the baptism of infants are not scriptural, but rather are drawn from their own mind. They assert that baptism is a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith, of the forgiveness of sin, of regeneration. They conclude, therefore, that baptism may be administered only to those who confess their faith, that is, to those who are known to be believers. They also point out that it is an established fact that many baptized infants prove in later life to be no children of God at all and are lost. Therefore, they conclude that it is wrong to administer the sign of baptism to children of believers before they come to years of discretion.

Against this argument many counter-arguments may be adduced, such as the fact that faith can be—and in fact *is*—in the hearts of infants, implanted immediately by the Holy Spirit. Although they do not yet actually believe, they have the faculty or power of faith. Moreover, if Baptists argue that one must be sure that faith is present in the heart before one can be baptized, the Baptist himself cannot baptize on that ground, because there may be—and in fact are—hypocrites among those who are baptized. But the chief argument that the Baptists produce turns against themselves, for what they argue against baptism holds in its full force against infant circumcision. Yet the Lord directly enjoins circumcision upon the seed of Abraham in their generations.

Circumcision was a sign of the righteousness which is by faith (Rom. 4:11), of spiritual circumcision, of the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29), of regeneration and sanctification, of the cutting away of the old man of sin, of the love of God in a new heart. In all these respects the significance of the old covenant sign is the same as of the sign of baptism. The identity of the two signs, although they differ in form, can be very clearly proved from the word of God.

Those passages of Holy Writ that refer only to the sign of circumcision prove the identity of the two signs.

#### God says about Israel:

If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land (Lev. 26:40–42).

Here it is clear that an uncircumcised heart is the same as a heart that will not confess sin and iniquity. To be uncircumcised in heart is to be unconverted. By implication this means that a circumcised heart is a regenerated and converted heart, from which arises sorrow over sin and confession of iniquity. Of such a heart, therefore, circumcision was a sign.

In this respect circumcision has the same significance as holy baptism: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked" (Deut. 10:16). Here, too, it is apparent that circumcision was a sign of a circumcised, that is, of a sanctified heart. Circumcision and baptism, therefore, have the same significance.

Circumcision is a sign of the work of God's grace in the heart, whereby the heart is filled with the love of God. Thus circumcision is a sign of the same grace signified in baptism: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6).

Circumcision and baptism are essentially the same in meaning: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Jer. 4:4). In the language of the New Testament, this is the same as saying, "Put off the old man of sin and put on the new man, which is renewed after the image of God in true righteousness and holiness" (cf. Eph. 4:22–24).

We should also remember Romans 4:11: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." In this passage circumcision is presented as a sealing of the righteousness which is by faith. God seals in the sign of circumcision that he justifies the believers by faith and counts their faith for righteousness. Again, the same is true of baptism.

That circumcision and baptism have the same meaning will be evident by a comparison of the passages above with others that speak of the significance of holy baptism. Baptism is a sign of the remission of sins—the righteousness which is by faith:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

Baptism, like circumcision, is a sign of renewal in Christ. In baptism we die with Christ, and we arise with him in newness of life and walk:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

Baptism is a sign of putting on Christ, that is, of being renewed in him.

These passages can easily be multiplied, but the above texts suffice.

Finally, we call attention to the passages in scripture that simply identify circumcision and baptism,

as in Colossians 2:11-12:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Here the apostle plainly identifies the signs of baptism and circumcision with respect to their significance. He writes to the church of the new dispensation that believers are circumcised in the spiritual sense and that this spiritual circumcision took place when they were buried with Christ in baptism. A more direct proof that circumcision and baptism are essentially the same in meaning could not be given. The change of form is due to the transition from the old dispensation into the new, from the dispensation of the shadows to that of the fulfillment. This passage also implies that baptism has come in the place of circumcision, as all our Reformed fathers have always taught.

The apostle in Philippians 3:3 neither mentions baptism nor refers to it. Nevertheless, he maintains that not the Jews, but the church of the new dispensation in Christ is the circumcision: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Circumcision has not been *essentially* discarded, but is continued in the church of the new dispensation in the sacrament of baptism.

The Baptists deny that baptism has come in the place of circumcision, as the Reformed plainly express in the baptism form: "Since then baptism is come in the place of circumcision, therefore infants are to be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant." [35] It is simply a historic fact that baptism forced circumcision out of the way. When baptism came, circumcision had to be discarded. For a time they existed side by side, especially in Jewish Christian communities, and circumcision tried to maintain itself alongside of baptism. This proved to be impossible, and circumcision was forced to surrender its place in the church.

The reason is that essentially baptism has the same significance as circumcision, as the word of God plainly teaches. This implies that the two signs with the same meaning could not exist side by side, but that circumcision, which belonged to the time of the shadows, must make room for baptism as being the sign of fulfillment.

If one still insists that circumcision is necessary for the Christian church, he can do so only because he attaches significance to circumcision as an element of the law, and he seeks the righteousness of the law. Therefore, Christ is of no effect to him (Gal. 3:17). Surely baptism, being essentially the same sign and having the form proper to the new dispensation, has come in the place of circumcision. So true this is that the apostle can write that those who are baptized are the circumcision (Col. 2:11–12; Phil. 3:3).

### One Covenant in the Line of Generations

We must also note that God continues his covenant, in both the old and in the new dispensations, in the line of continued generations. The Reformed symbols emphasize that infants as well as adults are included in the covenant and church of God. But the question arises, How are infants included in the covenant of God from their very birth? The answer is, God establishes his covenant in the line of continued generations. This is the ultimate ground for the baptism of infants. It is the will of God, plainly revealed in the holy scriptures, that the seed of Abraham, which is the same throughout the ages, shall receive in their generations the sign of the righteousness which is by faith.

That God establishes his covenant in the line of continued generations is the plain truth revealed in

all scripture and verified in all the history of the church of God in the world from the very beginning. Always God establishes his covenant organically, in the line of continued generations. This is already evident from the protevangel: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This is clear from God's establishment of the covenant with Noah: "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you" (Gen. 9:9). God revealed the same truth to Abraham: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7).

Besides, this is obvious from the entire historical line of the development of the covenant. The line of God's covenant runs in the line of successive generations from Seth to Noah, from Shem to Abraham, from Abraham to Israel, and from Israel to Christ. Even in the new dispensation it is very plain that God has his people in the line of continued generations. This is why the apostle Peter could preach on the day of Pentecost, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Only in this light can we understand the scriptural references to the baptism of households (Acts 16:33; 1 Cor. 1:16). Whether or not you maintain that there were little children in those households, the fact remains that houses, families, were baptized. The organic idea of the covenant, running in the line of continued generations, is taught by the baptism of "houses." The continuation of the covenant in the line of generations is true not only in the old dispensation, but also in the new.

### **Presupposed Regeneration Rejected**

The continuation of the covenant in the line of generation does not mean that all the children who are born under the dispensation of the covenant are real spiritual children of God. No one in the Reformed churches teaches this. Nevertheless, there is and has always been difference of opinion regarding the questions who are really in the covenant and how we must view baptized children.

Some teach that the baptism of infants is based upon their presupposed or presumptive regeneration. We must suppose that infants are regenerated, and therefore they ought to be baptized.

Even Ursinus seems to suggest this doctrine:

Faith is in infants potentially and by inclination, although not actually as in adults. For, as infants born of ungodly parents who are without the church, have no actual wickedness, but only an inclination thereto, so those who are born of godly parents have no actual holiness, but only an inclination to it; not according to nature, but according to the grace of the covenant. And still further: infants have the Holy Ghost, and are regenerated by him. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb, and Jeremiah is said to have been sanctified before he came out of the womb. (Luke 1:15; Jer. 1:5). If infants now have the Holy Ghost, he certainly works in them regeneration, good inclinations, new desires, and such other things as are necessary for their salvation, or he at least supplies them with every thing that is requisite for their baptism, according to the declaration of Peter, "Can any man forbid water to them who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we." It is for this reason that Christ enumerates little children amongst those that believe, saying, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me." (Matt. 18:6). In as much now as infants are fit subjects for baptism, they do not profane it as the Anabaptists wickedly affirm.[36]

Apparently, Ursinus here bases infant baptism on the presumption of regeneration in the children of the covenant.

With this idea of presumptive regeneration as a *basis* for infant baptism, we cannot agree. We do not deny that infants can be regenerated or that it is possible for them to have the faculty or power of faith. We even believe that it is the usual mode of God's working in the church of Christ to regenerate little children from their infancy. But this does not mean that we can presume that all the children born

under the dispensation of the covenant are regenerated, nor can we baptize infants on the basis of a presupposition or a presumption of their regeneration. We cannot state as a fact that all the children of believing parents are regenerated, for scripture plainly teaches the very opposite. Not all are Israel that are of Israel. Only the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:8). There is chaff among the wheat, and many carnal children are among those born of believing parents. Therefore, we certainly cannot and may not presuppose that which is so evidently contrary to scripture and to all reality.

On the basis of a presupposed or presumptive regeneration, there is no assurance possible. According to those who hold the theory of presumptive regeneration, the covenant is established, after all, only with the elect. Therefore, they say, one must first know that he is elect before he can have the assurance that he belongs to God's covenant. The best one can do on this basis with respect to the covenant children is to *presume* that they are really in the covenant; there is no assurance.

### A Conditional Covenant Rejected

Because some in Reformed churches seek a certain assurance for all the children born of believing parents, they reject presumptive regeneration as a basis for baptism. Rather, they find the ground for infant baptism in God's covenant promise, "I will be your God and the God of your seed." They want no distinction between an external and an internal covenant or between really being in and not really being in the covenant. They do not want to limit the covenant to the elect. They refuse to speak of suppositions and presumptions, and they seek objective certainty. This certainty with respect to the children of the covenant they find in the promise, "I will be your God, and the God of your seed." This promise all the covenant children, head for head and soul for soul, may accept. It is sure. It can never fail. On this promise all may rely. It is a sure basis of certainty and personal assurance of faith, and at the same time, it is the only ground of infant baptism.

According to this view, the promise is for all who are born under the covenant, for all the children of believing parents, for all who are baptized. In the promise God bequeaths all the blessings of the covenant upon all who are baptized. He gives all the right to those blessings. Therefore, one may say to all the baptized children, "You are really in the covenant. You have the right to accept the promise." However, this promise must necessarily be presented as conditional. It is contingent for its fulfillment upon the faith of those who are baptized. They are obliged to believe the promise, to fulfill their covenant obligation, their part of the covenant of God. If they fail in this, the blessings of the covenant do not actually come into their possession. Instead, they fall under the terrible covenant wrath and vengeance of God.

With this conception we cannot possibly agree. It certainly does not establish the assurance of which it boasts, that is, the objective certainty that, according to the promise of God, all who are baptized are really in the covenant and have a God-given right to its blessings. Those who teach this speak of a conditional promise. And the condition upon which the promise is contingent is faith and obedience.

Now the question is the relation of faith to the promise. Is faith excluded from the promise? Or is faith included in the promise? Does God also promise faith? If he does, and if the promise is for all who are born under the dispensation of the covenant, it follows that all must be saved. To all God promises the lively faith whereby they become partakers of the blessings of the covenant. Because the promise of God is sure, all the baptized children are surely saved. All receive the sign and seal of salvation in baptism. The inevitable conclusion must be that all the children born under the covenant

are surely saved.

Those who maintain that the promise of God is for all, head for head and soul for soul, realize that their position is untenable. They understand very well that scripture plainly teaches that many who are born under the covenant are irretrievably lost. Experience also teaches that many baptized children are not saved. Hence those who hold this theory must inevitably come to the conclusion that a conditional promise to all is a promise the condition of which the baptized children themselves must and are able to fulfill.

This is the view of Professor William Heyns. He maintains that every baptized child is given sufficient subjective grace to bring forth good fruits, which means the fruit of faith and repentance. All the covenant children receive sufficient grace either to accept or to reject the covenant obligation. The distinction between baptized children and others is that baptized children receive sufficient grace to accept the covenant, to bring forth fruits of faith and repentance, although they can still refuse to do this.[37] This is pure Arminianism and Pelagianism applied to the covenant. And even with this view, the desired certainty for all the children of the covenant is not attained, because the covenant is made contingent upon the will of the sinner, which means that ultimately the covenant is impossible of realization.

This view is also in plain conflict with the teaching of our baptism form. The expository part of that form establishes the whole of God's covenant and all its benefits as absolutely sure unto "the children of the promise." [38] The covenant and its benefits are not conditional whatsoever. God's part of the covenant is that he realizes it completely, both objectively and subjectively, both as to its objective establishment and as to its subjective application. God assures the children of the promise that he establishes his covenant with them and adopts them for his children and heirs, that he forgives all their sins and justifies them, that he delivers and sanctifies them, that he preserves them, and that he glorifies them so that they shall appear with all the elect in life eternal. This is not presented as a conditional promise, but is absolutely unconditional. The fact is that if there were a condition attached to this covenant, it could never be realized. God's work is never conditional, and it is in no wise contingent upon the will and work of man. The language of the baptism form is as positive and unconditional as it could possibly be. Therefore, we cannot accept the theory of a conditional promise for all the baptized children who are living under the dispensation of the covenant.

### The Covenant and Infant Baptism

The ground of infant baptism is neither a certain presumptive regeneration, nor a promise of the covenant for all who live under the dispensation of the covenant. Rather, the ground is that God establishes his covenant in the line of continued generations, although in those generations there are children of the promise and carnal children who never receive the blessing of the promise and who trample under foot the covenant of God.

So it was in the old dispensation when the covenant of God was confined within the limits of Israel. They formed one nation. They all lived under God's dealings with his own. They were all delivered with a mighty arm from the house of bondage (Ex. 20:2). They were all witnesses of God's terrible wonders. They all passed through the Red Sea, and they were all baptized into Moses. They all ate of the spiritual bread and drank of the spiritual rock that followed them in the desert (1 Cor. 10:1–4). They were the nation that received the law, to whom the word of God was entrusted, and whose were the prophets, the priests, the kings, the service of the temple, the altar, and the sacrifices. With the majority of them God was not well pleased (v. 5). In the generations of the people of God of

the old dispensation, there were two seeds—the true children of the promise and the carnal children who despised God's covenant and trampled underfoot the holy things of the covenant of Jehovah, his word and his precepts. Yet it was the will of God that all the males would receive the sign of circumcision, the seal of the righteousness which is by faith.

In the new dispensation it is no different. The church in the world is the gathering of confessing believers and their children. They form one people, although the course of God's covenant is no longer confined to one single nation, and to this people God reveals his covenant. They are called after his name. All who outwardly belong to them are subject to the same dealings. According to the will of God, all are baptized in the name of God triune. To all the word is preached. And all—unless they violate the covenant of God before they ever come to confession of faith in the church—celebrate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ at the communion table. Yet also to the church of the new dispensation apply the words of Romans 9:6–8:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

Always in the line of the generations of the people of God there are the true spiritual seed; but always there exist also the carnal seed, who live in close proximity and outward fellowship with the spiritual seed, dwell in the same house with them, and are subject to the same influences, but who are not children of the promise and receive not the grace of God in their hearts.

The significance of the presence of this carnal seed within the generations of the people of God is very clear both from scripture and from actual experience. Because of the perpetual presence of that carnal element in the church of Christ in the world, the church must fight her hardest battle in her own house, for by this carnal element the measure of iniquity is filled. From the carnal seed the antichristian power is constantly developing until the man of sin, the son of perdition, is revealed, which is the culmination of all the forces of iniquity.

Thus according to the will of God revealed in his word, the church is to administer the sign of baptism to all the children who are born in the line of the generations of God's people. While the sign and seal of the covenant is a savor of life unto life for the children of the promise, it is at the same time a savor of death unto death for the reprobates who trample under foot the covenant of Jehovah (2 Cor. 2:15–16).

# **Chapter 39**

# The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

### Different Views of the Lord's Supper

In the early church the questions that are now concentrated around the sacrament of the Lord's supper were not clearly before the minds of believers. The chief question regarding this sacrament is concerned with the proper interpretation of the words spoken by the Savior at the institution of this sacrament: "This is my body" (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). The question deals with the relation between the sign and the thing signified.

As is well-known, four different views have developed and are held by the church now. There is the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation, namely, the sign and the thing signified are identified: the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of the Lord. There is the Lutheran view of consubstantiation, namely, the sign and the thing signified are not identified, but yet are objectively connected: the body and blood of the Lord are really present in, with, and under the bread and wine. There is the conception that is usually connected with the name of Zwingli, which is what may be called the symbolical view: the Lord's supper is merely a feast of commemoration. Finally, there is the Calvinistic or sacramental conception: the relation between the sign and the thing signified is purely spiritual.

### The Lord's Supper in the Early Church

As might be expected, none of these four views had been definitely and distinctly developed in the earliest period of the church (before A.D. 300). Initially, the church simply accepted the sacraments and observed them without critically entering into their deeper significance. She did not immediately give clear and distinct account of the meaning of the Lord's supper or of the relation between the sign and the thing signified. Yet to this sacrament, as well as to that of baptism, the church in general attached a profound significance, although she had no idea of its deeper meaning. Various writers in this period sowed the seeds for the later development of the various views of the Lord's supper.

The present Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was entirely unknown in the first period of the church. Yet, since the church generally held that somehow the flesh and blood of Christ were received at the Lord's supper, but did not clearly answer the question how these were present, the tendencies that would later point in the direction of the Roman Catholic conception of the Lord's supper can be found.

In contrast, the views of Ignatius, Justin, and Irenaeus remind us of the present Lutheran doctrine. These church fathers emphasized the real presence of the body and blood of the Lord, although they did not clearly define the manner in which the body and blood were present. But they did not identify the sign and the thing signified. [1]

The North African church revealed clear tendencies toward what today is called the Reformed view of the sacrament. Origen inclined toward the Zwinglian view, but Clement, Tertullian, and Cyprian adhered to the Calvinistic conception.[2]

The idea of *sacrifice* in the Roman Catholic sense—the body and blood of the Lord are really offered up by the church through the priests—was unknown in the early church. Although the church in

that early period used the term *sacrifice* in connection with the celebration of the Lord's supper, it meant not an offering of Christ, but the church's offering of herself in prayer and thanksgiving, alms, etc.,[3] something that is radically different from the present teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. However, Cyprian, with his hierarchical tendencies, already suggested the idea that not the church but the priest offers an imitation of the sacrifice of the Lord.[4]

In the second period, from approximately AD. 300 to AD. 750, the ideas of the sacraments in general, and of the Lord's supper specifically, were further developed. The relation between Christ and the signs in the Lord's supper was often compared to the union of the two natures in Christ. [5] But at this time the doctrine of transubstantiation certainly was not yet part of the official dogma of the church. The bread and wine were called types and antitypes of the body and blood of Christ. [6] Frequently, they were also called symbols. Augustine wrote that Christ's declaration that he would give us his flesh to eat must not be understood in the literal sense: "His grace is not consumed by tooth-biting." [7] The idea of sacrifice was still emphasized, although also during this period the term did not convey the same meaning as it does for the Roman Catholics now. Rather, the sacrifice was conceived of as a thank-offering that consisted of prayers, alms, and so forth, although this was held to be effective for both the living and the dead. At the end of this period, however, Gregory the Great plainly spoke of the Eucharist as a sacrifice that we offer. [8]

#### The Romish View of the Sacraments

In the next period, from AD. 750 to the Reformation, the number of sacraments was fixed at seven, and the doctrine of transubstantiation was established as the official dogma of the church.

In the early part of this period, the number of the sacraments was not yet fixed; some people mentioned two, others four, and still others a larger number. Pope Eugenius IV (1431–1437) finally gave his sanction to the following seven sacraments still held by the Roman Catholic Church today: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and marriage. [9]

During this period the doctrine of transubstantiation was definitely taught and officially adopted. In the ninth century, Radbertus, Abbot of Corbie in Picardy, was the first to teach unequivocally the complete dogma of transubstantiation: By the words of consecration the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, although as to the senses the body and blood remain concealed under the qualities of bread and wine. [10] Most of the contemporaries of Radbertus opposed this view. After the Dark Ages (from the ninth to the twelfth centuries), it appears that the doctrine of transubstantiation gained ascendancy, although there was still an occasional voice against it. The Fourth Lateran Council under Innocent III officially adopted the doctrine of transubstantiation in 1215. [11] The idea of communion was replaced by that of a sacrifice: in the Lord's supper the church, that is, the priest, offers a repeated sacrifice of Christ. In the latter part of this period and in connection with the adoption of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the cup was withheld from the communicants, lest part of the blood of Christ be spilled. In justification of this sacrilege, the doctrine of concomitance was developed, that is, the blood is in the body by natural connection and is taken with the body.[12]

Since the time of the Reformation no new views concerning the Lord's supper have been developed; so at present there is the Roman Catholic conception, the Lutheran view, the Zwinglian idea, and the Calvinistic interpretation of the signs in the Lord's supper.

# The Necessity of Instituted Signs

As we said before, it is essential for a sacrament to be instituted in the church. That institution is very important. Water in itself does not constitute the sacrament of baptism, nor do bread and wine have any significance as sacramental signs. It is true that water is symbolic of cleansing. It is also true that bread is symbolic of spiritual nourishment and that wine is symbolic of heavenly quickening and refreshment. If this were not true, they could not possibly serve as signs. Although it is true that these natural elements are in themselves signs and are able to express certain symbolic significance, they thereby do not constitute sacraments. The institution—the setting apart of the water in baptism from all other water and the setting apart of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper from all other bread and wine, the divine act whereby God himself connects his word with those signs—is essential in the constitution of sacraments.

It is evident from all the synoptic gospels that the Lord Jesus Christ in the night in which he was betrayed instituted the New Testament supper to replace the passover. It is hardly possible to explain the scriptural record concerning the last passover of Jesus with his disciples in any other way than by assuming that it was celebrated on the regular day, a Thursday evening, the fourteenth of Nisan (Matt. 26:17–20; Mark 14:12–17; Luke 22:7–14). The theory that the last paschal supper was eaten on the fifteenth of Nisan rather than on the fourteenth, in order to maintain that Jesus died at the same time that the paschal lamb was slain, certainly can find no support in the biblical record. Others claim that Jesus celebrated the paschal supper on the thirteenth of Nisan, a day early. This theory also is not in harmony with the account of the synoptic gospels. Besides, it would mean that the paschal lamb, which had to be offered in the temple, could not have been eaten. [13]

What was the significance of the passover? It was a harvest feast celebrated in the promised land, the land of the covenant. On the sixteenth of Nisan, the first sheaf of the harvest was waved before the Lord

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it (Lev. 23:9–11).

The passover was above all a feast of commemoration, a remembrance of the Lord's passing over the dwellings of his people that were covered by the blood of the lamb in the night the destroyer went through the house of bondage to kill all the firstborn of the land. On the passover the people commemorated their great deliverance from the house of bondage by the mighty hand of God (Ex. 12:3–20). In this respect the Old Testament passover was also a feast that had typical significance.

We would not say that circumcision and the passover constituted two Old Testament sacraments. Circumcision was a sacrament. The passover was not in itself a sacrament, but it closely approached the New Testament conception of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Israel celebrated its accomplished deliverance and at the same time looked forward to its deliverance as realized in the blood of the Lamb who was to be slain. That passover Christ Jesus changed into the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's supper, taking not the lamb, but bread and wine. The lamb could not serve the purpose of a sign in the Lord's supper. The paschal lamb was positively the last lamb that could ever be eaten and that could ever be sacrificed. The passover lamb that Christ so greatly desired to eat with his apostles, the lamb that had been carried into the temple and sacrificed before it was carried into the upper room, the lamb that was eaten by Christ and his apostles—that lamb was the last that was ever and that could ever be typically slain, for at the last passover the Lamb of God stood ready to be sacrificed. Because the passover lamb was typical of the sacrifice that was to be accomplished

on the cross, it could not look backward to that accomplished sacrifice. Therefore, the passover lamb could not serve in the New Testament as a sign of the sacrament. But the Lord took the bread that was eaten and the wine that was drunk at the passover when the third cup, the cup of thanksgiving, was taken up at the supper. That bread and wine, instead of the lamb, Christ definitely instituted.

That the bread and wine were instituted to serve as a sacrament, and therefore as signs and seals, is evident from the words the Lord spoke at this institution:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:26–28; cf. Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20).

Therefore, by Jesus' spoken words the bread and wine were not only separated from all other bread and wine, but also the bread and wine of the Lord's supper were instituted as sacramental signs and seals.

Notice also that by a specific command Christ very definitely instituted this sacrament in order that it might be observed by the church. When he gave the bread to the disciples, the Lord said, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). When he gave the cup to them, the Lord said, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (vv. 27–28). According to the account in Luke, the Lord added, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

From these words it is very clear that the Lord instituted a sacrament that was to be observed throughout the ages by his church in the world. That the observance of this supper is of great significance is very apparent from the fact that the institution of it was repeated by special revelation to the apostle Paul:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

There can be no doubt that when the apostle writes that he has received from the Lord this commandment concerning the Lord's supper, he means that he has received it by special revelation and not from the rest of the apostles. The fact that the Lord from heaven gave a special revelation concerning the institution of the Lord's supper to the apostle Paul, who had not been personally with the Lord in his earthly sojourn, certainly emphasizes the importance of this sacrament. We are not surprised, therefore, that the church, from the very earliest time and throughout the new dispensation, attached great significance to the institution of holy communion and guarded jealously that feast of commemoration, which is at the same time a sacrament of nourishment. Nor are we surprised that all of the Reformed confessions mention and elaborately explain this sacrament.

# The Symbolism of the Lord's Supper

The symbolism of the Lord's supper includes more than the mere signs. The signs are the bread and wine. The symbolism also includes the bread and wine, signifying the body and blood of the Lord; the *broken* bread and the wine *poured out*, signifying his broken body and shed blood; eating and drinking the bread and wine at the table of communion; the word of the minister, through whom Christ by his Spirit addresses his own word to the hearts of communing believers; and the table of communion, signifying that in his tabernacle we eat and drink with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A word of explanation about each of these elements is in order.

#### The Bread and Wine

The elements of the Lord's supper are bread and wine. The symbolism in these signs is plain. The bread signifies Christ as the bread of life, as he said to the Jews in Capernaum:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:32, 33, 35).

The same idea is expressed in scripture when it speaks of Christ as the water of life (John 4:13–14; John 7:37–38).

It is true that in the institution of the Lord's supper Jesus did not use the symbol of water, but that of wine. For this we can find two reasons: first, wine is the color of blood, and the wine at the communion table is the sign of the blood of Jesus Christ; second, wine is a symbol of communion, of prosperity and joy, according to scripture (Gen. 14:18; Gen. 27:27–28; Gen. 49:10–12; Deut. 7:13; Deut. 33:28; Ps. 104:14–15). Wine is the symbol of heavenly joy. Therefore, it was very fitting at the wedding in Cana that the heavenly bridegroom changed the water into wine (John 2:1–11). Thus we can understand that not water, but wine is used at the Lord's supper as the proper sign of the blood of the Lamb, by which not only our guilt is changed into righteousness, but also our earthly life is translated into the joy of God's heavenly tabernacle.

### The Breaking of Bread and Pouring of Wine

According to Christ's institution, the bread at the communion table must be broken:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body (Matt. 26:26; cf. Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).

The broken bread is the sign of the broken body of Christ. It has been objected that the body of Christ was not really broken. The apostle John even emphasizes the fact that Christ's body was not broken:

But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken (John 19:33–36; cf. Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20).

The scripture referred to in this passage is probably Exodus 12:46, which speaks of the paschal lamb: "In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof."

Although in this strict sense the body of the Savior was never broken and was laid whole in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, yet in a very real sense it was broken, as the Lord himself emphasized at the institution of the Lord's supper: "This is my body, which is broken for you." It was broken by the nails that were hammered through his hands and through his feet, as well as by the soldier's spear thrust that miraculously resulted in the flowing forth of blood and water from Jesus' side. His body was broken exactly in such a way that for six hours Jesus might slowly pour out his lifeblood, taste death in all its fullness, and suffer the wrath of God for the sins of his own. Therefore,

it is only proper to preserve this symbolism by the minister's breaking the bread before the eyes of the assembled congregation.

Although this is not expressly emphasized in the account of the institution of the Lord's supper, the wine must be poured out:

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:27–28; cf. Mark 14:23–24; Luke 22:20).

Just as the broken bread is the symbol of the broken body of Christ, so also the poured-out wine is the symbol of the shed blood of Christ. Also this part of the rich symbolism of the supper of the Lord ought to be preserved in its celebration. When individual cups are used, it certainly is proper for the minister to first pour out the wine into one cup in the sight of the congregation, rather than to immediately pass the already-filled cups to the communicants.

# **Eating and Drinking**

There is also the symbolism of eating the broken bread and drinking the poured out wine. At the institution of the Lord's supper, the Savior very definitely commanded, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). When he took the cup, he said, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (vv. 27–28). The signs of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper are not simply to be looked at, but are to be appropriated by eating and drinking. This eating and drinking symbolizes the spiritual activity of faith, whereby we appropriate Christ and all his benefits, as the Lord said to the Jews in Capernaum,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him (John 6:53–56).

As signs of the activity of saving faith, whereby we appropriate the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, eating the bread and drinking the wine belong very essentially to the symbolism of the Lord's supper. As certainly as the activity of saving faith is necessary for the appropriation of Christ and all his benefits, so surely do eating the broken bread and drinking the poured-out wine belong essentially to the symbolism of the Lord's supper.

### The Words of Institution

To the symbolism of the Lord's supper also belong the words of its institution, which the minister who serves the sacrament must speak. These words are, "Take, eat; this is my body . . . this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many . . ." (Matt. 26:26, 28) and, "this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). These words are not to be considered only in the sense of a command that must be obeyed, although this certainly is true. Not to partake of the table of the Lord, not to eat and drink the signs of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, and therefore not to heed the command of Christ to do this in remembrance of him is disobedience. But more important is the truth of the powerful and efficacious word of Christ, which will surely speak through the Holy Spirit to the hearts of the believers when they celebrate the Lord's supper. Through the officiating minister, Christ speaks his own word to the believers. Without the presence of Christ at the communion table, there is no sacrament, and the Lord's supper cannot be a means of grace for the strengthening of the

believers' faith. The minister's speaking—preferably as literally as possible—the words that Christ spoke at the institution of the Lord's supper certainly belongs as an essential part of the celebration of communion.

#### The Lord's Table

We must call attention also to the table of communion and to the fact that the sacrament is a supper. The supper is a sign of the fellowship of friendship. The table of communion is the table of God's everlasting covenant. As the Lord addressed his church in Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). At the table of communion, believers eat and drink with Christ, and through Christ with their covenant God who dwells with them, walks among them, and calls them his sons and his daughters (2 Cor. 6:16–18). Thus the table of communion is a sign of the tabernacle of God with men that will be realized finally in the new heavens and in the new earth (Rev. 21:1–3).

Although the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine remain the heart of the entire symbolism of the Lord's supper, the other elements may never be discarded or ignored.

#### The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation

Now the question is, What is the relation between the signs and the things signified? In what way is the believer nourished with the body and blood of Christ through the Lord's supper?

One answer is the Roman Catholic theory of transubstantiation. According to the Romanists, Christ is present in the Lord's supper neither in the spiritual sense, as the Reformed teach, nor even by the real presence of his body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, as the Lutherans teach, but by the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. That the Roman Catholic Church teaches this error and pronounces its curse upon all who deny it is very evident from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent:

In the first place, the holy Synod teaches, and openly and simply professes, that, in the august sacrament of the holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things. [14]

#### The same council declares:

And this faith has ever been in the Church of God, that, immediately after the consecration, the veritable body of our Lord, and his veritable blood, together with his soul and divinity, are under the species of bread and wine; but the body indeed under the species of bread, and the blood under the species of wine, by the force of the words; but the body itself under the species of wine, and the blood under the species of bread, and the soul under both, by the force of that natural connection and concomitancy whereby the parts of Christ our Lord, who hath now risen from the dead, to die no more, are united together; and the divinity, furthermore, on account of the admirable hypostatical union thereof with his body and soul. Wherefore it is most true, that as much as is contained under either species as under both; for Christ whole and entire is under the species of bread, and under any part whatsoever of that species; likewise the whole (Christ) is under the species of wine, and under the parts thereof. [15]

The Romish Church, therefore, teaches that the whole Christ is in the bread and the whole Christ is in the wine; even more, the whole Christ is in each and every particle of both species. Moreover, Rome teaches that the effect accomplished by transubstantiation is permanent. The Romish Church concludes from this permanent change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ that the host or wafer can be preserved, that it can be brought to the sick,

that it can be carried about in processions, and that it should be worshipped. [16]

The Romanists make a distinction between *doleia* (*inferior religious worship*) and *latreia* (*superior religious worship*). *Doleia* may be rendered to the saints and to angels, but *latreia* is due to God alone. Because Christ is God manifested in the flesh, worship may be paid to him. Since after the consecration of the bread and wine Christ is present in the wafer as to both his divine and his human natures, the Romanists pay homage and worship to that wafer. The propriety of worshipping the wafer as it represents Christ is also taught by the Council of Trent:

Wherefore, there is no room left for doubt, that all the faithful of Christ may, according to the custom ever received in the Catholic Church, render in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God, to this most holy sacrament. For not therefore is it the less to be adored on this account, that it was instituted by Christ, the Lord, in order to be received; for we believe that same God to be present therein, of whom the eternal Father, when introducing him into the world, says: *And let all the angels of God adore him;* whom the Magi, *falling down, adored;* who, in fine, as the Scripture testifies, was adored by the apostles in Galilee.

The holy Synod declares, moreover, that very piously and religiously was this custom introduced into the Church, that this sublime and venerable sacrament be, with special veneration and solemnity, celebrated, every year, on a certain day, and that a festival; and that it be borne reverently and with honor in processions through the streets and public places. [17]

#### The Romish Church declares the doctrine of transubstantiation:

And because that Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which he offered under the species of bread to be truly his own body, therefore has it ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod doth now declare it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.[18]

#### The Romish Church anathematizes everyone who denies this doctrine of transubstantiation:

If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that he is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue: let him be anathema.

If any one saith, that, in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denieth that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood—the species only of the bread and wine remaining—which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation: let him be anathema. [19]

#### This the council further confirms:

If any one denieth, that, in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist, the whole Christ is contained under each species, and under every part of each species, when separated: let him be anathema.[20]

As to the permanent change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church teaches:

If any one saith, that, after the consecration is completed, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are not in the admirable sacrament of the Eucharist, but [are there] only during the use, whilst it is being taken, and not either before or after; and that, in the hosts, or consecrated particles, which are reserved or which remain after communion, the true body of the Lord remaineth not: let him be anathema. [21]

### The council anathematizes those who disagree:

If any one saith, that, in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, is not to be adored

with the worship, even external of latria; and is, consequently, neither to be venerated with a special festive solemnity, nor to be solemnly borne about in procession, according to the laudable and universal rite and custom of holy Church; or, is not to be proposed publicly to the people to be adored, and that the adorers thereof are idolators: let him be anathema[22]

It is well-known that the laity in the Roman Catholic Church does not partake of the communion wine, but of the wafer only. The church admits that this usage is contrary to Holy Writ and to the custom of the early church. However, it claims that it is unnecessary for the laity to partake of the wine because the blood is in the body, and the whole Christ as to his body, soul, and divinity is in every particle of both species. Therefore, one who eats the consecrated bread eats the whole Christ. [23]

This teaching is absurd and a wanton violation of the ordinance of Christ. This idea is really a result of the doctrine of transubstantiation itself, which teaches that after consecration the cup does not contain wine, but the real blood of Christ. It was feared that in passing the communion cup a drop of wine, that is, a drop of the blood of Christ, would be spilled. In order to avoid this profanation, it was decided that the priest alone should drink the wine, while the laity should receive only the wafer.

[24] Thus the symbol and beautiful institution of the supper of the Lord was corrupted and profaned.

The corruption of the Lord's supper did not enter into the church all at once, but gradually developed. Even some of the early church fathers began to speak of the signs of the Lord's supper as being connected with the body and blood of Christ. Augustine did not teach anything like the doctrine of transubstantiation. He held that the unbeliever received nothing through this sacrament. But in the Middle Ages the lie of transubstantiation was gradually adopted, although even then some opposed this doctrine. The scholastics, whose purpose always was to maintain the tradition of the church, defended it. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 adopted it, and the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century finally set its seal upon it and called them accursed who denied it. [25]

### **Proofs for Transubstantiation Refuted**

In support of this error, the Romanists appeal to scripture. They point especially to John 6:48–65, where the Lord speaks of himself as the bread of life, the living bread, whereof if any man eat, he shall live forever. Of that living bread the Lord says,

And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him (vv. 51, 53–56).

We may remark that in John 6 there is certainly no direct reference to the institution of the Lord's supper. Even if there is a very indirect reference to the institution, there still is no proof for the doctrine of transubstantiation. Surely, the Lord in these passages does not speak of a literal eating of his flesh and a literal drinking of his blood. This was exactly the error which the Capernamites made: "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat" (v. 52)? At the end of his discourse in Capernaum, the Lord specifically states, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (v. 63). The Lord is speaking of his sacrifice which presently he is to offer on the cross, and which cannot be partaken of except by faith.

Hodge remarks that this argument proves too much for the Romanists:

Our Lord expressly declares that the eating of which He speaks is essential to salvation. If, therefore, his words are to be

understood of the Lord's Supper, then a participation in that sacrament is essential to salvation. But this the Church of Rome explicitly denies, and must in consistency with its whole system, insist on denying. Romanists teach that spiritual life is as necessary to an experience of the benefits of this sacrament, as natural life is to the body's being nourished by food.

They further teach that baptism, which precedes the eucharist, conveys all the saving benefits of Christ's redemption; they therefore cannot make the eucharist essential, and consequently they cannot, without contradicting Christ or themselves, interpret John 6:48–65 as referring to the Lord's Supper.[26]

The Romish Church also appeals to the words of the institution of the Lord's supper, "This is my body" (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19). However, as has been frequently pointed out over against this argument of the Romanists, the copulative verb *is* does not necessarily denote the identity of the subject and the predicate that it connects. When at the institution of the Lord's supper, the Lord pronounced the words "This is my body," he was still present in the flesh; therefore, he could not have meant that the bread which at that moment he handed to his disciples was identified with or transubstantiated into his own body.

Certain it is that in the night in which he was betrayed, the disciples did not eat the body of the Lord, but they are mere bread. Besides, the word *is* in scripture frequently means "signifies." Of this there are many examples in Holy Writ. In Christ's explanation of the parable of the sower, he said, "The field is the world" (Matt. 13:38), meaning that the field *signifies* the world. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep," and "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:7, 9). In the same sense, when the Lord at the institution of the supper pronounced the words, "This is my body," the verb *is* simply meant "signifies" or "symbolizes." There is no reason whatsoever in Holy Writ to interpret these words as indicating a change of substance. The sign certainly is not changed into the body of Christ.

Another objection against the theory of transubstantiation is that it involves an impossibility. Concerning this Hodge remarks:

The impossible cannot be true, and, therefore, cannot, rationally, be an object of faith. It is impossible that the accidents or sensible properties of the bread and wine should remain if the substance be changed. Such a proposition has no more meaning in it than the assertion that an act can be without an agent. Accidents or properties are the phenomena of substance; and it is self-evident that there can be no manifestations where there is not something to be manifested. In other words nothing, a "non-ens" cannot manifest itself. Romanists cannot turn to the theory that matter is not a substance; for that is not their doctrine. On the contrary, they assert that the substance of the bread is transmuted into the substance of Christ's body. Nor can they help themselves by resorting to the pantheistic doctrine that all accidents are phenomena of God, for that would upset their whole system. [27]

We may restate Hodge's objection in this form: according to the doctrine of transubstantiation, God creates a lie. According to the Romish Church, the accidents or properties of the bread and wine remain even after the consecration. The bread and wine still appeal to the senses as bread and wine, and nothing else. They look like bread and wine; they feel like bread and wine; and they taste like bread and wine. Yet, according to the Romanists, after the priest expresses the formula of consecration, the substances of bread and wine are transubstantiated into the substances of the body and blood of Christ. Hence through the priests God is presented as making a lie. This is nothing but blasphemy.

Perhaps the most serious objection to the doctrine of transubstantiation is its presentation of the grace of God as being in things, that is, the gracious operation of God through the signs and seals of the Lord's supper is not upon the heart of believers, but upon the signs themselves. The signs are changed. The bread is changed into the body of Christ and the wine into his blood. Christ operates magically upon the signs and places them within the physical reach of the partakers. Grace is in things. By a physical act of taking and eating and drinking, those who partake receive the grace of

Christ. With their physical hands they can lay hold upon grace as it is presented in the bread and wine. They can taste grace with their physical mouths; they can chew grace with their teeth; they can digest grace in their stomachs. As Lanfranc, one of the defenders of this doctrine, expressed it in the eleventh century: "The very body of Christ was truly held in the priest's hand, broken and chewed by the teeth of the faithful." [28]

Hence in order to partake of the Lord's supper, it is not necessary to possess an active faith, but merely to go to the Eucharist with an empty stomach. This probably is the principal error of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Because of this principle error, our controversy with the Romish Church is still very significant. We must not foster the notion that our controversy with Rome is antiquated and of no significance, for the chief and fundamental error of the fallacy of transubstantiation is that grace, the righteousness of Christ, and salvation are bound up in physical things and are accomplished by the act of the institute of the church. The blessings of salvation are divorced from the operation of the Holy Spirit and from the activity of faith. They are made accessible to all who can eat and drink, hear and see, and understand with their natural minds.

Thus the error of the Romanists concerning transubstantiation is not far different from the theory of common grace, which also postulates that grace is in things. The reprobate as well as the elect receive many blessings from God: food and drink, life and health, and more. According to the defenders of this theory, all things are grace to the wicked, to the reprobate; even the preaching of the word is grace to all who hear. In contrast, we must insist that grace is never in things, that it is only through an operation of the Holy Spirit that we can receive grace, and that this operation of the Holy Spirit is only in the elect.

#### The Lutheran Doctrine of Consubstantiation

Another interpretation of the connection between the signs of the Lord's supper and the things signified is denoted by the term *consubstantiation*. It is not exactly a Lutheran term, although the Lutherans accept it as a substantially correct representation of their view. By *consubstantiation* we mean that the Lutherans—in distinction from the sacramentarians, as they call the Reformed, and in distinction from the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation—teach that in the Lord's supper the body and blood of Jesus Christ is really and substantially present in, with, and under the signs of the bread and wine.

It is a well-known fact that at the time of the Reformation a schism arose between the Reformed and the Lutherans about the question of the Lord's supper. Although the Reformers agreed on all the great doctrines taught in the scriptures, they could not agree on this point. Several attempts were made to effect reconciliation, but they all failed. The controversy at the time was rather sharp and bitter, at least on the part of the Lutherans. This is evident from the very language of the introduction to the article on the Lord's supper in the Formula of Concord, a Lutheran confession adopted in 1576:

For a solid explication of this controversy, it is first to be understood that there are two sorts of sacramentarians. For some are exceedingly gross sacramentarians; these in perspicuous and plain words openly profess that which they think in their heart, to wit: that in the Lord's Supper there is nothing more present than bread and wine, which alone are distributed and received with the mouth. But others are astute and crafty, and thereby the most harmful of all the sacramentarians; these, when talking of the Lord's Supper, make in part an exceedingly high-sounding use of our mode of speaking, declaring that they too believe in a *true* presence of the *true*, substantial, and living body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, which presence and manducation, nevertheless, they say, to be spiritual, such as takes place by faith. And yet these latter sacramentarians, under these high-sounding phrases, hide and hold fast the same gross opinion which the former have, to wit: that, besides the bread and wine, there is nothing more present or taken with the mouth in the Lord's Supper. For the

term (*spiritualiter*) signifies nothing more to them than the Spirit of Christ or the virtue of the absent body of Christ and his merit, which is present; but they think that the body of Christ itself is in no way whatever present, but is contained above in the highest heaven, and they affirm that it behooves us by the meditations of faith to rise on high and ascend into heaven, and that this body and blood of Christ are to be sought there, and in nowise in union with the bread and wine of the Holy Supper. [29]

It is not easy to understand clearly the exact meaning of the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation. Do they teach that the literal and natural flesh and blood of Christ are masticated by the teeth and swallowed by the mouth together with the bread and wine in the Lord's supper? Some of their statements indeed leave the impression that this is their view. However, other parts of the Lutheran confessions emphasize that this eating and drinking is some spiritual and supernatural process. The Lutherans base their view especially on a literal interpretation of the Savior's words at the institution of the Lord's supper on the night in which he was betrayed: "Take, eat; this is my body," and, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood." The Lutheran confessions, including the Formula of Concord[30] and the Saxon Visitation Articles, [31] insist that these words must be taken literally.

Proceeding from this literal interpretation, the Lutherans teach, first, that the body and blood of Christ are really and substantially present in the signs of the bread and wine at the Lord's supper.[32]

Second, they teach that this real and substantial presence of the body and blood of Christ in the signs of the Lord's supper must not be explained from any words of consecration spoken by man, but rather from the omnipotence of Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, and by the union of the two natures in Christ. We must remember that the Lutherans teach the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ: After his ascension Christ is not confined to heaven, but is everywhere according to the human nature.[33] By ubiquity they do not mean the same as divine omnipresence or immensity. Rather, they mean that Christ, not only by his Spirit and grace, but also according to his human nature, is not confined locally to heaven, but is able to be present wherever he wants to be. Therefore, it is possible for him to be present in, under, and with the signs of the bread and wine on the Lord's table. [34]

Third, they teach that the body and blood of Christ are received not only by faith, "but also by the mouth," so that together with the bread and wine the partakers also literally eat the body and blood of Christ.[35]

Fourth, they teach that not only believers, but also unbelievers receive, eat, and drink the body and blood of Christ. [36]

# **Objections to Consubstantiation**

Regarding the scriptural basis for the literal interpretation of the words of the Lord at the institution of the Lord's supper, we note that it is impossible to take these words literally because at the moment of the institution of the Lord's supper, the Lord was still present in his natural body and blood. His body was not yet broken, and his blood was not yet shed. It follows that the Lord could not have meant to say that the bread that he held in his hand was identical with his body, and that the wine that he offered to his disciples in the cup was identical with his blood. Hence the figurative interpretation—this *signifies* my body and blood—not only gives good sense, but is also the only possible interpretation. Besides, the natural flesh and blood of Christ are no more.

The Saxon Visitation Articles state:

That the true and natural body of Christ which hung on the cross, and the true and natural blood, which flowed from the side of Christ, are exhibited and received. [37]

This is impossible. The natural body and blood of Christ, as he received them from the Virgin Mary, exist no more and cannot be exhibited and received. His body was broken and his blood was shed, and he received an altogether different, spiritual, and heavenly body. This spiritual, heavenly body belongs to heaven and is locally in heaven.

Moreover, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ are acts of faith alone. This is evident from John 6, a chapter often cited as indirectly referring to the supper of the Lord. From this chapter it is also evident that eating the flesh of Christ is equivalent to believing:

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Then said Jesus unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever. (John 6:35, 40, 47, 51, 53–58).

It is very evident that eating the bread of life and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are identical. It is not by literal manducation, but by faith alone that we can eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ.

Besides, it is well-known that in scripture the word *is* must frequently be understood in the figurative sense. In the sentence, "The seven good ears are seven years" (Gen. 41:26), the sense is that the seven ears *signify* the seven years. The same is true of such propositions as, "I am the living bread" (John 6:51) and, "The field is the world" (Matt. 13:38). Therefore, it is certainly thoroughly scriptural to interpret the words of Christ in the figurative sense.

The conception of the Lutheran church concerning the Lord's supper constitutes a curious mixture of the physical and the spiritual. Natural eating and drinking are purely physical acts, and by these physical acts, one can eat and drink the real and substantial body and blood of Christ. Yet at the same time the Lutherans reject the idea that one can literally manducate the body of Christ and swallow his blood by that physical act, insisting that in the Lord's supper one performs a spiritual and supernatural act of eating and drinking. Further, unbelievers and the unworthy receive the body and blood of Christ as well as believers and the worthy. It is certainly difficult to understand how unbelievers can perform a supernatural and heavenly act, even apart from the fact that eating Christ's literal body and drinking his literal blood could not possibly be to the condemnation of the partakers.

Therefore, we must reject the Lutheran view of the Lord's supper as unscriptural and impossible. As we remarked in connection with the Romish view of transubstantiation, the Lutheran view is also exposed to the error that grace is in things. However, the living Christ and all his grace can be received only by an act of faith.

# The Zwinglian View of the Lord's Supper

Before we explain the Reformed conception of the relation between the signs and the things signified in the Lord's supper, we must still call attention to the Zwinglian view. The traditional and generally accepted representation of the Zwinglian view is that the Lord's supper is a mere feast of commemoration. This reformer did not really see a sacrament at all in the Eucharist; in the Lord's supper there is no operation of God in Christ, but rather an act on the part of the church. It is doubtful

whether this representation of Zwingli's view does complete justice to him, although he seems to belittle the supernatural element in the sacrament. Sometimes he stresses the act of believers rather than the work of God and the operation of Christ through his Holy Spirit in the Lord's supper, and he leaves the impression that to him the supper mainly serves the purpose of commemorating the death of Christ.

But there also are expressions in Zwingli's writings that seem to prove the contrary. Besides, the First Helvetic Confession, which is supposed to conform to the Zwinglian view, speaks about the power and efficacy of the sacraments:

The signs, which are called sacraments, are two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are significant, holy signs of sublime, secret things. However, they are not mere, empty signs, but consist of the sign and substance . . . In the Lord's Supper the bread and wine are the signs, but the spiritual substance is the communion of the body and blood of Christ, the salvation acquired on the Cross, and forgiveness of sins. As the signs are bodily received, so these substantial, invisible and spiritual things are received in faith. Moreover, the entire power, efficacy and fruit of the sacraments lies in these spiritual and substantial things. [38]

The confession speak of the Lord's supper as follows:

In regards to the Lord's Supper we hold, therefore, that in it the Lord truly offers His body and His blood, that is, Himself, to His own, and enables them to enjoy such fruit that He lives ever more and more in them and they in Him.[39]

The Second Helvetic Confession also has language that is very similar to the Reformed conception of the Lord's supper. [40] Although we do not mean to say that all that is contained in these two confessions can be attributed to Zwingli himself, yet we consider it very questionable whether Zwingli's conceived of the Lord's supper as merely a feast of commemoration and nothing more.

### The Reformed View of the Lord's Supper

It is not always easy to understand what significance Calvin attached to the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Sometimes he even seems to teach that in the Lord's supper there is an influence of Christ's glorified body on believers, although this is probably to be taken in a figurative sense. In other passages Calvin clearly teaches that the presence of the body and blood of Christ is in the signs only spiritually and can be eaten and drunk not by the mouth, but only by faith. He emphasizes that every imagination of a local presence of Christ's body and blood is to be entirely removed. Christ as a man is now present only in heaven and not upon earth; therefore, his communion is to be sought only by faith. He cannot be included in the earthly elements.

This is the teaching of the Reformed confessions.

The Heidelberg Catechism instructs:

Why, then, doth Christ call the bread his body, and the cup his blood, or the New Testament in his blood; and St. Paul, the communion of the body and blood of Christ?

Christ speaks thus not without great cause: namely, not only to teach us thereby that like as bread and wine sustain this temporal life, so also his crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink of our souls unto life eternal; but much more, by this visible sign and pledge to assure us that we are as really partakers of his true body and blood, through the working of the Holy Ghost, as we receive by the mouth of the body these holy tokens in remembrance of him; and that all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly our own as if we had ourselves suffered and done all in our own persons. [41]

Two elements are here mentioned as constituting the power and efficacy of the supper of the Lord: through the supper we spiritually eat and drink Christ at his table, and our souls are fed to eternal life;

through the Holy Spirit our faith that we are really partakers of the suffering and obedience of Christ is strengthened.

Substantially, the same view is taught in the Belgic Confession, Article 35[42]; the French Confession of Faith, Article 36[43]; the Scottish Confession of Faith, Chapter 22[44]; the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Article 28[45]; and the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 29.[46]

All of the Reformed confessions emphasize that the eating and drinking that takes place at the table of the Lord is purely spiritual. There is a spiritual food: Christ imparts himself at the table of communion to believers as the true meat and drink unto life eternal. There is a spiritual operation: Christ imparts himself to believers through the Spirit of Christ. There is a spiritual mouth by which believers eat and drink: faith is the spiritual mouth. This entire spiritual mode of operation, this spiritual eating and drinking of Christ, takes place through the means of the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine.

The Belgic Confession compares this spiritual eating and drinking with the process of physical nourishment. First, in physical nourishment there is a physical organism, the human body, which is dependent for its sustenance on the outside world, on food and drink. Second, there is a physical substance, food and drink, which must be assimilated by that body. Third, there is the longing of that body for physical food and drink; it hungers and thirsts. Fourth, there is the act of eating and drinking by the physical mouth. Finally, there is the process of assimilation, whereby the body changes the food and drink into its own flesh and blood and thus is strengthened. [47]

All this can be applied spiritually. There is a spiritual entity that must be nourished, the regenerated inward man created in Christ Jesus; however, it is not independent and cannot sustain its own life, but must be nourished from without. The proper nature of that regenerated life is spiritual. It consists of a spiritual knowledge of God in Christ, forgiveness of sin, righteousness before God, adoption unto children, holiness, hatred and abhorrence of sin, and delight in the law of God. This spiritual life must be nourished; it must be sustained and must grow and develop unto perfection. This spiritual life of the regenerated man can never be nourished by material food, but must have spiritual nourishment: righteousness, holiness, wisdom, light, and knowledge, which are outside of the regenerated man, but which can be assimilated by him. That spiritual food and drink is, in one word, grace. And that grace is all in Christ. Christ is the regenerated man's food, which feeds him unto eternal life. Out of Christ, he receives grace for grace (John 1:16). Christ is the bread of life (John 6:33, 35, 48, 51, 58). Christ is the spiritual nourishment that the regenerated man needs to sustain his life.

Also, the process of assimilation by which this spiritual food and drink becomes the believer's own is purely spiritual. Christ must impart himself to the regenerated believer, and the believer must eat and drink him. This mode of operation cannot be physical, but must be purely spiritual. According to the Roman Catholics, there is an action of Christ through the priest on that physical food whereby it is changed into the body and blood of Christ. If this were true, the living Christ would actually be beyond the reach of the believer, for that bread and wine can be taken only physically and can have nourishing effect only on the body. Rather, the operation in the Lord's supper is spiritual.

Christ is truly present in the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine, but only in a spiritual sense. By an operation of his Spirit, Christ imparts himself to the believer, not only mystically, but also through the consciousness of the regenerated man so that he constantly is strengthened in righteousness and holiness, in wisdom and knowledge, and grows in the grace of the Lord. As Christ imparts himself by his Spirit to the regenerated man, that man eats and drinks him, not with his physical mouth, but by the spiritual mouth of faith. Faith is the spiritual power of the soul to

eat and drink Christ. This faith, whereby believers receive Christ and assimilate him, is wrought and strengthened chiefly by the word of the gospel and also through the signs and seals of the sacraments, in this case, through the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine.

Herein lies the special significance of the Lord's supper. We must not imagine that in the supper a grace is imparted to us that is not and cannot be received in any other way than by eating and drinking the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine at the table of the Lord. Christ always imparts himself to the believer and feeds his soul unto everlasting life. The chief means whereby he imparts himself is always the preaching of the gospel, and to this the sacraments add nothing. But through the visible signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine, the Holy Spirit effects two things: he strengthens the personal assurance and confidence of faith and stimulates faith to a greater hunger and thirst for Christ, so that by faith believers eat and drink Christ unto life eternal, even as he imparts himself to them at his table. Thus the supper of the Lord is a means unto growth in grace.

#### The Mass

A word must still be said in this connection about the Romish notion that the Lord's supper is a continual sacrifice of Christ offered by the priest. We can distinguish between the Eucharist and the mass. Both presuppose that the bread and wine at the Lord's table are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. While the Eucharist consists only in the eating of the wafer and the drinking of the wine by the priest, the mass proper really consists in the sacrifice of Christ—also by the priest—under the form of bread and wine. That the Romish Church actually presents the Lord's supper as a continual sacrifice of Christ through the priest is evident from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent:

Forasmuch as, under the former Testament, according to the testimony of the Apostle Paul, there was no perfection, because of the weakness of the Levitical priesthood; there was need, God, the Father of mercies, so ordaining, that another priest should rise, according to the order of Melchisedech, our Lord Jesus Christ, who might consummate, and lead to what is perfect, as many as were to be sanctified. He, therefore, our God and Lord, though he was about to offer himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father, by means of his death, there to operate an eternal redemption; nevertheless, because that his priesthood was not to be extinguished by his death, in the Last Supper, on the night in which he was betrayed,—that he might leave, to his own beloved Spouse the Church, a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world, and its salutary virtue be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit,—declaring himself constituted a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech, he offered up to God the Father his own body and blood under the species of bread and wine; and, under the symbols of those same things, he delivered [his own body and blood] to be received by his apostles, whom he then constituted priests of the New Testament; and by those words, Do this in commemoration of me, he commanded them and their successors in the priesthood to offer [them]; even as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught. For, having celebrated the ancient Passover, which the multitude of the children of Israel immolated in memory of their going out of Egypt, he instituted the new Passover [to wit], himself to be immolated, under visible signs, by the Church through [the ministry of] priests, in memory of his own passage from this world unto the Father, when by the effusion of his own blood he redeemed us, and delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into his kingdom. And this is indeed that clean oblation, which can not be defiled by any unworthiness, or malice of those that offer [it]; which the Lord foretold by Malachias was to be offered in every place, clean to his name, which was to be great amongst the Gentiles; and which the Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, has not obscurely indicated, when he says, that they who are defiled by the participation of the table of devils, can not be partakers of the table of the Lord; by the table, meaning in both places the altar. This, in fine, is that oblation which was prefigured by various types of sacrifices, during the period of nature, and of the law; inasmuch as it comprises all the good things signified by those sacrifices, as being the consummation and perfection of them all. [48]

That the Roman Catholics teach that in the mass and through the priests Christ is offered as a

continual sacrifice is clearer from the next chapter:

And forasmuch as, in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy Synod teaches, that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory, and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace *in seasonable aid*, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent, with a sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence. For the Lord, appeased by the oblation thereof, and granting the grace and gift of penitence, forgives even heinous crimes and sins. For the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministery of priests, who then offered himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different. The fruits indeed of which oblation, of that bloody one to wit, are received most plentifully through this unbloody one; so far is this [latter] from derogating in any way from that [former oblation]. Wherefore, not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ, and who are not as yet fully purified, is it rightly offered, agreeably to a tradition of the apostles. [49]

It is evident that, according to the Romish Church, the mass is a continual and oft-repeated sacrifice of Christ offered by the priests, and that this repeated sacrifice is necessary for the forgiveness of sins of those who are living on the earth and of the departed souls in purgatory. According to the Roman Catholics, the mass has all the essential elements of a true sacrifice. It is offered by a priest, Jesus Christ, through the ministry of his earthly representative, the Roman Catholic priest. It has its victim, again Jesus Christ, as he is really present under the appearance of bread and wine. And it is offered up as a real sacrifice through the mystic rite of consecration. In the mass there is, therefore, a continuation of the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the cross in an unbloody manner. The Romish Church indeed maintains that this sacrifice of the mass is necessary and denies that it is sufficient that Christ once for all and forever shed his blood for the blotting out of all the sins of his people. This sacrifice of the mass—together with the teaching that the transubstantiated signs are to be worshipped by the church—the Heidelberg Catechism rightly calls an "accursed idolatry." [50]

# Proper Partakers of the Lord's Supper

We must still answer the question, For whom is the Lord's supper instituted? The answer is that it is instituted for conscious believers. This implies, first, that only those who are truly sorrowful for their sins and live in true repentance and sorrow after God are true partakers of the supper of the Lord. Second, true partakers are those who trust that their sins are forgiven only for the sake of the obedience and perfect sacrifice of Christ and that all their sins are covered by his passion and death. Third, true partakers are those who desire to have their faith strengthened, long for holiness in life and walk, fulfill their part of the covenant of God, love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, forsake the world, crucify their old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.[51]

This implies that unbelievers and hypocrites cannot properly partake of the Lord's supper, but they eat and drink the signs of the broken bread and poured-out wine to their condemnation and by this means are hardened in their sin. It also implies that with respect to the Lord's supper, the church institute has a calling to bar from holy communion all those who live in open wickedness and do not sincerely repent of their sin, although they are outwardly members of the church. Such persons must be disciplined and must finally be excommunicated from the fellowship of the church.

Hence the Reformed churches cannot have open communion, for by allowing everyone who desires to partake of the signs of the bread and wine, the church becomes guilty of profaning the covenant of God. Thus it is necessary for anyone who approaches the table of the Lord rightly to examine himself, according to the injunction of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27–29:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

The necessity of self-examination is emphasized in Question and Answer 81 of the Heidelberg Catechism from the viewpoint of the individual believer, and in Question and Answer 82 from the aspect of the institution of the church and its calling with respect to maintaining the covenant of God. [52]

The Belgic Confession teaches the same necessity:

Further, though the Sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men; the ungodly indeed receives the Sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the Sacrament. As Judas and Simon the sorcerer both, indeed, received the Sacrament, but not Christ, who was signified by it, of whom believers only are made partakers. Lastly, we receive this holy Sacrament in the assembly of the people of God, with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Saviour, with thanksgiving, making there confession of our faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself; lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup he eat and drink judgment to himself. In a word, we are excited by the use of this holy Sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor. [53]

The "Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper" also requires self-examination before partaking of the supper of the Lord:

The true examination of ourselves consists of these three parts:

First. That every one consider by himself, his sins and the curse due to him for them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God: considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) he hath punished the same in his beloved Son Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Secondly. That every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God, that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, so perfectly, as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins, and fulfilled all righteousness.

Thirdly. That every one examine his own conscience, whether he purposeth henceforth to show true thankfulness to God in his whole life, and to walk uprightly before him; as also, whether he hath laid aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy, and doth firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true love and peace with his neighbor. [54]

The form goes on to state that all those—and those only—"who are thus disposed, God will certainly receive in mercy, and count them worthy partakers" of the Lord Jesus Christ. By way of contrast, the form states, "all those who do not feel this testimony in their hearts eat and drink judgment to themselves." It admonishes all who do not walk according to these rules of self-examination and who are defiled with sins of which they do not repent and which they do not confess to keep away from the table of the Lord as those who have no part in the kingdom of Christ. If they nevertheless partake, their condemnation and judgment will be made heavier. This does not mean that only the perfect may come to the table of the Lord and that only those who are without sin may partake,

for we do not come to this supper, to testify thereby that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves; but on the contrary, considering that we seek our life out of ourselves in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that we lie in the midst of death; therefore, notwithstanding we feel many infirmities and miseries in ourselves, as namely, that we have not perfect faith, and that we do not give ourselves to serve God with that zeal as we are bound, but have daily to strive with the weakness of our faith, and the evil lusts of our flesh; yet, since we are (by the grace of the Holy Spirit) sorry for these weaknesses, and earnestly desirous to fight against our unbelief, and to live according to all the commandments of God: therefore we rest assured that no sin or infirmity, which still remaineth against our will, in us, can hinder us from being received of God in mercy, and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly meat and drink.[55]



# THE SIXTH LOCUS Eschatology

# Chapter 40

# The Idea of the End of All Things

### The Name Eschatology

The name *eschatology* does not express completely what is included under the last locus of dogmatics. Other names have been used, such as *De Novissimis* (*Concerning the End*) and *De Consummatione Saeculi* (*Concerning the Consummation of the Ages*), a name that Dr. Abraham Kuyper, Sr. uses, but neither of these names covers the contents of this last locus. The name *De Consummatione Saeculi* denotes approximately the same idea as that of *eschatology*, while the name *De Novissimis* refers to what lies beyond the last time (ἔσχατος ὁ χρόνος). The name *eschatology*, which is derived from ἔσχατος (*last*) and λέγειν (*to speak*), denotes only that which must still take place in order to bring to an end all that has reference to the present world. It does not refer to the eternal things whatsoever. It refers to the end of the world and to the things that immediately precede the end and that must lead to the end, but it does not apply to the new and eternal creation of God where the tabernacle of God will be with men. This must be borne in mind when we nevertheless use the term *eschatology* for this locus.

The term *eschatology* is derived from Holy Writ, which speaks of the last hour (ἐσχάτη ἄρα) that already is: "Little children, it is the last time [ἄρα]" (1 John 2:18). Scripture speaks of the last days (ἔσχαται ἡμέραι—Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1). It also tells us that Christ as the Lamb of God was known "before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times" for us (ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων—1 Pet. 1:20). Scripture distinguishes between αἰὼν οὖτος (*this age*) and αἰὼν μέλλων (*the age to come*) or in the Hebrew, הָּעוֹלְם הַזּהָ (*this age*) and κρύτς (*the future age* or *the age to come*). When we speak of eschatology, we refer particularly to the last things that must precede the age to come. This includes the state of things inaugurated by the parousia and that will forever exist in the age to come.

#### **Eschatology in the History of Dogma**

It stands to reason that on the basis of Holy Writ, the church from its very beginning fixed her attention upon these last things and upon the age to come. Although the last locus did not receive the attention enjoyed by the other loci, the ideas of life and death, the state after death, the hope of the resurrection, and the eternal desolation of the wicked were indeed developed. Moreover, while in the very earliest period of the church some of the fathers strongly emphasized the idea of an earthly millennium, in a later period of church history, from about the fifth century to the time of the Reformation, these chiliastic notions were opposed and gradually forgotten. The notion of an earthly millennium and of a kingdom established on this earth was replaced by an emphasis on the future kingdom of eternal glory. In this later period attention was also centered upon the intermediate state, the state of the soul after death and before the resurrection, and the notion of purgatory was developed.

At the time of the Reformation, the idea of purgatory was rejected, but eschatology did not receive its proper place and attention in dogmatics. The Reformation emphasized the second coming of Christ, the resurrection unto glory, as well as the general resurrection of the dead, eternal life and eternal doom, and it rejected the chiliastic notions that had again arisen in some sects at the end of the previous period. But the whole of eschatology received only scant attention.

Recently, however, there has been a marked change. The church as a whole is paying more attention to eschatological questions, although the new emphasis is largely due to the premillenarians, as well as to the new theology introduced by the school of Karl Barth and others.

# **Neo-orthodox Eschatology**

Especially the school of Barth, to which belong men like Brunner, Eduard Thurneysen, Friedrich Gogarten, Adolph Bultmann, Heinrich Barth (Karl's brother), Heinrich Knittenmyer, and W. Kolfhaus, emphasizes eschatology so strongly that in principle this school of thought regards all dogmatics and theology as eschatological. But their eschatology is radically different from what the church has always understood by it and from the teachings of scripture; although those of Barth's school claim that their view is exactly that of Holy Writ, especially of the New Testament.

In the dogmatics of Barth or, rather, in Barthian philosophy, the eschatology of the church and of Holy Writ can hardly be recognized, especially because of his dialectic method and because his use of the paradox is very obscure and difficult to understand—so obscure, indeed, that one cannot help wondering sometimes whether Barth clearly understands his own terminology.

According to the faith of the church, the meaning of *last* (ἔσχατος) is last in the chronological sense. *Last things* (ἔσχάτα) are the last things in time, the last things in the present age, in *this age* (αίὼν οὖτος). The end of this present age, according to the faith of the church from the beginning, will be characterized by the ripened ethical fruit of sin and grace. The measure of iniquity will be filled, and the suffering of Christ in and through the church will reach its fullness ( $\pi\lambda$ ήρωμα). According to the faith of the church, moreover, the end of this present age will be terminated by the parousia, the second advent of Christ, which is a visible and literal coming of the Lord. That end, according to the faith of the church, will be accompanied by terrible catastrophes, so that the entire form of this world will pass away, and the very elements will melt and burn (2 Pet. 3:10). This coming of Christ will inaugurate a new world, the everlasting kingdom of God, the heavenly world, where the tabernacle of God will be with men (Rev. 21:3), while the wicked will be cast forever into eternal desolation.

Barth, however, presents an entirely new eschatology that has nothing to do with the faith of the church or the teaching of Holy Writ. The basic notion on which the entire eschatology of the school of Barth and dialectic theology rests is the qualitative distinction between eternity and time. Again and again in the works of dialectic theologians this distinction is emphasized. What do they mean by this distinction? Do they merely mean that eternity is not time, that only God is eternal, and that the creature is necessarily temporal; in other words, that eternity is not time indefinitely prolonged?

If this were the meaning, there would be no dispute. However, this is not the case. They mean something entirely different. In dialectic theology, eternity is related to time as the yes to the no. Eternity is everything; time is nothing. Barth writes:

That time is nothing when measured by the standard of eternity, that all things are semblance when measured by their origin and by their end, that we are sinners, and that we must die—all these things are, even though the barrier be not for us the place of exit. [1]

According to Gogarten, eternity is in principle dissolution of time. Everything in the sphere of earthly existence and life, all history, and man, measured by eternity, is nought: *Offenbarung und Zeit* (*appearance and time*). Eternity is the wholly other, and between eternity and time is the death-line.

Eternity marks or limits time on every side. The "end" is not an end of time in the chronological sense, but it is rather the *Augenblick* (*moment*) in which eternity breaks into time—now in the moment of revelation and forever at the moment of death.[2]

This, according to Barth, is true eschatology. This is the parousia of Christ; this is the *Auferstehung der Toten (resurrection of the dead)*. That this is indeed the teaching of Barth and of the entire group of dialectic theologians is evident from *The Epistle to the Romans*.

There is always a tension between the 'Then' of our unruffled existence and the 'Now' of our disturbed recollection of non-existence. There is always a tension between the times of the revelation that have 'already' occurred, between the deeds that have been 'already' done, between the God who has been 'already' known, and our waiting for the existential occurrence of what has only apparently 'already' taken place, our expecting and looking for the eternal 'Moment' of the Appearance, the Parousia, the Presence of Jesus Christ. This tension of the times has as much or as little to do with the well-known nineteen hundred years of the history of the Church—which quite obviously have 'not yet' ushered in the Parousia—as it had with those weeks or months during which the Epistle to the Romans lay in Phoebe's trunk (16:1), or with the moments which elapsed between Paul's dictation and Tertius' writing (16:22). For the hour of awakening, the striking of the last hour, the time of fulfilment, which is here announced, certainly does not mean some succeeding chronological hour, as though the life which proceeds from death, the non-existence by which all 'existence' is dissolved, the Now which is between all past and all future, could be a period of time succeeding another period in time . . . Will there never be an end of all our ceaseless talk about the *delay* of the Parousia? How can the coming of that which doth not enter in ever be delayed? The End of which the New Testament speaks is no temporal event, no legendary 'destruction' of the world; it has nothing to do with any historical, or 'telluric', or cosmic catastrophe. The end of which the New Testament speaks is really the End; so utterly the End that in the measuring of nearness or distance our nineteen hundred years are not merely of little, but of no importance; so utterly the End that Abraham already saw the Day—and was glad. [3]

In *The Resurrection of the Dead*, a sort of commentary on the first epistle to the Corinthians, Barth strikes a very similar note:

In using this expression [last things] we involuntarily think of events and figures belonging to a future of the world, of humanity and the individual, which is wrapped in obscurity, which is perhaps immediately imminent, but perhaps thousands upon thousands of years distant from us in time; we think of "the end of history" in the sense of the termination of history, history at the termination of the story, of the life story of the individual as well as the story of the world and of the Church, in fact, even of natural history, in a possibility beyond those known to us, but always as new, unknown further possibilities linking up with the latter in continuous succession, although perhaps amid unparalleled catastrophes, surpassing and perpetuating them upon a higher plane. Why should there not be "ends of history" and "last things" in this sense too? Why should it not be deserving of serious consideration? The endeavours that abound in all epochs and civilizations, never successfully suppressed but never wholly without success at all, to penetrate the secret of continual existence in time, forbid us to leave entirely out of our calculations a calm consideration, at any rate of this, according as one regards it, joyful or melancholy possibility. There might be something in it. Why not?

Further, the great historical transformations, whence we have emerged, and in the midst of which we are standing, the supposition which can hardly be kept out of sight, that entirely different things might be in store for our so-called civilized world in the near or remote future, facilitate our appreciation of the possibility that a final term of history, although perhaps for a time only in the form of a new ice age, such as plays an important part (really not unmerited) in Troeltsch's theology, might dawn upon the whole. And if the extinguishing of a star in the dark firmament accidentally reminds us that somewhere, at a distance which we are quite unable to apprehend or imagine, a world has actually and literally perished and been dissolved into its atoms, it may be decades or centuries ago, so the consideration that far away and long ago such a thing happened is, at any rate, less ingenious than the other, which is obvious to an unsophisticated mind *iam proximus ardet Ucalegon* (Virgil's "Now neighbor Ucalegon is on fire") such a thing might happen to us even to-day. As images of "last things," such final possibilities, lying so far and yet so near us, might well be instructive and stimulating, especially if we should unhappily be indifferent to the obvious symbols of "last things," ice ages, and the fate of expiring worlds in the past and the present, by which we are, without resort to metempsychosis, surrounded.

But "last things," in the sense of 1 Cor. 15 and in the sense of the New Testament generally, are *not* such final possibilities, however real they may seem to our eyes. Not even if we conceive them only as preliminary stages to physical-metaphysical, cosmic-metacosmic transformations and revolutions of an unparalleled kind. Not even if the picture of this background of history's end is composed of, and constructed with, material taken from the Bible and perhaps even from

1 Cor. 15. "Everything transitory" is only a parable; that even the objects of the biblical world of apprehension belong to the passing; that they are meant to serve and not to rule, to signify and not to be, the Bible, at any rate, leaves us in no doubt. Last *things*, as such, are not *last* things, however great and significant they may be. He only speaks of *last* things who would speak of the *end* of all things, of their end understood plainly and fundamentally, of a reality so radically superior to all things, that the existence of all things would be utterly and entirely *based* upon it alone, and thus, in speaking of their end, he would in truth be speaking of nothing else than their beginning. And when he speaks of history-end and of time-end, he is only speaking of the *end* of history and the *end* of time. But once more of its end, understood thus fundamentally, thus plainly, of a reality so radically superior to all happening and all temporality, that in speaking of the finiteness of history and the finiteness of time, he is also speaking of that upon which all time and all happening is *based*. The end of history must be for him synonymous with the pre-history, the limits of time of which he speaks must be the limits of all and every time and thus necessarily the *origin* of time. [4]

We will understand now that according to Barth the end is not to be conceived chronologically, for then the end could not be the beginning. But as the end is conceived metaphysically or ideologically, so that it is the limit of time marked by eternity, we can understand that according to Barth the end of time is at the same time the beginning of eternity; that time, which in itself is nothing but vanity and death, is based upon eternity, which is life and the resurrection; and that eternity is the origin of time.

Barth writes further:

The representations of "last things" or of "end-of-history" engrafted upon the language and world of apprehension of the Bible have, however primitive they may be in certain circumstances, at least the great advantage over other similar things, that the idea of eternity, at least according to name and place, is not quite unknown to them. The "last things," however weightily they may be arranged in sequence, the final-history, with whatever complications it may be spun out, here become, willy-nilly, the end of all things, the end of history, so far as, where the idea of eternity is not quite unknown, the real end at last, the absorption of all this and that, all here and there, all once and now into the solemn peace of the One, is found to occur at a definite place. Here, if this idea in its justifying power is even to some extent known, one is at any rate preserved from plunging like a drunkard into the bottomless abyss of a supposed absolute future, and, like the eternal Jew, if not wandering among, at any rate pondering upon, the succession of millions of years, or even the succession of æons, and to regard the result of this as eschatology. Somehow and somewhere the infinite series is apt to come to a stop in a thought somehow determined by the Bible, the infinite series thus becoming a finite one, in view of the insurmountable wall which is placed against it by the eternity where God is all in all. Here it cannot be altogether forgotten and overlooked that the eternity, of which others perhaps also speak, is the eternity of God, that is to say, the rule, the Kingdom of God, His absolute transcendence as Creator, Redeemer, and King of things, of history; thus not just the infinity of the world of time, of things, above all men, but, however it may stand with the due prolongation of their existence into a beyond, their fundamental finiteness. The force of this biblical idea of eternity is to-day sustaining such a man as Kuno Fiedler with his passionate gospel of the "Dawn of Nihilism."

But here we may not stop half-way. The knowledge that it is God's eternity which sets a limit to the endlessness of the world, of time, of things, of men, must be made fruitful. The *last* word that is spoken here must be so understood as last word that it can at the same time be understood as *first* word, the history of the end at the same time, and, as such, the history of the beginning—as the first word, and as the history of the beginning of all time, of the whole of time, of the oldest ages as well as of the latest ages, and of all the ages situated at the centre. Time as such is finite by virtue of its limitation by eternity. But as the word that first establishes and as the history of the beginning it must be understood, as the word and history of the origin of all time, of the whole of time. For if eternity limits and sets an end to time as such, it marks it indeed as finite, but it marks it. Whoever clearly grasps this is removed from the temptation to confuse the end-of-history with the termination of history, however impressive and wonderful it may be. Of the *real* end-of-history it may be said at any time: The end is near! Even of an age of the greatest and most impressive catastrophes of the most supernatural kind only this could be said fundamentally. The end is near! and that applies fundamentally also to yesterday, to-day, and tomorrow. But he will also be removed from the other temptation, to confuse eternity with a great annihilation, and to make of the end-ofhistory an annihilation of history. That would, in fact, not be real eternity, not even the eternity of God, which dissolves time into infinity, instead of marking it (marking it) as infinite. A thinker who obeys wholly and not only in part the promptings of the Bible, then, must pass right through these two temptations. The doctrine of "last things" or eschatology is, therefore, unless this conception is very thoroughly explained, a misleading, and, in any case, inadequate description of what Paul expounded in 1 Cor. 15.[5]

Thus it is very evident that when Barth speaks of eschatology, he uses entirely different language

from that which the church has always spoken and from that which scripture speaks, especially in the New Testament. According to Barth, the end of things has nothing to do with time in its chronological succession, and it is always near because eternity always marks time. The end is the beginning because time has its origin in eternity, and time is based upon eternity.

Although our quotation is already long, yet in order to present Barth and his school in as clear a light as possible, we will quote a little more:

If the assumption is correct upon which we have so far proceeded in our commentary, that the discourse of the apostle in the whole Epistle proceeds from a single point and harks back again to this same point, and that 1 Cor. 15 is to be understood as an attempt to express in words this one single point in itself, severed from the relationships in which it had up till now almost only been visible, then the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead which he expounds here is in no case an "eschatology" in the sense which attaches to this word in ordinary dogma, that is, an attempt, after speaking of everything else possible, to bring forward something about death, the beyond and world perfection, but we have to do here with the doctrine of the "End," which is at the same time the beginning, of the last things, which are, at the same time, the first. The chapter treats of Death and the Dead, in sharp contrast to the abundance of the possibilities of life which was the theme of chapter 14. All those things which the Corinthian Christians were previously bidden to lay to heart suddenly appear here in the pale light of the fact that they must die. Truly, this is not a recollection among other recollections: it is the recollection which Paul wants to awaken. But the theme is to be the resurrection of the dead. Only that gives meaning and emphasis to the recollection. What is the end, if it be only the end? What is eternity, if it be only eternity? What can touch us, when we are not, when we do not know, when we cannot have? With the word "resurrection" however, the apostolic preaching puts in this empty place against all that exists for us, all that is known to us, all that can be possessed by us, all things of all time—what? not the non-being, the unknown, the not-to-be-possessed, nor yet a second being, a further thing to become known, a higher future possession, but the source and the truth of all that exists, that is known, that can belong to us, the reality of all res, of all things, the eternity of time, the resurrection of the dead. But be it understood: all this exactly in that empty place, and therefore exactly where only the indifferent conception of the non-existent, unknown, inconceivable seems to have room, where only the dissolution of all things and phenomena seems to be in question, where only the contradictory assertion of the infinity of time seems to be left, where death seems to be the last word. The dead: that is what we are. The risen: that is what we are not. But precisely for this reason the resurrection of the dead involves that that which we are not is equivalent with that which we are: the dead living, time eternity, the being truth, things real. All this is not given except in hope, and therefore this identity is not to be put into effect. The life that we dead are living here and now is not, therefore, to be confounded with this life, of which we can only ever say that we are not yet living in it; the endlessness of time is not to be confused with eternity; the corporeality of phenomena is not to be confused with this reality; the being that we know or can know is not to be confused with this its origin, in its truth; the sharp, fundamental step which parts the latter from the former, as the impossible from the possible, is not to be removed, but given in hope—in hope, in the identification of the former with the latter, the resurrection of the dead already effected in God. This is what is behind the recollection of the fact that we must die, which here at the end of the Epistle finally appears on the scene after casting its shadow widely enough before. The recollection of death is so important, so urgent, so disturbing, so actual because it is in fact really the tidings of the resurrection behind it, the recollection of the life, of our life that we are not living and that yet is our life. Hence the end of the Epistle is also its beginning, its principle that supports and actuates the whole, because it is not only a termination, but the end. [6]

If all this means anything at all, it means that in the end and in the resurrection (in the Barthian sense), we will be no more temporal but eternal. Time will be swallowed up in eternity. This certainly is the teaching neither of Holy Writ, nor of the church. Although in the age to come we will be everlasting, and time as we know it now will no longer exist, yet even in that future age we will still be creatures and therefore temporal. God alone is eternal, and we will never become like him. The qualitative difference between God and the creature, between eternity and time, will exist in the future age as well as in the present age.

#### Pantheism and Evolutionism

What is the idea of the end of all things, of the consummation of the age (*consummatio saeculi*), of the passing away of the fashion of this world, and of the renewal of all things?

It stands to reason that pantheism does not and cannot know such a consummation. The consummation of all things presupposes a willing and decreeing God who is before all things, who made all things according to his own counsel unto a definite end and purpose, and who by that counsel controls and guides all things unto the end he has in mind. Without the presupposition of this counsel of a personal God, the world can have no purpose and no destination unto which it was called into being. And without an all-ruling providence, according to which God controls all things according to his good pleasure, there cannot possibly be any definite line or stability in the development of all things, and there is no guarantee that they will attain to the purpose for which they were called into being. Pantheism knows nothing of such a willing and counseling God who is as distinct from all the works of his hands as the eternal is distinct from the temporal and as the infinite is distinct from the finite, although he is never separated from the works of his hands. Pantheism knows only an eternal being and becoming, an ever-recurring and returning stream of becoming and perishing. It knows of no definite beginning of the world. It has no answer to the question, Whence? Therefore, it cannot have an answer to the question, Whither?

The same inability is true of every form of evolutionistic philosophy. Evolutionism also cannot find a beginning, whether it starts its philosophy of the world with one original cell or with a fiery mist. Evolutionism cannot possibly conceive of the beginning of things, and it cannot conceive of a consummation of the world. It can only speak of an ever-progressing course of development.

#### The Biblical Idea of the End

Only by faith do "we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3).

Everything in creation witnesses not only of a beginning, but also of an end. The day commences with the first dawn in the east and finds its end in the setting of the sun on the western horizon. When in the spring the south wind warms the atmosphere, all nature is quickened, and soon the trees stand adorned in the garb of their rich foliage. Soon their rich green withers, and they shed their leaves. Man is born and stands for a moment in the strength of his life; but presently he declines to the grave, and his earthly existence is forever terminated. Thus it is with all things.

We can no more think of the earth without a beginning than we can conceive of it without an end. There is a limited measure of power and means, a limitation of place and space, which will ultimately come into conflict with the existence and development of the living creatures and of the nations of the world. Besides, the history of the world itself calls for a consummation. All struggle, toil, and trouble, all guilt and sin, all suffering and sorrow, and all injustice and oppression in the history of the world loudly cry for a day in which everything that appears to be crooked from an ethical viewpoint will be made straight. It need not cause any surprise that also outside the sphere of revelation the question of the "whither," the question of eschatology, has always been seriously considered.

Of such a consummation and of a better day in which all things will be renewed, the word of God speaks very clearly. It speaks not only of this age (αἰὼν οὖτος), but also of an age to come (αἰὼν μέλλων); not only of a present age הָעוֹלָם הַזּהָ, but also of future age הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. The revelation of God in scripture begins with God and ends with him. He is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8). Of him, through him, and unto him are all things (Rom. 11:36). Scripture does not begin with a dualism, as did the heathen of old, but with a unity. That unity of all things is in God himself. Only out of him can all things be explained, not in the pantheistic sense, as if God were all things and all things emanated

from his being, but in such a way that behind and before all things stands the decreeing God, who performs all his good pleasure.

In that counsel of God, the end of all things was proposed before the beginning. The counsel of the intelligent and willing God proposed for all things a  $\tau \hat{\epsilon} \lambda o \zeta$ , a purpose, an end, a destination. To that end and purpose all things are adapted, and unto that end all things hasten with infallible certainty under the almighty control and direction of the living God. Only when that final purpose is reached as the end of all God's works, through the deep way of sin and grace, will the present age be finished, and will the future age be inaugurated.

#### The Biblical Proof for the End

Everywhere the scriptures speak of a day in which history and all things earthy will be consummated. The prophets of the Old Testament beheld that day as a day of great wrath, a day of trouble and distress, and a day of gloominess and great darkness:

The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land (Zeph. l:14–18).

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations (Joel 2:1–2).

The prophets spoke of a day of the Lord (יוֹם יְהוֹהָ) that would be inaugurated by signs and wonders in the heavens and in the earth:

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call (Joel 2:30–32).

More clearly this is expressed in the New Testament. The prophets of the old dispensation still beheld the entire panorama of the new dispensation as one moment, as one day, and therefore usually made no distinction between the first and the second comings of Christ, between the judgment that would come upon Israel as a nation and the judgment that would come over the entire world, and between the coming of the Lord in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and in the parousia. Even the Lord himself frequently spoke to his disciples in one breath of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Nevertheless, the New Testament speaks more clearly than the Old Testament of the day of the Lord. It speaks of it as the day of wrath (ἡμέρα ὀργῆς—Rom. 2:5), the day of judgment (ἡμέρα κρίσεως—Matt. 10:15), the last day (ἐσχάτη ἡμέρα—John 6:39–40, 44, 54; John 11:24), and the end of the ages (τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων—1 Cor. 10:11).

That day is the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6). It is the day in which the regeneration (παλινγενεσία) of all things will take place (Matt. 19:28), the day of the restitution of all things (ἀποκατάστασις πάντων—Acts 3:21). It is the day for which the whole creation longs with outstretched neck, because then the creature will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and

will partake of the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:19–22). It is the day in which the very elements will perish with burning heat, and which will inaugurate the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:10–13).

# The Theory of Abraham Kuyper

What is the idea of this end or this consummation in relation to creation and the entire history of the world?

We cannot agree with Dr. Kuyper, who essentially makes an interim of the history of this present world.

Common grace is given to continue the development of our human race, even in spite of Satan, precisely at that point where sin would have restrained and destroyed that development. In spite of the changes introduced by sin, the great plan of God continues. Man's humanity continues, that humanity has its history, and in that history it goes through a process. This process must unfold that which the creation ordinance hid away in the bud, and common grace is the holy instrument whereby God realizes this process, even in spite of sin.[7]

According to Kuyper's theory, God had in mind an original purpose in the ordinance of creation. Despite all the attempts of sin and Satan, God realizes this ordinance. Although Satan opposes this purpose of God; nevertheless, the Lord causes his creation to develop and to reach the purpose, the destination, which without sin it should have reached.

This is effected by what Kuyper calls common grace. He maintains that if common grace had not intervened and begun to operate immediately after the fall, the end of all things would have been reached in paradise with man's eating of the forbidden fruit. The whole world would have relapsed into a chaotic state. Adam would have died the complete and eternal death. There would have been no history and no development of the human race in the world. As a result, there would have been no room for the establishment and development of God's covenant of grace in Christ. The elect would not have been born. Christ would not have come. The works of God would have been completely spoiled and destroyed by the wiles of Satan. The devil's purpose would have been reached. However, by his common grace God intervened. The universe did not suffer destruction. Man did not immediately die. The original divine idea in the ordinance of creation can be and is realized in the history of this world. At the same time a sphere is created for the realization and development of special grace in Christ Jesus.

Kuyper therefore conceives of the work of God in a dualistic way. God had an original purpose with creation, the normal development of all things under man as its king. This purpose was apparently frustrated by the temptation of the devil and sin. Nevertheless, through the operation of common grace, God carries out the original idea and brings about a positively good development of the human race in connection with the earthly creation. God also carries out his purpose of predestination in the redemption of the elect and the damnation of the reprobate. Kuyper really makes an interim of the history of this present world.

# **Eschatology and the Purpose of God**

On the basis of Holy Writ, we cannot agree with Kuyper's theory. Instead, we must proceed from the thoroughly scriptural organic idea, which is realized in all creation. All creatures are one. God did not create in the beginning an aggregate of creatures, loose and independent of one another, but a world, a cosmos, a harmonic, organic whole. God is one; the world is also one. In the midst of that

earthly creation stood man. God had formed him after his own image so that in a creaturely sense he resembled God in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This man stood at the head of creation as king over the earthly world, and he stood in God's covenant of friendship from the beginning. In that covenant relation God would be man's sovereign friend and cause him to taste the blessedness of the communion of his friendship, which is life. In that covenant relation man stood as friend-servant of the Most High, to represent him in the earthly creation, to take up in his own heart the praise and honor of all creatures, to interpret and express that praise and honor before the face of God, to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and in the name of and according to the will of God to rule over all creatures. Man was officebearer—prophet, priest, and king—with the commission—the command and the right, the power and the authority—to subject creation unto himself and to cultivate it. In his heart lay the spiritual, ethical center of God's creation. Through that central point the entire creation was united in love with God himself. Also the creatures, each according to its nature, were taken up into God's covenant of friendship and shared the good favor of the Lord. Those creatures, sustained by God's omnipresent power, also stood through man in the service of God, each in its own place and according to its own nature. Even now the Lord God sustains and governs all creatures that they may serve man, in order that man may serve his God.[8]

In this harmonic relation of all things to God, a breach was struck by sin. We must immediately emphasize that the breach was struck in the spiritual, ethical center of the earthly cosmos, in the heart of man. Man violated God's covenant. The break was spiritual and ethical in character.

Sin did not bring about an *essential* change in the relation of things. Sin can have as its result neither the destruction or annihilation of creation, nor an essential change in the mutual relation among the creatures and the relation of the creatures to man, although the relationships were disturbed and marred. The creation could not have been turned into chaos if common grace had not intervened. To be sure, in its connection with man, the creature temporarily bears the curse; it is subject to vanity. But sin did not break the unity of creation; creation's natural, organic affinity continued. Certainly, fallen man became very limited in his gifts, powers, and natural light; he retained merely remnants of his former powers. But even in his fallen state he retained his position at the head of creation. Although it cannot be said that man is still the officebearer of God in the sense of his right to serve in God's house, as head of the creation he certainly continues to stand before the demand to serve his God in love, with all his gifts, means, and talents. However, he cannot and will not and cannot will to serve God because of the spiritual, ethical breach in man's relation to God. The life of his heart was subverted into its very opposite. The working of the image of God, whereby man with mind and will and all his strength went out to God in the state of rectitude, was turned into its reverse.

We must not say that man through the fall simply lost the image of God. It is even less correct to maintain that he lost that image of God only in part. If this last thought is the result of distinguishing the image of God in a narrower and a broader sense, it would be better to abandon this distinction altogether. On the contrary, we must maintain that the image of God turned into its reverse. Man's light became darkness; his knowledge was changed into the lie; his righteousness became unrighteousness; his holiness became impurity and rebellion in all of his willing and inclinations; his love changed into enmity against God. Sin is not merely a defect or a lack, but it is *privatio actuosa* (active privation). The servant and covenant friend of the Lord became a friend and covenant ally of the devil.

Even so, the Lord continued to sustain and govern creation by his providential power, which has nothing to do with common grace. The entire organic existence of things remained essentially unaffected. If no further change were brought about in this state of things, the final result of history would be that the completed spiritual, ethical fruit of the life of creation would be the very opposite

of that which it should be according to God's creation ordinance.

But this is not the case. The sin of man and the curse upon the creation, although effected through the willful disobedience of the first man, nevertheless took place according to the counsel and will of God. From God's point of view, accidents never occur. God is God! He is in heaven and performs all his good pleasure (Ps. 115:3), not simply in spite of the attempts of Satan and sin, but through those very attempts. At all times, God proceeds directly to his goal. There is no interim. Never is God hindered by the creature from realizing his counsel. With God there is no change or shadow of turning. Also the fall is wholly according to the counsel of his will and serves him in the realization of his purpose, for he has provided some better thing for his people; his objective was not attained with the rest of the seventh day. That rest was only a figure of the eternal rest in the eternal and heavenly tabernacle, in the eternal kingdom in which all things will be united in Christ as their head, when all things in heaven and upon earth will be eternally concentrated in the heart of Christ. Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature as the head of the body, as the beginning, and as the firstborn from the dead, in order that in all things he should be first. Through him all things in heaven and on earth were created, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers—all things were created by him and for him. For it pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell (Col. 1:15–19).

Thus it is according to God's eternal decree. God's eternal covenant of friendship must be established not in the first Adam, but in Christ, and must be realized by him unto its final, eternal, and heavenly destiny, when the tabernacle of God shall be with men (Rev. 21:3). Therefore, immediately after man's fall God maintained his covenant in spite of Satan and sin, but now as the covenant is eternally and firmly established in Christ. Through the realization of that covenant immediately at the fall, the friendship with Satan in the heart of man was brought to nought, and through the operation of grace enmity was wrought in the heart of man against the devil.

Here, however, we face the decree of predestination. Not all of the children of Adam have been predestined to enter into the eternal covenant of God's friendship. Grace follows the line of election. Only the kernel is affected by grace. The shell or bolster is rejected. It is exactly through predestination that the antithesis is realized in the midst of the world. The fact is that also today the creatures in the natural sense continue to exist in organic connection and affinity. Out of one blood God created the entire human race. From a merely natural viewpoint all men are one, and man ever continues to stand in organic connection with the cosmos, in the midst of which he moves and develops. Neither grace nor sin brings about an essential change in the temporal existence of things. There is no dualism. Nature and grace are not opposed to each other, are not contraries. Even now grace can never become the cause for man, who is a partaker of it, to go out of the world. Certainly the antithesis of sin and grace is called into being by the breach of sin and the entrance of grace as it develops along the line of election. Yet all things continue to exist and develop according to their own natures, in organic, natural affinity, sustained by God's almighty power. But amid this temporal existence of things arises and develops the spiritual, ethical antithesis of sin and grace, of light and darkness, of the love of God and enmity against him, of life and death, of heaven and hell. Through all of this, God does all his good pleasure and leads all things to the eternal destiny, the eternal separation of chaff and wheat, the realization of his everlasting covenant.

In the light of the preceding, it will readily be understood that we can neither speak of a common grace, nor view the history of this present time as an interim in which God maintains his original creation idea or ordinance. The sinful and corrupt creature can never be pleasing to God, but always is the object of his dislike, wrath, indignation, hatred, and curse. Only as the creature is incorporated

into Christ and is eternally beheld in him can that creature be pleasing to God and be the object of his sovereign favor. Only from the eternal counsel of election can the grace of God in Christ go out to him. And this is indeed the case. There proceeds out of the eternal good pleasure of God in Christ an operation of grace upon the elect kernel of our race in connection with the organic whole of all creatures. By the wonder of grace that elect kernel in Christ—always in connection with the whole of things—is redeemed, saved, liberated, glorified, lifted up out of darkness, guilt, sin, death, curse, and vanity into the state of the heavenly glory of God's covenant of friendship. In contrast, the wrath of God abides upon the reprobate shell outside of Christ. An operation proceeds from God's wrath, indignation, repulsion, and hardening, whereby this reprobate shell becomes ripe for destruction.

In all of this, according to his everlasting counsel, God proceeds directly to his goal. He never takes a detour. He never retraces his steps. His work is never frustrated. His purpose is never thwarted at any moment of history. There is neither an interim nor an attempt to realize the original creation ordinance in spite of Satan and the sin of man. All things develop in a straight line according to the counsel of God. This development and operation of God's grace and aversion, drawing and casting off, blessing and cursing, softening and hardening, continues constantly, according to his eternal good pleasure and in connection with the operation of his providence and the organic development of the human race. In the actual sense one can never speak of a checking or restraining of this process. To be sure, the end does not appear immediately at the beginning. This could not possibly be. The development or process of grace and sin is according to God's good pleasure and is connected by his providential control and management with the organic existence of all things. But this process is not restrained. It proceeds as rapidly as it possibly can. Christ comes quickly, and his reward is with him, to give unto every man according as his works shall be (Rev. 22:12).

By the doctrine of the last things, then, we understand the final consummation and realization of the counsel of God, which along the way of sin and grace, death and the curse, as well as the wonder of salvation in Christ, is finally realized in the eternal kingdom and the everlasting covenant of God where the tabernacle of God will be with men.

## **Different Aspects of Eschatology**

In this last locus of dogmatics, four main elements occur and must be treated.

The first element includes, in a general sense, all things that must take place in this dispensation from the time of Christ's exaltation to the moment of the parousia. In a certain sense we may say that Christ has come and that all things have been accomplished in him by his death, resurrection, and exaltation, as well as by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In this sense the entire new dispensation is certainly the day of the Lord ( $\dot{\eta}\mu\dot{\epsilon}\rho\alpha$   $\tau\sigma\tilde{\nu}$ ). On Pentecost the apostle Peter could apply the prophecy of Joel to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come (Acts 2:16–20).

The second element is the intermediate state, the state of the soul immediately after death and before the final resurrection. In this connection we must also treat the true scriptural idea of immortality in distinction from the philosophical notion of immortality as unending existence.

The third element includes the events that precede and prepare the coming of Christ, sometimes called the precursory signs, which include the preaching of the gospel to all nations and throughout the entire world; the increasing apostasy of the church; the development, coming, and final appearance of the antichrist, the man of sin; the binding and loosing of Satan in connection with the final struggle of the antichristian nations with Gog and Magog; judgments upon the nations, which will increase in intensity and scope as the coming of Christ draws nigh; and signs in nature, culminating in the sign of the Son of man.

The fourth element is the coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven or the parousia. In connection with this, we must discuss the coming of Christ as such; the resurrection of the dead, both of the righteous and of the wicked; the final judgment upon the righteous and the wicked alike and the manifestation of the theodicy; the passing of the fashion of this world and its complete destruction so that even the elements will melt with fervent heat; the creation of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness will dwell and in which the tabernacle of God will forever be with men; and the eternal state of both the righteous and the wicked, heaven and hell.

# **Chapter 41**

# The Intermediate State

#### The Intermediate State Defined

The intermediate state is the state of the soul—whether of the righteous or of the wicked, of the believer or of the unbeliever—immediately after temporal or physical death and before the final resurrection.

Various questions arise here and must be answered. What is the state of the soul after death and before the final resurrection, the state of the disembodied spirit ( $\pi v \epsilon \tilde{\nu} \mu \alpha$ ) or soul ( $\psi \nu \chi \hat{\eta}$ ) before it is reunited with the body? What is meant by immortality? What is immortality according to philosophy? What is meant by immortality according to God's revelation in Holy Writ? What is physical death? What is temporal or physical death for believers? What is the significance of that physical or temporal death for the wicked?

# Immortality in Greek Philosophy

In the conception of philosophy, immortality means nothing more than the continued existence of the soul after physical death. This was the conception of immortality already in early Greek philosophy. Especially Plato defended the immortality of the soul in this sense. He conceived of the body as a sort of box or prison of the soul and taught that after physical death only the soul continues to exist.[1] That this conception of immortality has found entrance into the teaching of the church is regrettable, although many throughout the history of the church have rejected the philosophical idea of immortality. To be sure, the biblical conception of the immortality of the soul must never be confused with the idea of philosophy. The two are quite distinct.

When philosophy, while rejecting revelation, ponders the problem of the immortality of the soul, it simply tries to establish that after the body dies the soul continues to exist and live. The biblical distinction between life and death does not enter into philosophical consideration. When man dies the physical death, a fact that is very evident from experience, he ceases to exist as far as his body is concerned. Immortality, according to philosophy, concerns only the soul, not the body. Hence the expression "immortal soul" has come to mean no more than "imperishable soul" or a soul with endless existence and continued life. The tacit assumption is that if the soul continues to exist after physical death, it must live just as it lives now. Philosophy denies sin and guilt, Christ and the atonement, the resurrection, and the truth of eternal life and eternal death. Philosophy prefers to speak of immortality in a general sense, as it applies to all men alike without distinction. If the soul is immortal, then all men will continue to live after the death of the body. If the soul is mortal, then death is simply the end.

Philosophy also offers various proofs for what it means by the immortality of the soul. The first proof is that the belief in such immortality is universal; therefore, such a belief must certainly rest upon a reality. The second argument is called the ontological proof for the immortality of the soul. It is very similar to the first argument in that it reasons from the idea of immortality to its reality and truth. The third argument is called the metaphysical proof, which reasons from the very nature of the soul and from its character as a principle of life to its necessarily continued existence. The fourth

argument is called the anthropological proof, and it proceeds from the essential difference between the psychic life of man and the life of other organic creatures, such as animals and plants. This essential difference necessarily implies the immortality or continued existence of the soul. Finally, there is the moral argument, which proceeds from the fact that while there is much injustice, oppression, and evil in this world, the disharmony between virtue and the present evil calls for a life after this life, in which everything will be made straight, and in which the good will be rewarded with good and the evil with evil.

It will readily be seen that these so-called proofs are really no proofs at all. Apart from the revelation in scripture, there is really no proof whatsoever that the soul of man continues to exist after physical death.

## The Church's Wrong Use of the Term Immortality

It is regrettable that this philosophical usage of the term *immortality* is frequently adopted not only by believers, who very loosely and often thoughtlessly speak of the immortality of the soul, but also by the church officially. Even the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands maintained the usage of the term in the sense of the continued existence of man's soul after physical death and gave it its official sanction when it declared:

That according to Scripture and the Confession, when man dies, his body returns to the dust; but his soul, whether in communion with Christ enjoying eternal salvation or suffering in desolation, continues to exist until the last day. Which truth from of yore was expressed in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.[2]

It is plain here that the term *immortality* is applied to both believers and unbelievers and is used in the sense of continued existence after physical death.

The Belgic Confession also uses the term *immortal* in this philosophical sense:

Their innocence [of believers and the righteous] shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and, being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.[3]

## Immortality in Scripture

This, however, is not the scriptural meaning of the term *immortality*. According to the Bible, both the body and the soul are mortal, not immortal. In the strict sense, Adam, according to both body and soul, was created not immortal, but mortal, for the term *mortal* means "die-able." Although Adam in the state of rectitude was not subject to death, yet he was die-able; that is, he could enter a state in which he became subject to death. Adam could die. When man fell and the punishment of death was inflicted upon him, he did not cease to exist, but he fell into the state of death according to his whole nature, body and soul. The whole man, body and soul, was created mortal, and through sin the entire man died.

This is so emphatically true that, according to scripture, man will never see life until he is born all over again (John 3:3). To live and to reach the state of immortality, he must pass through the radical changes of the new birth and the resurrection of the last day. When the wicked, who are outside of Christ, die the temporal death, it is not merely their bodies that die, while their immortal souls simply continue to live. Rather, the whole man dies, and through physical death he passes into a deeper state

of death: as to the body he enters into the corruption of the grave, and as to his soul he opens his eyes in hell. When the wicked in the last hour are raised unto the resurrection of damnation, they do not become immortal, but sink into the final state of death. For the wicked there is no life, still less immortality: they pass from death unto death.

With the believer, however, this is quite different. He becomes immortal in principle when he is regenerated, for then he is raised with Christ, and his life is hid with Christ in God. He partakes of the resurrection life of Christ: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (v. 36). "And whosoever liveth and believeth in [him] shall never die" (John 11:26). According to the inner principle of life in the believer, he is immortal: he cannot die, but he passes from life unto life. He receives the principle of immortal life in the moment of regeneration. He passes into a more glorious manifestation of immortality when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved and he has a house with God (2 Cor. 5:1). He enters into all the glory of complete immortality, both body and soul, in the day of the final resurrection.

That this is the meaning of *immortality* in scripture is very evident from the only passage in Holy Writ where the term is applied to man:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:50–54).

In the absolute sense immortality can be applied only to God, for he alone *is* life and is the fountain of life. Hence the apostle Paul teaches concerning God: "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:16). "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17).

From these passages it is very plain that immortality is something quite different from mere continued existence and refers to the glorious, everlasting life that can be obtained only through the resurrection in Christ Jesus our Lord.

# **Physical Death**

In this connection a word must be said about the nature of physical death. Scripture teaches in many passages that physical death is the death of the body, the dissolution of the earthly house of this tabernacle, in distinction from the death of the soul or of the inner man (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4; 2 Cor. 5:1). In other passages it seems that physical or temporal death is described as the end of the soul (Matt. 2:20; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; Luke 16:26). But it must not be forgotten that the term *soul* (ψυχή) in the New Testament sometimes simply denotes this present earthly life, the life of the soul in the body. Moreover, death is presented in Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Philippians 1:23 as a separation of the soul and body. Physical death is not annihilation, nor is it merely the operation of a natural law, according to which all organized matter is subject to decay and dissolution. Death is a penal concept, the result of the sentence of God upon the sinner. This is true of all death, including the death of the

From the viewpoint of experience, that is, from the viewpoint of what we can see of death on this side of the grave, it is the complete dissolution of man's earthly house and his return to the dust

body.

whence he was taken. In death the organism of the body collapses and dissolves, and with it man's entire earthly existence is completely destroyed. As far as this world is concerned, he is no more, because through the body man is a living soul: through his physical organism, with its senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, he has contact with the outside world, the world of his experience.

When man's body is dissolved, the entire world as the object of his experience dissolves with it. In death he sees, hears, tastes, touches, smells, eats, drinks, thinks, speaks, desires, pursues, craves, and delights in the things of this present world no more. Everything that belongs to his life in this present world is taken away from him. His very place knows him no more (Ps. 103:16). His very name perishes (Ps. 41:5). Indeed, he continues to be, for *he* really dies and passes through the terrible reality of dying, but in and through death *he* is left utterly naked. From the viewpoint of his present existence, death means that he is deprived of all rights and privileges. From death there is no return; in the grave the corruption and dissolution of his body are finished, and it becomes a mere heap of dust without form and meaning.

This physical death is not a normal process. Rather, it is a violent intervention of the hand of God to take away man's life and name in this present world. Death is punishment. It is the wages of sin. It is the expression of the wrath of God, the revelation of his justice against the sinner. He does not simply die as a matter of fact or as the result of a natural law inherent in all organized matter. God kills him.

Death is God's verdict upon sinners. In death, including physical death, God declares that they are wholly unworthy to have a place and a name in this world, that they have forfeited the right to exist, and that they have made themselves worthy of destruction. Although death is the end as far as man's existence in this present world is concerned, it is not the end of man in the absolute sense. Physical death is also the beginning: it is the entrance into the dark and horrible pit of hell, into outer darkness, where there is nothing but the experience of the just wrath of a righteous and holy God. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; Matt. 22:13; Matt. 24:51; Matt. 25:30; Luke 13:28).

#### The Death of Believers

If such is the nature of death, if it is part of the punishment of sin, why must believers—who are justified in Christ, and therefore cannot be subject to this punishment any more—also die? Why is it that they also must pass through the suffering of physical death? Why could they not be translated without enduring this suffering, as will be the saints who are still living at the final moment?

Several answers may be suggested to this question, but all of them are controlled by the one fact that all things must be ready before the saints can be completely glorified. The entire elect church must be born and saved, and the new heavens and the new earth must be created.

First, it stands to reason that if believers were to be immediately translated without the suffering of death, this translation would have to take place at the moment of their regeneration. From the viewpoint of their election, it would really have to take place at the very moment of their birth, because the reality of physical death is not limited to the moment when they give up the ghost and their spirit leaves the body, but it involves their entire earthly existence. The prayer in the baptism form describes this life as "nothing but a continual death." [4] Living our earthly life, we die constantly. The power of death reveals itself in all the diseases, suffering, and sorrow of this present time.

If the elect were to escape physical death, they must be regenerated and completely renewed at their coming into this world and at once taken into heaven. This is impossible and absurd, for in that case the church of the elect could not be brought forth. The generations of the elect must be born, and to them we can give birth only in our present earthly and corruptible bodies. In these corruptible bodies we lie in the midst of death and must pass through death and through the grave into glory.

Second, believers must die because the glory and power of God's grace in delivering his elect from the dominion of sin and death must be realized in the consciousness of the elect. They must know by experience from how great a depth of sin and misery and death the marvelous grace of God has redeemed and delivered them. Unto this end they experience the suffering and power of death. From the depths they must cry unto God (Ps. 130:1) in order that they may forever extol the wonder of his grace whereby they are redeemed. They must not at once be glorified in body and soul at their regeneration. As renewed children of God in principle, they must suffer a while and pass through the darkness of death in order that they may taste the goodness, glorious grace, mighty power, and dominion of God their redeemer who calls the things that are not as if they were and quickens the dead (Rom. 4:17).

Third, believers have a calling in this world to live the life of regeneration antithetically in the midst of the present world of sin and darkness. It is only in the body of this death that they are able to fulfill their calling according to God's good pleasure over them. For a time they must represent the cause of the Son of God in antithesis to the world of sin. They must be to the glory of the grace of him who called them in all their walk and conversation (Eph. 1:6); they must fight the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:7) in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (Phil. 2:15).

They are called to suffer with Christ, so to fulfill the measure of his suffering (Col. 1:24). Therefore, their regeneration and glorification cannot be simultaneous. It is only in their present bodies, in which they are by nature one with the world and have all things in common with natural men, that they can serve this high purpose of God and be faithful even unto death. Believers, then, must also die, although Christ died for them, and although their physical death is no longer a punishment for sin. For it is given them of grace in the cause of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake (Phil. 1:29).

Fourth, believers must die because the final economy of things, to which the ultimate and complete redemption of the elect belongs, is not yet come. They must be glorified body and soul and inherit the kingdom of God, the incorruptible, undefilable inheritance that fades not away (1 Pet. 1:4). This kingdom of God is heavenly, and to inherit it, the *bodies* of believers must be made to "bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49). The heavenly kingdom and the redemption of their bodies belong together (Rom. 8:23). The one must wait for the other. Hence the bodies of believers cannot be glorified until the consummation of all things, the moment of the resurrection, when God will make all things new, create new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3:13), and the tabernacle of God will be with men (Rev. 21:3). Until the moment of the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the bodies of believers must rest in the grave and await the resurrection of the dead.

Fifth, the physical death of believers is not, cannot be, and is not intended to be a form of satisfaction for their sins. Christ removed the power of death from them so that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Thus the death of believers is not to be considered a manifestation of the wrath of God, an execution of justice, a punishment for sin. Death is changed into something else for those who are in Christ. This is true not only in respect to the final moment of their death and of their descent into the grave, but also of all that is implied in death, of all the suffering of this present time, for they lie in the midst of death in this world. Dying, they always die. All the suffering and agony, all the sorrow and grief of this present time, are very really the

operation of death.

When we confess by faith that our death is not meant as a satisfaction for sin, this confession also implies that all of our present sufferings of soul and body are no longer to be considered a punishment for sin and the expression of the righteous judgment of God. Believers no longer experience the sufferings of this present time as righteous retribution. Even those sufferings that appear to be the direct result of certain concrete personal sins dare not be considered as a punishment for sin. If a man is regenerated and called to the light of life in later life, and if in his unconverted state he lived a life of dissipation, the effects of this former life of sin are not removed by his regeneration. He must suffer them. Yet even that suffering is not punishment for sin, and may not be regarded as such, because Christ died for all our sins. He died all our death. His death is a complete satisfaction for all of our iniquities. He paid the debt in full, and God in his justice will not exact punishment twice.

The sufferings of this present time, then, assume the character of chastisements for believers.

There is a great difference between punishment and chastisement. Punishment is the expression of God's just and condemning wrath. Chastisement is the operation of his paternal love:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons (Heb. 12:6–8).

Punishment is just retribution. If we are punished for our sins, there is no hope, for the just retribution of our sins is eternal death. If we are chastised, we may rejoice in the chastisement, for it is meant for our good, and it tends unto life. Punishment for sin in the suffering of this present time is only for the reprobate wicked. Chastisement is the same suffering for God's elect children. Punishment is suffering mixed with God's fierce and holy anger. Chastisement is the same suffering mixed with God's love and saving grace. Punishment ends in destruction. Chastisement is for our good, for our correction and sanctification, as the scriptures teach:

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Heb. 12:9–11).

All things work together for good to them who love God (Rom. 8:28). Although believers lie in the midst of death and taste death in all the sufferings of this present time, yet for them it is no punishment, no satisfaction for sin. Christ died and rose again. He fully satisfied for all their iniquities. The sufferings that they endure must serve and tend unto their eternal good.

Sixth, as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, physical death is for believers the abolishing of sin and an entrance into eternal life.[5] Those who are in Christ die in faith. Although their death appears to be the same as the death of unbelievers, and although believers pass through the same struggles and suffer the same agonies in departing from this present world, their death is essentially different. Because in that hour of death they cling by faith to their crucified Lord, they know that not the retributive wrath of God is upon them in all the agonies of death, but his elective love, delivering them from death into life and beckoning them home to the house of many mansions. For them death is indeed an abolishing of sin.

The death of believers in Christ is not simply a separation of soul and body. It is much more. It is the final deliverance of the inward man from the bondage of the outward man and from all that pertains to it. Thus the apostle teaches: "... though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). When the believer dies, his outward man, the "earthly house of this tabernacle," perishes completely (2 Cor. 5:1). To that outward man belong many things: his body and all his earthly life, his earthly experiences, his joys and sorrows, his earthly relationships, and his name and position in this world. To that outward man belongs also the old nature, in which the motions of sin are still active, in which operates the law of sin that wars against the law of his mind and brings him into captivity to the law of sin in his members (Rom. 7:5, 23). In death this outward man perishes; it is completely and finally destroyed.

Although death is suffering, and the believer, as long as he is in the earthly house of this tabernacle, does not want to be unclothed, and although from a merely earthly viewpoint the believer dreads and hates the dissolution of his earthly house (2 Cor. 5:1–4), yet by faith he rejoices in the very suffering of death. All his life he must fight against the motions of sin in his members (Rom. 7:5). Frequently he seems to suffer defeat. The sin within him has been a cause of profound sorrow and misery to him. As he finally lays his weary head upon death's pillow, he may rejoice in the prospect of final deliverance from the body of this death and the enjoyment of the perfect liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21), for the death of believers is a passage into eternal life. The inward man does not perish: it is the new principle of the life of Christ in a believer. The inward man cannot die: it is the resurrection life, and death has no dominion over it. Regarding the believer from the viewpoint of that inward man, Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). According to his inward man, the believer is firmly rooted in Christ, the resurrection. The believer passes through death, but he cannot die.

These are the reasons that the believer must still pass through physical death, although Christ died for him, and that the believer's death is not a punishment for sin, but rather an abolishing of sin and a passage into life everlasting.

#### The State of the Dead

We must still answer our original question: How must we conceive of the intermediate state, that is, the state of the soul immediately after death and before the final resurrection?

The Old Testament refers to this state of the dead as Sheol (שָׁאוֹל), and ( $\tilde{\Lambda}\iota\delta\eta\varsigma$ ), distinction from calls Hades New Testament it in (γέεννα), which refers to the state and place of the final punishment or hell, although in some passages Hades (Ἡιδης) seems to denote the same concept as Gehenna (γέεννα). Sheol and Hades denote in general the state of the dead, the state in which all that is related to this earthly existence is found no more, the grave, the darkness of death. Yet from the viewpoint of the distinction between the elect and the reprobate, the righteous and the ungodly, believers and unbelievers, *Sheol* and *Hades* are at once distinguished into a state of glory and a state of eternal desolation (Matt. 5:30; Matt. 25:46; Luke 23:43). This is the teaching of the entire scriptures, although, as might be expected, this revelation is clearer in the New Testament than in the Old. In fact, there can be no doubt that the hope of the old dispensational saints regarding Sheol or Hades, the state of the dead, was less bright than that of the believers in the new dispensation. The explanation of this fact must not be found in the allegation that the Old Testament fastens the hope of the saints upon earthly rather than upon heavenly things, upon a long life on earth rather than upon the future glory.

#### **Bavinck's View Refuted**

This seems to be the contention of Dr. Herman Bavinck:

Wholly in harmony with the dispensation of the covenant of grace at that time [the old dispensation], and with the election of Israel to be the people of God, the Old Testament presents the connection between the fear of God and life in such a way that the former receives its reward in a long life on earth . . . For this reason the expectation of pious Israel was directed almost exclusively toward the earthly future of the nation and the realization of the kingdom of God . . . Not until after the captivity, when Israel becomes a religious congregation, and religion becomes a matter of the individual, the question concerning the future lot of the individual is pressed. The spiritual antithesis, woven into the natural by revelation, worked through; the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous more and more replaced that of Israel and the nations, and was extended to yonder side of the grave. [6]

With Bavinck's interpretation we cannot agree, and we offer the following objections:

First, the distinction that the Old Testament draws throughout is certainly not limited to a distinction between Israel and the nations, but on the contrary, is very sharply applied to the nation of Israel itself as a distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous. That this is true anyone who is at all acquainted with the contents of the Old Testament knows well. Think of the dreadful distinction made between the godly and the ungodly in the nation as it was led out of Egypt, in the majority of whom God had no pleasure and who were struck down in the wilderness. Think of the sharp antithesis in Psalms, Proverbs, and the prophets between those who fear God and those who fear him not.

True, God separated the nation of Israel from all other nations to be his peculiar people. But throughout Israel's history he made it very plain that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). In fact, especially after the captivity the Jews began to boast of their national preference and privileges, and the spiritual, ethical distinction between the godly and the ungodly was relegated to the background.

Second, exactly at the time of Jesus' public ministry, the expectation of the Jews was fixed upon an earthly kingdom and upon earthly glory, rather than upon the heavenly city.

Third, throughout the old dispensation there was in the hearts of the saints an expectation of heavenly things. This is especially plain if the Old Testament is read in the light of the New Testament. The people of God in the old dispensation did not have their part in this earthly life. They were strangers in the earth and were often oppressed and persecuted by the ungodly, but they sought the heavenly city and hoped for the recompense of the reward in Christ, considering his reproach greater riches than all the treasures of the world (Heb. 11:9–10, 13–16, 26). Thus Enoch walked with God and by faith was translated that he should not see death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5).

In Sheol, which represents the cessation of all earthly life and light, no one praises the Lord. The psalmist draws a dark picture:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks? What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or thy faithfulness in destruction (Ps. 6:5; Ps. 30:9; Ps. 88:11)?

#### Nevertheless, the psalmist rejoices:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Ps. 16:10–11).

The psalmist speaks of the men of this world who have their portion in this life; but his own portion is quite different, for he lives in the hope that he will see God's face in righteousness, and he

shall be satisfied when he awakes with God's likeness (Ps. 17:14–15).

The psalmist strikes the same note in Psalm 73. The prosperity of the wicked is but a means in God's hand to set them on slippery places so that they hasten headlong into destruction. But the poet's portion is God who will guide him with his counsel and afterward receive him in glory (vv. 17–28).

Not on earthly glory or on a long earthly life, but on the heavenly city the expectation of the old dispensational saints was certainly fixed, according to scripture.

It is true that sometimes, especially in the Psalms, the believers of the Old Testament struck a note that echoed a gloomy outlook upon the state of the dead and a clinging to this present life upon earth. However, we must not forget that the land of Canaan was the fulfillment of the promise; it was a shadow of the heavenly rest. There God dwelt between the cherubim with his chosen people in the holy city. For the saints of the old dispensation, the service and fellowship of God, his blessing and favor, were inseparably connected with the land of Canaan, which the Lord their God had given them, and with the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. The promise of the fifth commandment had an earthly meaning for them, exactly because the land of Canaan was the rest of God. Hence they clung to the shadow of the heavenly Canaan and were loathe to leave it.

We must also remember that for the Old Testament saints, heaven did not offer the prospect of glory and joy in the same measure as it does for the New Testament saints. The promise had not yet been fulfilled. Christ had not yet come. The kingdom of heaven was not yet centrally realized in him. The Old Testament saints could not rejoice with the apostle Paul in the prospect of being with Christ (Phil 1:21). All this had to wait until the fullness of time. In the light of these facts, we can somewhat understand that although the pious among Israel believed that God would afterward receive them in glory, they did not share with the saints of the new dispensation the brighter outlook upon the intermediate state, but prized highly and clung tenaciously to a long life in the land of promise.

# **Conscious Glory after Death**

However, there can be no question that the scriptures, especially the New Testament, clearly teach that immediately after death the believers will enter into a conscious state of glory, while the wicked will enter into their eternal state of desolation:

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. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:1–5).

The apostle makes the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly house. The earthly house is evidently the same as what the apostle calls the "outward man" in 2 Corinthians 4:16. To this outward man belongs the body. But much more is implied in this idea. To the outward man also belongs the soul in the sense of man's earthly life, the life that he lives through the senses in the midst of this world. In death, the soul in the sense of man's spirit is separated forever from all things earthy. Man's soul neither perceives earthly things nor has any need of them any more. His soul is separated from all earthly relationships. The ties of human love and friendship, as they function through man's present body, are severed forever. The outward man also includes the old man of sin as it has its instrument in the body. Death serves to remove from the Christian the last vestiges of sin. Also to this outward man must be reckoned the world in its evil sense, with its temptations and allurements, its hatreds and persecutions.

From all of this the inward man of the believer is separated at death. The outward man constitutes "the earthly house of this tabernacle" that shall be dissolved and is dissolved in temporal death (2 Cor. 5:1). The inward man of the Christian is the new man in Christ. According to this inward man the believer in Christ is born of God. He is free from sin. He cannot sin because he is born of God (1 John 3:9). According to this new man he is born from above; he is not earthy, but heavenly. He partakes of the resurrection life of the glorified Lord. He neither seeks nor sets his heart on earthly things, but on heavenly things, and longs to be with Christ. In this present tabernacle of his outward man, he groans, "being burdened: not for that [he] would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). It is this longing of the inward man that will be completely fulfilled as to the soul of the believer when the earthly house of this tabernacle will be dissolved in physical death, for then he will be immediately taken up to Christ in glory.

It is evident that 2 Corinthians 5 does not refer to the resurrection of the dead at the coming of Christ. It is apparent that the apostle speaks of a state that follows immediately upon physical death: when the earthly house is dissolved, then we have a house with God (v. 1). The heavenly house, the building of God of which the apostle speaks in this passage, also does not refer to a sort of intermediate body, as some would explain the passage, because this house of God is eternal, and an intermediate body would not be eternal. Rather, Paul speaks of a heavenly state of glory into which the inward man enters immediately after death. In the present state we groan, but we long for the dissolution of our earthly house, not because we like to be unclothed, but because we long to be clothed upon with our heavenly house, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Exactly what belongs to the "building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (v. 1) is difficult for us to define. Of a soul-life without the body we cannot possibly conceive. As long as we are on this side of death and are of the earth, earthy, the concrete details of our heavenly house must be considered to belong to the hidden things that are for the Lord our God, and about which we dare not speculate. Let it suffice us to know that there is such a heavenly house into which we shall enter through death as soon as our earthly house is dissolved.

Scripture plainly reveals that this building of God, in distinction from our present earthly tabernacle, will be characterized by heavenly perfection and glory. In that house there will be no more sin, no more temptation to sin, and no more hating of that which we do and doing that which we hate. In that house there will be no more suffering and persecution for Christ's sake. It will be a state of perfection and final glory, although with all the saints we will look forward in hope to the resurrection of the last day. This implies that this building of God denotes a state of conscious bliss. In that heavenly house we will forever consciously be with Christ. We will behold him always and everywhere, face-to-face, and have unbroken fellowship with him and with the Father.

For proof of a conscious state of glory immediately after death, we also refer to Philippians 1:21–24:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

In this passage it is not clear what the apostle means when he says, "For to me to live is Christ" and, more particularly, "to die is gain." It certainly seems clear from the context that the apostle's meaning is not that his death is gain for himself, but rather that his death is gain for the gospel and for the glory of Christ. Christ and the gospel will be glorified in him when he dies the martyr's death. Nevertheless, the meaning is not excluded that he also refers to the state immediately after death, and

that therefore also for him it is gain when his earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. For him to live is Christ. Christ lives in him and is the life of his life. It is his joy perfectly to live unto Christ. Therefore, since only death will enable him to live perfectly unto the Lord, to die is gain for him. But apart from this question, the passage clearly speaks of the fact that the apostle expects immediate glory after his decease. He would like to stay for the church's sake; yet it is far better for him to depart, for then he will be with Christ (v. 23).

A conscious state of glory for the believer after death is also taught in Luke 23:43, which records the Lord's promise to the malefactor crucified with him: "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The promise is that the malefactor would be with the Lord in paradise that very day, immediately after his death.

Paradise is the place where our first parents originally lived in the state of rectitude and in fellowship with God near the tree of life. Paradise is identified as the third heaven, a place of unspeakable bliss and glory (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). There in that paradise is the eternal antitype of the tree of life in the first paradise (Rev. 2:7). However we may conceive of this paradise, it certainly refers to a conscious state of glory into which believers will enter immediately after death.

We may also note that Luke 23:43 definitely and clearly reveals that there will be nothing between death and glory for the believer, no purgatory in which he must be cleansed before he can enter into heaven. If there were such a thing as purgatory, it would certainly seem that the malefactor would have had to enter into it before he could ever enter into the state of glory. However, the Lord promises the malefactor that he shall enter with Christ into paradise *today*.

Another passage that teaches a conscious state after death is Luke 16:22–24, the conclusion of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus:

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

We realize that not every detail of a parable can be explained literally. Yet the representation in the parable is such that no one can escape the impression that immediately after death the believers are in a conscious state of glory, while the unbelievers are in a conscious state of suffering and desolation in hell. The parable teaches plainly that immediately after death Lazarus is carried into Abraham's bosom and that the rich man, the unbelieving wicked, opens his eyes in hell, while his body is being buried on earth.

All of these passages plainly teach a state of conscious glory with Christ immediately after death. Yet it must be remembered that this state of glory is still anticipatory and partial. There is a vast difference between the old and new dispensations in heaven, as is evident from Hebrews 11:39–40: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

Still other passages do not directly refer to the state immediately after death, but indirectly point to it. One of these is John 11:25–26:

Jesus said unto [Martha], I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

In this passage there is no direct mention of a conscious life of the soul immediately after death. Yet we note that this word of Jesus is an answer to Martha's statement concerning Lazarus, "I know that

he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v. 24). She places a possible glory and life in the distant future, but the Lord puts it in the immediate present. Besides, the Lord says the believer shall live, "though he were dead," and he "shall never die." This implies a continuity of life after death. All of this the Lord connects with his being the life and the resurrection: the dead will live in him and will live like him continuously. They can die nevermore, because they already live in Christ. We conclude that since the believer cannot die and continues to live in and with Christ, he must enter into a state of conscious glory immediately after death.

Also in Matthew 22:31–32 there is no direct reference to the state of the soul immediately after death:

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

The subject is the resurrection of the dead, not the intermediate state. Yet when Jesus says that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, his argument is important and applies to the state of the soul after death. The implication is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living and therefore are existing in a state of conscious glory before the final resurrection. The examples of Enoch and Elijah, both of whom were translated without seeing death, and of Moses, who was buried and probably resurrected, also point to the fact that there is at least a state of glory before the final resurrection of the saints. The same is true of the resurrection of the saints in conjunction with the resurrection of Christ. It is true that Matthew 22 does not shed direct light on the state of the soul after death, but it proves that there is a state of glory immediately after death and before the final resurrection.

We also refer to Psalm 73:24–26:

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

Also this passage is not specific, because "afterward" may refer to the distant future as well as to the state of the soul immediately after death. However, we must not forget that in Psalm 73 the psalmist draws a distinction between the godly and the ungodly from the viewpoint of their end. The ungodly descend into sudden destruction, while the godly ascend into glory. The text certainly leaves no time between the guidance in the present and the glory after death.

Finally, we refer to Revelation 20:4–5:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years . . . This is the first resurrection.

It is evident that "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus" do not refer to the resurrected saints in their glorified bodies. When the text speaks of "the first resurrection," it refers to the resurrection into which the believer's soul enters immediately after death—the state of glory with Christ in heaven. It is true that scripture speaks of regeneration, the work of God that precedes all others, as a resurrection in the spiritual sense. Nevertheless, according to this text, the "first resurrection" is the entrance of the soul into the state of glory immediately after death, and the second or final resurrection is the glorification of the saints in both soul and body.

#### The Roman Catholic Doctrine of the Intermediate State

There are other views concerning the intermediate state of the soul, such as the Roman Catholic doctrine. Besides the states of heaven and hell, the Roman Catholic Church distinguishes three other states regarding the soul after death: the limbo of the fathers (*limbus patrum*), the limbo of infants (*limbus infantum*), and purgatory.

By the *limbus patrum* the Romish Church refers to Sheol as the state of the righteous immediately after death and before the first coming of Christ. The Old Testament patriarchs did not go to heaven, but to Sheol, the *limbus patrum*. When Christ came and accomplished his work of redemption by dying upon the cross, he descended into Sheol or Hades, where the souls of the Old Testament saints were confined; he delivered them from their prison and carried them into glory in heaven. This doctrine is chiefly based upon a wrong interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19–21. We have refuted this interpretation before, and will not enter into it again.[7]

By the *limbus infantum* the Roman Catholic Church means the state of unbaptized infants. Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that no one can enter into the kingdom of heaven without having the sacrament of baptism administered by the church. Baptism is the only means appointed for deliverance from the evils of original guilt and corruption. The state of infants who die without the benefit of the sacrament of baptism is not clear. The general view seems to be that it is not a state of eternal desolation in the sense of hell. The argument of the Roman Catholic Church is plain: children are born in original guilt and sin and therefore cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. The sacrament of baptism is indispensable to deliver them from this original corruption. Hence a child that is not baptized cannot enter into the kingdom. This idea of a *limbus infantum* is really based upon the error of the Roman Catholics concerning the sacrament of baptism, which they believe has in itself the power to deliver from original sin, as the Council of Trent plainly expressed:

If any one denies, that infants, newly born from their mothers' wombs, even though they be sprung from baptized parents, are to be baptized; or says that they are *baptized* indeed *for the remission of sins*, but that they derive nothing of original sin from Adam, which has need of being expiated by the laver of regeneration for obtaining of life everlasting,—whence it follows as a consequence that in them the form of baptism, *for the remission of sins*, is understood to be not true, but false,—let him be anathema.[8]

For unbaptized infants the Roman Catholic Church devises a special state. There are several departments in hell. One is for the impenitent who died before the coming of Christ, another is for the souls of the righteous who awaited the advent of the Messiah, and a third is for the souls of infants who are not baptized. Although these infants are forever excluded from the kingdom of heaven, yet they do not suffer the pains of hell. According to the decree of Pope Innocent III, "The punishment of original sin is deprivation of the vision of God, but the punishment of actual sin is the torments of everlasting hell." Deceased unbaptized infants, although they are forever deprived of the blessedness of the saints in heaven, suffer neither sorrow nor sadness in consequence of the privation of the vision of God. How it is possible to conceive of a conscious human being who experiences neither blessedness nor sorrow or pain we must leave to the Romanists to solve.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that purgatory is a state of suffering immediately after death and before entrance into heaven. The purpose of this suffering is both to expiate and to purify. The intensity of the suffering and the duration of the stay in purgatory depend upon the degree of impurity that still cleaves to the soul immediately after death. One's stay in purgatory could be a very short period or could last until the day of judgment. The sufferings of the saints in purgatory can be

alleviated by the prayers of the saints on earth and by their offering up the sacrifice of the mass. Whether a saint is canonized, that is, whether he is excused from the suffering of purgatory and enters immediately into heaven, is for the church on earth to determine.

The doctrine of purgatory is based not upon scripture, but upon the tradition of the church, which gradually developed this error. Roman Catholics appeal to a few passages of scripture, but without reason. One of those passages is the reference of the Lord to the sin against the Holy Ghost, about which scripture says, "it shall not be forgiven . . . neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32). The Roman Catholic interpretation is that there are sins that are not forgiven in this life, but that can be forgiven hereafter. Hence the dead still need forgiveness after they pass into the state that ensues immediately after death. It is evident that this interpretation is false. The Lord says that the sin against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.

Another passage to which Roman Catholics appeal is Revelation 21:27: "And there shall in no wise enter into [the holy Jerusalem] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." The implication of this passage, according to Romanists, is that even the saints to whom sin still cleaves after death cannot enter into heaven. However, this text has nothing to do with a proof for purgatory. It does not speak of the intermediate state, but of the eternal city of God; and the state in that city is not intermediate, but is fixed forever. Besides, when the Romanists say that the saints after death must be purified before they can enter into heaven, because nothing that defiles can enter into the eternal city, they are begging the question; for scripture teaches very plainly that death is the final purification and deliverance from the old nature of sin for believers in Christ. Believers, then, have no need of any more expiation or purification.

# **Soul Sleep**

Another theory of the intermediate state is that of soul sleep. According to this view, after death the soul remains in a state of sleep or unconsciousness until the coming of the Lord and the final resurrection.

All of the texts that we have quoted and explained above plainly deny this theory, because they certainly speak of a conscious state of the soul immediately after death, whether in heaven or in hell, in eternal bliss or in eternal desolation.

Those who defend this theory of soul sleep refer to Psalm 16:10, 11; to the fact that after they died the Lord said of Lazarus (John 11:11–14) and the daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9:24; Luke 8:52) that they were sleeping; to the general fact that scripture frequently speaks of death as a sleep (Deut. 31:16; Job 7:21; Ps. 76:5; Jer. 51:39, 57; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 27:52; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Cor. 15:20, 51; Eph. 5:14); and to Psalm 17:15: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." The argument is that the psalmist's reference to a time when he awakes presupposes a state of sleep, which only can be the state of death before resurrection. This argument and interpretation are false. It is certainly true that David speaks of the vision of God that will be his complete joy when he awakes in the resurrection of the body. This implies that only in his body he will close his eyes in sleep until the final resurrection. But this statement cannot be applied to the state of the soul.

In Psalm 16:10–11, David teaches that his *soul* will be in the place of hell (*Sheol*) until the day of the resurrection:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the

path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

These verses cannot mean that after death David will be in a state of suffering in hell, and that therefore the soul will be in a state of unconsciousness until the hour of the resurrection, as those who defend the theory of soul sleep reason. But look at this passage in the light of Acts 2:25–28:

For David speaketh concerning [Jesus], I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

From Acts 2 it is plain that in Psalm 16, David spoke in principle of Christ. The soul of Christ was in Sheol, in Hades, until his resurrection on the third day. Yet we know from the words of Christ on the cross, addressed to the malefactor, that his soul was in a state of conscious bliss and joy in paradise. The conclusion must be that *Sheol* is the general name for the state of the dead in which the soul remains consciously and in a state of bliss, even in its separation from the body. God did not leave Christ in that state of death, but he caused him to rise from the dead, so to enter into eternal glory at God's right hand with his whole being.

The soul cannot sleep. Sleep is particularly a state of the body. Even when a person reclines and sinks into the state of physical and natural sleep, his soul is still awake and active, as is evident from his dreams. In the sense that in death we close our eyes forever upon the things of the world, upon everything earthy, never to return to them anymore, the Bible speaks of death as a sleep. But physical death is a sleep of the body, certainly not of the soul.

As to the state of Lazarus, of the daughter of Jairus, and in general of those who returned from death to earthly life, nothing can be deduced from these examples regarding the state of all the saints immediately after death, for the simple reason that Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus were designed by God not to leave this world permanently, but to return to it by the wonder of God in Christ into a state of typical resurrection. It certainly is not possible to maintain that those who died in order to rise again into this world enjoyed in their temporal state of death the blessedness of conscious glory with Christ in God, and that from that state they were recalled into this present world of sin and death. We must maintain that in those cases the Lord provided a special state in which most likely they were unconscious, and from which they were aroused into a conscious state in the present world by the wonder of what we would call a typical resurrection.

In this connection we must mention three theories which do not refer immediately to the intermediate state of the soul, but are nevertheless closely connected with it. They are the theories of strict universalism, hypothetical universalism, and conditional immortality.

#### Universalism

Universalism in the strict sense maintains the restoration of all things or of all men (αποκατάστασις πάντων). Although Barth denies that this is his view, yet the view of predestination that he presents necessarily must lead to that theory[10]. If, as he maintains, Christ is the reprobate *par excellence* who suffered as the reprobate, so that after his death there is no more reprobation in any sense, the conclusion must be that all men will ultimately be saved. This is the doctrine of the universalist. It teaches the ultimate restoration of all sinners to the favor of God and to salvation in everlasting glory.

The ground of the teaching of the universalists is found in their own philosophy and own man-made conception of God, not in scripture. They claim that the final exclusion of any soul from everlasting

life and glory would be contrary to the abundant mercy and unbounded love of God. They make a distinction between God's wrath against sin and his wrath against the sinner, and they claim that the scriptures teach only his wrath against sin. In the ultimate sense no one is the object of the wrath of God forever. Even in a future state of existence, repentance and, consequently, restoration to the love of God remain possible. All of this, of course, is pure philosophy and has no basis whatsoever in Holy Writ. The distinction between God's wrath against the sinner and his wrath against his sin is entirely without foundation in Holy Writ, which clearly teaches everywhere that God's face is against those who do evil and that he is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 34:16; Ps. 7:11).

However, the universalists appeal to scripture. Negatively, they assert that the Bible has no plain dogmatic statements at all concerning the possibility or impossibility of repentance after death, that is, of repentance even in hell, although it is true that terrible threats of divine vengeance will overtake the ungodly. Positively, they assert that there are many expressions in Holy Writ that suggest a hope embracing all times, existences, and states, as well as all men. As proof for this idea they appeal to such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:22–28; Ephesians 1:9–10; Philippians 2:9–11; and Colossians 1:19–20. These passages indeed teach a regeneration and restoration of all things, both heavenly and earthly, in the new creation where the tabernacle of God will be with men, and God will be all and in all. But this restoration certainly has no reference to every individual man. It stands to reason that the ultimate basis of the conception of universalism is universal atonement: Christ died for all men, and God would have all men to be saved.

We may briefly sum up the arguments of universalism as follows:

The first and basic argument is that Christ did not die for a certain number of men, but for mankind universally and for all men without exception or limitation. In support of this the universalists appeal to many texts, such as John 1:29; John 3:16–17; Romans 5:6; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Peter 3:9; and 1 John 2:2. These are the same passages of Holy Writ to which all Arminians appeal, the false interpretation of which is not necessary to gainsay in this connection.

Second, it is God's purpose and good pleasure that mankind universally, in consequence of the death of his Son Jesus Christ, shall ultimately be saved—mankind being understood in the sense of all men, head for head and soul for soul. For this contention the universalists also have their scripture passages, such as Romans 5:12; Romans 8:19–24; Ephesians 1:9, 10; Colossians 1:19–20; and 1 Timothy 2:4. These passages are substantially the same as those mentioned above, but if they are explained in the light of the whole of scripture, they cannot possibly mean what the universalists claim they signify.

Third, the universalists teach that sooner or later God will surely reduce all men under willing and obedient subjection to his moral government, whether in this time or in a future state. As proof the universalists appeal to such passages as Psalm 8:5–6; Matthew 1:21; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 15:24–29; Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 2:6, 9; and 1 John 3:8. It is obvious that universalists appeal to only a few passages from Holy Writ, while they ignore all the rest of scripture.

Fourth, in consequence of the mediatorial interposition of Jesus Christ, the language of scripture is such that it leads us to the inevitable thought that redemption is comprehensive of mankind universally, head for head and soul for soul.

It is true that the doctrine of eternal punishment seems very severe and harsh to our natural sentiment and human feeling. But let us not forget that it is not our human sentiment, but the clear teaching of Holy Writ that may be the only standard for our faith and doctrine. We must also remember that even our human sentiment is sinful and that we certainly cannot summon the holy and righteous

God before the bar of our feeling without going far from the path of truth. And we must remember that sin has been committed against the most high and infinite majesty of God and that for this very reason it requires infinite, eternal punishment in hell.[11]

# Hypothetical Universalism

From this strict universalism the theory of hypothetical universalism is distinct in that it leaves room for the possibility that ultimately some persons may be lost. It really presents the future existence as an endless prolongation of the present. All punishment is in its nature and purpose purifying, and this will continue to be so in a future existence. The possibility of repentance, even after death and in the future age without end, must be maintained. Needless to say, this is only a modification of strict universalism and is motivated not by the clear teaching of scripture, but by the human desire to avoid the doctrine of everlasting punishment in hell.

# **Conditional Immortality**

The third theory concerning the intermediate state is called conditional immortality. This theory holds that by nature the soul is not immortal, but mortal, in the sense of destructible. The soul becomes immortal or indestructible only through the powerful operation of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. This gift of immortality is bestowed only on those who believe and obey the gospel. Faith and obedience are therefore a condition unto immortality. From this it follows that there cannot be a state of eternal punishment. The soul that sinneth shall die (Ezek. 18:4). The soul that dies without Christ shall be destroyed so that it exists no more. But there is no eternal hell. Those who hold to this theory grant that after this life there will be a period in which the ungodly will be punished, but that punishment is not everlasting.

## The Reformed View

This is not the place and connection in which to treat this whole subject. We only want to reiterate that all Reformed and orthodox theologians from the very beginning of the history of the church have maintained that after this life there is not only a state of eternal bliss, but also a state of eternal desolation.

We quote from the Dutch theologian Van Oosterzee:

The *duration* of future punishment is most definitely represented in Holy Scripture as absolutely endless. Even if the word "eternal" does not itself denote absolute endlessness, it is surely a different matter when eternal pain is without any limitation contrasted with eternal life. We shall first discuss in chapter 7, in connexion with Eschatology, the doctrine of the so-called restitution of all things, in its entirety, but here we will only call to mind that its supporters can appeal but to single, indirect, and mysterious utterances of prophecy: those on the other hand who maintain the contrary opinion can bring forward numerous and plain statements of the Lord and His witnesses; at any rate, the possibility of an endless misery is most distinctly declared in Matt. 12:31–32; and words such as those in Luke 16:26; Matt. 26:24; 25:10, 41, could hardly be vindicated from the charge of exaggeration, if He who spake them had Himself even seen a ray of light in the outer darkness, and been able and willing to kindle it before others' eyes. In no case could such a ray be seen without previous sorrow and conversion; but, viewed psychologically, this latter is certainly nowhere less to be looked for than in a hell of sorrow and despair, not to say that the Gospel nowhere opens up to us a certain prospect of the continuance of the gracious work of God on the other side of the grave. He who here talks of harshness must by no means forget that sinful man is a very partial judge in his own case; that nothing less than the highest grace is boldly and stubbornly set at nought in the case here supposed; and that there will be always, according to the teaching of Scripture, an equitable distinction in the rewards as well as in the punishments of the future. Aye, even if men might flatter themselves with a diminution or postponement of

the punishment, there would still always be a remembrance of the countless mischief which they had done to themselves and others, which as a dark cloud would be before the sun of an eventual happiness. Least of all must they hope for such an end, who have known the great salvation, and all their life long ungratefully despised it.[12]

#### Van Oosterzee further discusses the restoration of all things (αποκατάστασις πάντων):

It is in itself, when we turn to the other side, a fact in our estimation of no small significance, that the Christian Church of all ages has decidedly rejected the doctrine of the Apokatastasis, even when it was presented to her in the most charming colours. It was as though the Church instinctively felt that thereby too little is, in principle, made of the holy and inflexible righteousness of God, of the deepest solemnity of the Gospel proclamation, yea, of the whole Scriptural mode of regarding the connection between the present and the future life; and in reality there is—its dangerous character not even being taken into the account—something in the apparent easiness of this solution of the world-problem which awakens an involuntary suspicion. It is by no means open to us here to attach the highest authority either to our reason or to our feeling. Upon the point of becoming arbiters in our own cause as regards this matter, we run the risk of becoming just as little impartial as, without the Word of God, we are sufficiently enlightened in our judgment. As against the single indications in that Word which appear to be in favour of the Apokatastasis, there stand, as has been already earlier observed (§79.12), others, and those more numerous, which lead to an opposite conclusion; while even the first-named, on a nearer examination, and viewed in their connection with the whole of saving doctrine, lose, at least in part, the force which has been ascribed to them. So long as Scripture has a right to a voice in the decision, utterances like Matt. 25:10, 41, 46; Mark 9:44–48; Luke 16:26; Rev. 14:11, and others, cast a heavy weight into the scale; while the principles of Hermeneutics teach that obscure and ambiguous places must be explained by the light of such clear and unambiguous places, and not the converse. Even though we had only the words of Jesus concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost, the eternity of punishment would be thereby already, in principle, decided; unless it be, without reason, asserted that this sin never was committed, and also never will be committed. But even regarded as to the nature of the case, it is scarcely possible to think of conversion—and without this it it is evident that no salvation is conceivable—in connection with an opponent such as is depicted in 2 Thess. 2 or Rev. 13; and thus also for him an exception must be made to the desired rule, unless one should choose to suppose an annihilation, in the proper sense of the term, of this hostile power. Such an annihilation of the incurably Evil would, we readily confess, appear most acceptable to us, if we should give to our own thoughts the highest authority in this province. For it is very difficult to conceive of an endless existence in connection with one who is entirely separated from God, the source of life, on which account accordingly Scripture has described this condition as the "second death." On the other hand, however, we feel that such an annihilation would be no slight alleviation of sufferings, from which precisely this prospect is most positively cut off. Thus we here come to a point at which the question of principle is determined, which must give the last deciding weight to the scale of our considerations; and then we can and must—even though the issue should be against our own selves—only bow before the written word of Him who cannot lie, and give Him the full honour of the obedience of faith.[13]

Although this subject must be more fully treated at the end of this locus, we maintain already here that immediately after death the state and condition of both the godly and the ungodly are decided forever: the godly enter into a state of conscious glory, while the ungodly descend into the pit of hell.

# Chapter 42

# The Precursory Signs

# The Precursory Signs Defined

By the precursory signs we understand all the events in the realm of nature, as well as in the history of the nations and in the church, which more or less clearly indicate that Jesus is coming and that the end of all things is near and approaches quickly.

# Dispensationalism and the Coming of the Lord

On the basis of sacripture, we can distinguish a twofold coming of the Lord or two aspects of his coming, which are related as the way to the end. This must not be understood in the sense in which dispensationalists speak of two separate comings of the Lord, separated by a period of approximately seven years.

The first coming, according to dispensationalism, will be the secret rapture. It will occur at the end of the dispensation of the church before the great tribulation. The rapture will not be preceded by precursory signs; it can occur at any moment. At the moment of the rapture, the Lord will descend from heaven to receive his bride, the church. Like Enoch, the then-living saints will be translated and, with the saints who will be raised from the dead at that time, will be caught up into the air to live with Christ. The church—at least those who expect Christ's coming and look for it—will be taken out of the world, but will not go to heaven. For a time the church will be with the Lord in the air where the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place. Those who are deemed worthy to participate in that great blessing will escape the tribulation that will come over the whole world; for while the church is in the air, the world will be in the throes of a great tribulation, such as has not been since the world began. During this period God will deal again with his Old Testament people Israel. They will be restored to their own land, and antichrist will be revealed, literally sitting "in the temple, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). Israel will be converted and will accept the Christ.

Approximately seven years after the rapture, Christ will come again in the revelation, accompanied by his saints. Christ will execute judgment on the earth; antichrist will be destroyed; the beast and the false prophets will be taken; Gog and Magog and their allies will be smitten; Satan will be bound; and the millennium, the glorious reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, will be ushered in.

# Refutation of Dispensationalism

This theory we cannot accept because it rests upon a false interpretation of the passages of scripture on which it is based.

The chief basis for the idea of the rapture and of the first resurrection (the resurrection of the saints in distinction from the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium) is 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and

with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The Thessalonians apparently expected the coming of the Lord before any of them passed away. When this proved not to be true, they were confused and troubled about those who had gone before, fearing that they could not participate in the glory of the Lord's coming. Concerning this the apostle instructs, comforts, and admonishes the Thessalonians to "comfort one another with these words" (v. 18). He says that if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, God will also bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (v. 14). Paul teaches that those who remain alive until the coming of the Lord certainly shall not "prevent" (go before) those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, for at the coming of the Lord the dead in Christ shall rise first (vv. 15–16). The distinction Paul makes is not between the dead in Christ and the dead outside of Christ, but between the dead in Christ and the then-living in Christ.

There will not be two different groups of resurrected men, one at the rapture—the resurrection of the righteous—and another at the end of the millennium—the resurrection of the wicked. But there will be only one resurrection, the resurrection of the wicked and of the righteous at the same time, as is clear from John 5:28–29:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

As is often true in scripture, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 mentions neither the resurrection of the wicked nor any first resurrection. It simply says that those who have died in Christ will rise from the grave first, even before the living saints are translated—or at least, that both will occur at the same time, so that those who remain alive until the coming of Christ shall not prevent those who have died. When the saints in Christ have been raised from the dead and the living saints have been glorified, then they together will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

That 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17 does not refer to a period before the final coming of the Lord (the parousia), but to that parousia itself, is evident also from the description of that coming. According to the dispensationalists, this particular coming of the Lord to which verse 17 refers is supposed to be a secret event. The dead will be raised, and the living saints will be translated and caught up with Christ in the air in such a way that no one will notice. The remaining inhabitants on the earth will simply wonder for a time why so many of them are missing. For two will be in the house or two in the field; one will be taken, and the other will be left (Matt. 24:40–41; Luke 17:35–36). The coming of the Lord in the rapture is supposed to be a secret event. However, this secrecy certainly is not the presentation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16: "For the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."

Besides, the last part of verse 17, "so shall we ever be with the Lord," is not in harmony with the presentation of the dispensationalists. They claim that "so" means "in the air for approximately seven years," while the text clearly teaches that we shall *ever* be with the Lord.

Further, the dispensational view is that between the two comings of the Lord will be the great tribulation, which the saints will escape, except for a few who will be converted during the seven years and raised to glory at the end of that period. This teaching is a serious error because it is in contradiction with all of scripture, which tells us everywhere that the people of God shall have tribulation and that they must also expect the great tribulation at the end. From a practical viewpoint this error is serious because it leads the people of God to believe that they will escape tribulation, so

that when it comes—as it surely will come for God's people—they will not be prepared.

This view of the distinction between the two comings of Christ, the rapture and the revelation, with an intervening period of seven years, must be condemned as anti-scriptural. The dispensational exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17 cannot stand for a moment.

# **Aspects of Christ's Coming**

Even though the parousia, the final coming of Christ, is one, our rejection of dispensationalism does not prevent us, on the basis of Holy Writ, from distinguishing among various comings of the Lord.

Scripture certainly speaks of a coming of Christ on the day of Pentecost in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you (John 14:18–20).

That the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is actually a return of the Lord to his church is evident from Peter's sermon on that occasion, in which he explained the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in light of Joel 2:28–29 as being the day of the Lord (Acts 2:14–36).

Besides, in a sense we can speak of the coming of the Lord for his people at the moment of their death, when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved and when they shall have a house with God and be with Christ forever (2 Cor. 5:1; 1 Thess. 4:17). This, at least in part, is the meaning of John 14:1–3:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

We can speak of still another coming of the Lord, a coming that is especially significant in connection with the precursory signs. We refer to Jesus' coming throughout the history of the new dispensation, from the time of his cross, resurrection, and exaltation until the final parousia. Always and in all the events of the history of the world and of the church, in connection with the preaching of the gospel, Jesus is coming, and he is coming quickly. To this coming the Lord refers in Matthew 26:64: "Hereafter [ $\alpha \pi$ '  $\alpha \rho \tau - henceforth$  or from now on] shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

One must not object that because the Lord speaks here of his coming on the clouds of heaven, he refers only to his final coming, for it is evident that clouds have at least a symbolic meaning. We are even inclined to think that their meaning is purely symbolic. Clouds and darkness in scripture are symbolic of judgment. Thus we read in Psalm 97:2: "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." That this Psalm speaks of the Lord's coming to judge the world is evident from verses 3–8:

A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods. Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O Lord.

The same note is heard in Psalm 18:11–12:

He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.

In this passage, as the whole Psalm indicates, clouds are symbolic of the Lord's coming for judgment.

Other passages of Holy Writ teach the coming of the Lord throughout the new dispensation. When the Lord declares before the high priest, "Hereafter [ἀπ' ἄρτι—henceforth or from now on] shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64), "hereafter" clearly indicates that he refers to a coming immediately following his exaltation at the right hand of God and throughout the history of this dispensation. The same truth is expressed in those passages in which the Lord speaks of his coming quickly: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:12, 20).

These passages refer not only to Christ's final coming, as if the Lord had merely meant to state that he would return soon, but also to his coming throughout the history of this dispensation. He hastens to come. He comes as quickly as possible. This is the teaching of scripture throughout regarding the coming of Christ. Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God. As the exalted Savior he is in a position and in power to reign over all things, not only over the church and the nations, but also over the elements in creation, which he can and does make subservient to his coming and the perfection of his kingdom. All power is given unto him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). All authority is his to rule in the new dispensation and to execute the counsel of God concerning the coming of his kingdom.

This is also the chief idea of the book of Revelation, particularly of chapter 5, which speaks of the opening of the book with its seven seals. We may say that this book represents the contents of the counsel of God with respect to all things that must take place in the new dispensation concerning the kingdom of God. When that book, sealed with seven seals, is seen on the right hand of him who sits on the throne, and the challenge is issued forth to all creation, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" (Rev. 5:2), no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able or worthy to open the book (v. 3). But the Lion out of Judah's tribe takes up the challenge. He takes the book out of the right hand of him who sits on the throne (vv. 5–7) and executes the counsel of God regarding all things that must take place in the new dispensation with a view to the realization and coming of the kingdom of heaven.

In the sense that Jesus executes the counsel of God regarding the coming of the kingdom of heaven, he is always coming. He is coming in the preaching of the gospel, in war and rumors of war, in earthquakes and pestilence, in famines and want, and in death and destruction. Because this is the truth, the scriptures speak of signs of his coming, signs that clearly and loudly proclaim throughout this dispensation that the Lord is coming again. He comes quickly. There is no check. There is no restraint. There is no delay. Things develop as quickly as possible, until in the end he comes personally in the parousia, which we believe will be his personal and visible arrival to close the history of this entire dispensation and the history of the world.

### The Precursory Signs in Matthew 24

These precursory signs are clearly denoted in Matthew 24, where the Lord predicts the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem and, in connection with these events, the signs of his second coming. In answer to the disciples' question, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of

thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (v. 3), Jesus teaches in verses 4–14:

Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

More directly in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem, but nevertheless speaking of the end of time, the Lord says,

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:21–31; cf. Mark 13:1–37 and Luke 21:5–36).

### The Precursory Signs in the Epistles

The teaching of Jesus is reflected in other passages of Holy Writ. Paul writes of the coming of antichrist:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:1–12).

#### The apostle also writes:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1–3).

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 3:1–5).

The apostle John writes to the church:

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:18–19).

# The Order of the Precursory Signs

The events mentioned in the above passages are the precursory signs. Although not arranged strictly in order of time because most of them occur simultaneously throughout this dispensation, they are:

- 1. The preaching of the gospel.
- 2. Wars and rumors of wars.
- 3. Social conflict and revolutions.
- 4. Death, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes.
- 5. Apostasy from the faith.
- 6. The development and final consummation of antichrist.
- 7. Great tribulation throughout the entire new dispensation, but especially at the end.
- 8. Signs in the heavens.
- 9. The sign of the Son of man.

This order is quite in harmony with the contents of the book of Revelation from chapter 4 to the end. The groundwork of this part of Revelation is undoubtedly the book with its seven seals that the Lamb takes from the hand of him who sits upon the throne (Rev. 5:6, 7). The seven seals (the seventh of which appears as the seven trumpets, while the seventh trumpet appears as the seven vials), with a few interludes, cover the revelation of all that must come to pass in the future.

### **Different Interpretations of the Seals**

Revelation 6:1–8 is the record of the first four seals, known as the four horsemen. We must remember that the seals, as well as the trumpets and the vials, are divided into groups of four and three—four being the number of the world, and three being the number of God or the Trinity—which together denote the realization and consummation of the covenant of God with men.

Some explain the seals or horsemen as if they are realized in strict succession in time; in the same succession in which they are opened and revealed in scripture, they are also realized in the history of the world. In the earliest history of the church, the first seal was realized, later the second, then the third, and so on, until finally all of the seven seals will be opened.

This interpretation has often led to vain speculations as to the exact time of the return of Christ Jesus. If the seals point to successive events in the history of the church upon earth, and if these successive events can be definitely pointed out—the years and the days during which the seals are fulfilled—the natural conclusion is that we are able to calculate exactly the current stage of development and to say definitely how long it will be until Christ returns and the kingdom of God is completed.

However, this is impossible according to scripture, which teaches that we know neither the day nor the hour of Christ's coming (Matt. 24:36). We must not explain these seals according to this method.

Besides, such a mode of interpretation does not at all fit the facts. It is not true that history reveals to us the riders upon these horses described in the first four seals—the victory of the spiritual kingdom, war, scarcity, pestilence, and plagues—as being upon earth one after the other. It is very evident that they ride simultaneously upon the earth throughout the history of this present time, the difference between them being that first one and then another appears upon the foreground.

There are also those who maintain that all of these seals must refer to the period immediately preceding the second coming of Christ Jesus. The seals have nothing to do with the history of this present day, but they will be fulfilled in the future shortly before the coming of Christ. Among those who hold this view are some who suppose that all of the seals will be fulfilled in the period of the great tribulation; after the church has been taken away from the earth, then the Lord will come with these judgments upon the world.

Against this interpretation stands the fact that Revelation never speaks of a rapture of the church; therefore, we have no right to believe that she will no longer be on earth when these things take place. Against this interpretation stands also the plain testimony of history, which reveals to us that these events do come to pass continuously. Above all, against this interpretation stands the purpose of the entire book of Revelation, which is intended to be a consolation for the church in the tribulation of this present time. If all of these events have nothing to do with the history of our own time, there would indeed be nothing in most of the book for the church of God, and it would be better to leave off attempting to explain what refers absolutely to the future until a time when the church will have been caught up into heaven.

Rather, we must maintain that these seals for the most part are being fulfilled simultaneously throughout the history of the present world, but that at the same time there is a certain succession insofar as new elements enter in occasionally, while all these phenomena increase in force and intensity as time goes on. The events represented by the seals are both contemporaneous and successive, all of them together converging finally in the completion of the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in the parousia. To speak concretely, many of these events have come to pass in the past, are coming to pass today, repeat themselves in history with increasing vehemence and clearness, and will come to pass in the future, until finally all will have been accomplished.

# The General Symbolism of the Four Horses

As we have already indicated, the first four seals belong together and are distinguished from the last three. The first four seals are distinguished by their allegorical figures, the horses and their riders, as well as by the four living creatures' sounding forth the invitation, "Come," at the issuing forth of every horse (Rev, 6:1, 3, 5, 7). John is in the Spirit in heaven and is a witness who is interested to the depth of his soul in all that he sees; therefore, he does not need the invitation, "Come and see," as it is incorrectly translated in the Authorized Version. The call of the creatures is not to John, but to the horse that must come forth with its rider. This plainly distinguishes the first four seals from the last three, which are not introduced by the call of the creatures.

The symbolism of these seals lies first in the idea of the horses and their riders. The horse is an animal of war, and Holy Writ depicts it especially as the symbol of undaunted courage and irrepressible progress in battle: "An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength" (Ps. 33:17). Job 39:19–25 paints a beautiful picture of the warhorse:

Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.

He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

The horse in scripture is a symbol of strength, of courage, of irrepressible onslaught and eagerness for battle. Therefore, when these horses go forth from the seals, we know that there is to be war and battle and that the forces of these seals cannot be checked or repressed.

However, the horses do not run wild. The fact that they are let go by the Lamb and proceed out of the book already assures us that they are sent and controlled; all of the forces that are sent forth to battle upon earth are in the power of the Lamb who sends them. This means that the forces symbolized by these horses can do nothing more than they are supposed to do. That all of the horses have riders also inspires us with confidence that the horses cannot run wild, but are directed and controlled in all that they do. We must not ask who the riders are, but must take the symbolism as a whole: the riders together with the horses represent an irrepressible force, well-directed and controlled in all it does. History unfolds itself by the direction of Christ and by his Spirit (cf. Zech. 6).

#### The Colors of the Four Horses

The next element that draws our attention in the symbolism of the first four seals is the colors of the horses and, in harmony with their respective colors, the other details of their description.

The color of the first horse is white (Rev. 6:2). White in scripture is the color of victory. This is evident from the repeated mention of the white robes of those who have overcome (Rev. 6:11; Rev. 7:9, 13–14). This is also plain from Revelation 19:11–16, where Christ himself is pictured as seated upon a white horse in all the glory and power of his victory. Besides, this imagery was common and familiar in the Roman Empire; the victors returning from battle would ride on white horses.

In harmony with its color are the other features of this first horse. Its rider has a bow, which is the emblem of righteous and victorious warfare. In Psalm 45:5, we read of the typical Christ: "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." This victorious aspect is evident also from the fact that the rider receives a crown, which in this case is not the royal crown of dominion, but a garland or wreath of victory. And the idea of victory is definitely expressed in the last words of Revelation 6:2: "And he went forth conquering, and to conquer." By the repetition of "conquer," the certainty of the victory of this warrior is emphatically expressed. Therefore, in the symbolism of the first horse is the picture of an armed warrior going forth to battle, whose victory is assured him even before the battle.

The color of the second horse is red or, according to the original, "glowing like fire" (v. 4). Red is the color of wrath and anger, of all kinds of heated passion and emotion, of lust and revenge, of blood and war. So it was with the man coming from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah: he is red in his apparel because he has trodden the winepress alone in his anger (Isa. 63:1–4). This red horse, then, bears the color symbolic of wrath and anger and passion, the color of a glowing fire. In harmony with this horse's color is the fact that his rider receives a great sword, used for killing and destruction. Also in harmony with this idea is the specific expression that this horse with its rider is given power to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4). In general, then, this horse is the picture of wrath and anger and heated passion going forth with the definite commission to create war in the earth.

The third horse is black, the color of scarcity and dearth (v. 5). This interpretation is also supported by scripture. Referring to the drought and scarcity in the land of Judah in his own time,

Jeremiah says, "Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up" (Jer. 14:2). In Lamentations 5:10 the prophet complains, "Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine." Black, then, is the color of scarcity and want. This horse's color is in harmony with—although somewhat modified by—the rest of its description. Its rider holds a balance and weighs carefully. As he weighs, a voice is heard, "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny" (Rev. 6:6). A measure of wheat, about a pint and one-half, was just enough for the subsistence of one man for one day. Three measures of barley, besides being food generally fed to horses and animals, was the subsistence of a slave for one day. In harmony with this measure is the price of one penny or one shilling, which constituted just about the common wage for one day. The picture, therefore, is not of famine, but rather of dearness and scarcity. The relation between the necessities of life and the wages of the common people is such that the necessities devour the wages every day.

The voice speaks still more, "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine" (v. 6). Oil and wine are symbols in scripture of luxury and plenty, of riches and merriment and feasting. By this expression the text draws a sharp contrast: scarcity on the one hand, luxury on the other; a living by the day here, a living in feasting and merriment there. The black horse and its rider represent the power to bring and to maintain on earth this contrast between poverty and riches, between scarcity and plenty, as well as all the grief and mourning connected with it.

The fourth horse is pale green, the color of death (v. 8). Here we can make no mistake. The horse bears the fearful and awful color of a corpse, of death itself. Again, in harmony with this color is the description of the rider and his following. The rider is death, and following him is Hades (not hell as the place of the condemned, but Hades as the general place of the dead). Power is given to him to destroy and to kill with the sword, with pestilence, with death, and with the wild beasts of the earth. Moreover, this power is limited to one-fourth part of men. If four is the number of the world in its completeness, then one-fourth represents a limited portion, such a limited part of the world's inhabitants as is in harmony with its present existence in this dispensation. This horse represents the power of death in all its forms sent upon the earth to do its work.

# The Meaning of the White Horse and Its Rider

After this general explanation of the symbolism of the four horses, it cannot be difficult to find the meaning of each one of them and to discover what each one represents.

The victorious warrior on the white horse represents the triumphal progress of the cause of Christ and his kingdom in this dispensation, the progress of the gospel preached in all the world (v. 2). As has been said, we must not personify and try to explain every detail. The rider is neither Christ, who according to this scene is in heaven opening the seals, nor the word. The word, if it is represented at all in this symbolism, is pictured by the bow, not by the rider. Rather, we must take the picture as a whole and say that it represents the victorious progress of the cause of the kingdom of God in the world through the preaching of the gospel.

The world is the kingdom of darkness. If the kingdom of Christ is to be established in the world, it is not enough that the world be punished and destroyed. Spiritual victories must be won, and subjects of the kingdom of darkness must be brought to worship at the feet of him who rules in the kingdom of light. To this end, throughout this dispensation, Christ sends forth his word in every form through the preaching of the gospel in all lands. As we know from the gospel narratives, the gospel of the kingdom must be preached before the end can come. That gospel alone is not sufficient; Christ also

sends his Spirit. That Spirit regenerates the heart, calls, and brings to repentance and to faith through the preaching of the gospel. So that Spirit from age to age brings subjects of the kingdom of darkness to worship at the feet of the great King. By this combined operation of the Spirit and word, resulting in the victorious progress of the kingdom in this present dispensation, the church is gathered, established, and preserved in the world. This is the symbolism of the white horse and his rider.

That rider goes forth; he shoots his sharp arrows into the hearts of the enemies of the king (Ps. 45:5), subdues them, and brings them to bow at the feet of the King of kings. Until the present time this rider has pursued a very definite course through the world. He has not traveled at random, but has had his course mapped out: from Jerusalem to Antioch; from Antioch to Macedonia, Greece, and Asia Minor; from there into the very heart of the Roman world, whence he has hastened on over the mountains and plains of Europe and, when the time was ripe, has crossed over into the Western Hemisphere. In general, therefore, the white horse has run in a westerly direction. This does not mean that he has not appeared in other parts of the world, for he certainly has in the past and still does. Today he rides in practically every part of the world, but with this distinct difference: in the nations of Europe and America, he has gained such great victories that even the nations as a whole can be classified as Christian nations, while in the other parts he has until now conquered only individuals for the kingdom of Christ. Regardless of his effect in every part of the world, the very obvious effect of his running is that in the world the contrast between the Christian world and the heathen world is called into existence.

### The Meaning of the Red Horse and Its Rider

The second horse and its rider are the symbol of war and have to do with the world from its political side (Rev. 6:4). His duty is to stir up as well as to control the passions that slumber in the heart of sinful humanity and that must be brought to light. This is plain from the color of the horse—red, like a glowing fire—and from the long sword. Above all, it is obvious from the clear expression that power is given the rider to take peace from the earth. In the deepest sense this horse causes nation to rise against nation.

Notice that also in this case it is Christ, the Lamb, who opens the seal and sends forth the horse. Also here the horse does not run at random, but is directed by its rider, that is, the wars of this world are sent forth by Christ and by no one else. These wars are accomplished and controlled by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who goes forth into all the earth. Christ brings the kingdom, and he brings it through his Spirit. Nevertheless, the victorious progress of the kingdom in the world is aided somehow by the progress of the red horse, by wars and rumors of wars. These wars and rumors of wars are subservient to the progress of the gospel, as is evident from the fact that the red horse follows the white.

It is not necessary to call special attention to the details of the drive of this red horse. Nation rises against nation throughout the history of this dispensation. History tells of the hordes from the dark north against the mighty Roman Empire, of the various tribes of Europe against one another, of Spain against the Netherlands and England, of England against France, of Napoleon against all Europe, of Germany against France, of England against Germany, and of Germany and Japan against the Allies. Wars have increased both in number and in intensity despite all the efforts of the nations to decrease them and to create peace. Because of the drive of the red horse, universal peace is a mere dream. This rider goes forth through the ages, riding upon the glowing passions of hatred and revenge, of lust and gain and conquest, of might and world-power, of religious fanaticism and hatred. It is this red

horse that appears again on the foreground today, redder and fiercer than ever. But to us it is a sign which reminds us that Christ is coming and hastening unto the end.

# The Meaning of the Black Horse and Its Rider

The third horse is the symbol of the contrast between scarcity and luxury and, therefore, affects the social world (v. 6). It covers all that takes place in the economic and social world in general. The symbolism of this third horse applies primarily to a general condition in the social and economic world, although special famines are by no means excluded, especially as they follow in the wake of wars. This horse emphatically makes its appearance also in our own day. In Europe a measure of wheat can be sold for a penny, no more. In our own country during both the First World War and the Second World War, the necessities of life were measured out in definite quantities.

Although these specific instances are manifestations of this horse, we would make a mistake if we saw the black horse only in special times of famine and want. He always rides through the earth, and he always does his work. As we have already pointed out, the symbolism does not point to downright famine, but to a living by the day, while the other element of the symbolism points to luxury and plenty: "hurt not the oil and the wine" (v. 6). The black horse causes all of our social problems, the contrast between rich and poor, between misery and plenty. Always the masses live by the day; always they can make just about enough to secure their daily subsistence and to make a living from day to day. But always the oil and the wine remain untouched so that the few can live in riotous living and banqueting.

A few years ago we read a chart that indicated that sixty percent of all the wealth of the United States is in the hands of twenty-five percent of the people, and the other seventy-five percent of the people possess just forty percent of the wealth—a contrast that is the occasion for many problems in the world. It is often the occasion for dissatisfaction, protest, rebellion, revolution, boycotts, and bloodshed on the one hand, and for feasting and luxurious and riotous living on the other. In all of these social relations, the children of the kingdom must always see the black horse riding, and crying, "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" (v. 6).

# The Meaning of the Pale Horse and Its Rider

The fourth horse pictures death in all its various forms and manifestations (v. 8). A horrible picture indeed this last horse and its rider call to mind: a horse of a pale green—a cadaverous, ghastly color—ridden by death with its sword in its fist and with power over pestilence, death, and wild beasts, and followed by Hades, ready to swallow up all the victims who may fall in the path of this horrible horse and its rider. Here is a picture of death in all its forms, not merely as you see it at special occasions, but also as it enters your homes and mows away your children, your dear ones, yourselves. This rider kills by death, which evidently means that this horse is the symbol of the power that makes an end to man's life and destroys millions and millions every day. Hence the additional statement that he has power over one-fourth part of the earth—just the number that is in harmony with the present existence of the world must be mowed away and killed by this rider. Besides usual death, he also destroys by all kinds of violent means, as is indicated by the sword, pestilence, and the wild beasts of the forest and field. By homicide, wars, and revolutions, by suicide and bloody insurrections, this rider reveals the power of his sword. In storms and floods and fires, in pestilences and epidemics of

all kinds, he snatches away thousands upon thousands at the same time. By the wild beasts of the earth—and here we need not think only of lions and tigers who kill many in other lands, but also of the infinitesimally small wild beasts that we call germs, which feed by the millions upon our bodies—he fulfils his purpose, in order continually to mow away and kill one-fourth part of the earth.

This one-fourth part indicates the general number of men who are always dying in normal circumstances. According to the law of probability, one-fourth is the number on which insurance companies base their calculations. In special times this number increases to just a little more than normal, just as when the trumpets sound, the part increases to one-third. In this work of death, we behold the fourth horse and its rider controlled by Christ, who opens the book with its seven seals. And in this fourth horse we behold a sign of Christ's coming, for death in all its forms is strictly subservient to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory.

### The Necessity of the Four Horsemen

We see these horses issue forth out of the living decree of the all-wise God, the God of our salvation. We behold that these seals are opened by our Lord and Savior, to whom all power and all wisdom is given. We understand that the Spirit of Christ controls these seals. Therefore, we may certainly ask the questions: Why these horses? Why this victorious progress of the cause of Christ in this dispensation? Why war in the world? Why the tremendous contrast of the economic and social world? Why this terrible power of death sweeping over the world?

Because we believe that wisdom is characteristic of all the decrees of God, we take courage to investigate and to find out the wisdom of God and the purpose of the Lord in all these things. It is not difficult to determine the general answer to these questions. The answer is that all these things are signs of the coming of the Lord, that these signs are strictly connected with his coming, and that therefore the events signified by these four horsemen are indispensable for the realization of the kingdom.

### The White Horse and Romans 11:26

The first and positive effect of the drive of the white horse is the ingathering of the elect church, as well as the manifestation of the church as the body of Christ in the world. This ingathering of the church is from both Jews and Gentiles. The fullness ( $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega\mu\alpha$ ) of both the Gentiles and the Jews will be completed at the same time, at the end of this dispensation.

The dispensationalists do not believe this. As we well know, they have a special dispensation for the Jews. According to them, after the ingathering of the church, God will deal in a special way with Israel as a nation; they will be converted en masse. In support of this view, they appeal to various passages of scripture from both the Old Testament and the New. For New Testament evidence they appeal especially to Romans 11:26: "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." In connection with the running of the white horse, it is not superfluous to call special attention to this passage of scripture, for it certainly does not teach a future conversion of Israel as a nation.

In order to interpret this passage correctly, we certainly must not overlook the context in which the apostle employs the figure of the olive tree, the root of which is Christ, and the branches of which are the generations of the people of God, both of the old and new dispensations. The apostle distinguishes among three kinds of branches. First, he calls attention to the branches that lie under the tree, broken

off and dead, which represent the generations of the Jews who had stumbled at the Stone and were hardened. Second, he speaks of the natural branches that remain in the tree, which represent those Israelites at the time of the transition from the old dispensation into the new who were saved and who entered into the kingdom of heaven and became members of the church. Third, the apostle speaks of the branches of a wild olive tree that have been grafted into the olive tree of Israel, which represent the Gentiles who were called into the fellowship of Christ and his church.

It is important to remember that there is only *one* tree, representing the *one* family of God in the line of generations, gathered in both the old and new dispensations, from both Jews and Gentiles. In the preceding section of Romans 11, the apostle called special attention to the natural branches that had been broken off (v. 17), that is, to the state of the generations of those Jews who had rejected Christ and had been hardened. Concerning them Paul stated not only that they could and would be grafted into their own olive tree (vv. 23–24), but also that their being grafted back into their own olive tree—referring to their conversion—would be much more natural and much easier than the conversion of the Gentiles. The Gentiles are branches of a wild olive tree, and they are grafted into the cultivated tree "contrary to nature" (v. 24); but the conversion of the Jews is like grafting natural branches into their own olive tree. In verses 25 and 26, the apostle pursues the same subject of the grafting of the natural branches, the salvation of the Jews who were hardened. He introduces these verses by the conjunction "for." By so doing, he gives to the Gentile Christians, whom he is addressing, his reason for writing so extensively on the subject of the salvation of the Jews. The reason is that he would not have the Gentiles to be wise in their own conceits regarding this matter. They must know "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved" (vv. 25–26).

# Different Interpretations of "All Israel"

What, then, is meant in Romans 11:26 by "all Israel shall be saved"? Many answers have been given to this question. The views that are presented on this matter may be classified into two groups.

On the one hand, there are interpreters who refer the salvation of all Israel to some future period after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. All Israel will be saved in some future period, not in the present time. These interpreters evidently ignore the little but significant word "so" in verse 26. They evidently read it as if the apostle had instead used the word *then*: blindness in part is happened to Israel and, *then*, after the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in, all Israel shall be saved.

This group of interpreters may further be distinguished into two classes. There are those who insist that "all Israel" signifies every one of the Jews who will be living at the end of this dispensation. The time will come when absolutely every Jew will be converted, will return unto Jehovah, and will accept and believe in the Messiah.

Others, however, are inclined to interpret the phrase "all Israel" somewhat freely; they explain that Israel shall be saved en masse: the nation as a whole shall be saved, not every individual Jew who will be living after the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in. They read therefore: "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and after that the Jewish nation as a whole shall be saved."

On the other hand, there are interpreters who lay emphasis on the fact that the apostle writes "and so," not *and then* or *and thereupon* all Israel shall be saved. They prefer to view all Israel as being saved continually all through this dispensation. Blindness in part is happened to Israel; the other part is being saved constantly throughout the new dispensation. The natural branches are being grafted

back into their own olive tree, together with the wild branches of the Gentiles. This will continue until both the fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of the Jews shall have been saved, and then the end of all things shall come.

The interpreters who understand the apostle to say that "all Israel" is being saved continually may also be classified into two groups. There are those who understand the expression "all Israel" as referring to the fullness of the Jews, all the elect of the Jewish nation: blindness in part is happened to Israel, but the part that is not hardened is being saved continually throughout this dispensation, and this will continue until the fullness of the Gentiles is saved. The fullness of the Jews and the fullness of the Gentiles are therefore being saved together at the same time.

There are also those who understand "all Israel" in the spiritual sense, as referring to the elect from both the Jews and the Gentiles. They call attention to the fact that the apostle speaks of the grafting of both the Gentiles and the Jews into the fellowship of Christ. He then immediately continues, "and so all Israel shall be saved," meaning that by the calling of the elect Gentiles and the elect Jews, all Israel—all spiritual Israel, the whole church, the whole body of Christ—shall be saved.

# The Correct Interpretation of "All Israel"

Which of these interpretations is the correct one? The answer to this question must be determined, at least in part, by the context. In Romans 9–11, the apostle taught that they are not all Israel who are of Israel, but that always the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:6–9). The remnant according to the election of grace obtains salvation; the rest are blinded (Rom. 11:7). Even with respect to the historical line of the covenant in the generations of Abraham, God is merciful to whom he will be merciful, and whom he wills, he hardens (Rom. 9:18).

Therefore, it would be quite in conflict with this basic thought of the context to explain the phrase "all Israel" as signifying every Jew, whether of the present or of some future time. It may be regarded as firmly established by the context that, whatever may be the explanation of "all Israel," it must always be limited to the children of the promise. The number of the children of the promise is never equivalent to the number of the natural children of Abraham or to all the children born in the generations of the covenant. "All Israel" always refers to the spiritual seed, and that spiritual seed is always the elect.

Another fact that may be regarded as established by the context is that when the apostle writes, "all Israel shall be saved," he has in mind no special kind of salvation for the Jews in distinction from that of the Gentiles. According to many, we must expect a national restoration of the Jews. They will be the peculiar people of God again. According to others, we must at least look forward to the time when Jehovah will deal with his old covenant people in a special way. The words in Romans 11:25–26 do not lend support to such a view. The apostle simply says, "All Israel shall be saved." To be saved always means to be delivered from sin and guilt and death, to be justified, sanctified, and perfected through the blood and the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be made partakers of the glory of the messianic kingdom. It never means anything else. There certainly is no reason to attach any other significance to the words of Romans 11:25–26. The context also forbids this, for it shows very clearly that when the apostle speaks of the salvation of the Jews, he refers to the very same salvation as that of which the Gentiles have also become heirs in the new dispensation.

The context does not support the notion that there is a special way of salvation for Israel or even that we must expect a time of a widespread and very general conversion of the Jews. The figure of the

olive tree in the immediate context certainly contradicts any such notion. If the Jew is to be saved, he must be grafted back into his own olive tree, together with the Gentiles, so that Jews and Gentiles become one church, one family of God in Christ, one flock under one Shepherd. God is not forming two peoples—a kingdom people out of the Jews and a church people out of the Gentiles—as the dispensationalists like to present the matter. God saves one people out of both Jews and Gentiles. When, therefore, the apostle writes that all Israel shall be saved, the meaning is that they shall inherit the same salvation in the same way as the Gentiles.

This also implies that when the apostle speaks of the salvation of all Israel, he does not have in mind any mass conversion of the Jews at some future time. This notion is certainly contrary to the immediate context, where the apostle teaches that the generations of the Jews that were hardened may be saved as branches that were cut off and then grafted back into their own olive tree. This does not take place in any future age, but all through the present dispensation.

Besides, this view is ruled out by the use of the little adverb "so" that connects verse 26 with verse 25. Those who cherish the notion of a special future for the Jews overlook this word. They read the text as if the apostle had written: And *then* all Israel shall be saved, which Paul certainly must have and would have written, had the reference been to a special salvation of the Jews after the gathering in of the fullness of the Gentiles. But he did not write this, and the adverb *so* cannot mean the same as *then*. So is not an adverb of time, but an adverb of manner. Hardening had happened to Israel in part. The rest of the Jews are being saved continually. All of this will continue until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. "So," that is, *in this manner*, all Israel will be saved. The apostle, therefore, teaches neither a national restoration of the Jews after the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, nor a special dealing of God with Israel so that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews after the gathering in of the fullness of the Gentiles. He does not refer to any future event at all.

# The Meaning of "Israel"

We must choose, then, between the two interpretations of the second group mentioned previously. One interpretation is that the expression "all Israel" means all the children of the promise in the generations of the Jews, the Jewish remnant according to the election of grace, until the end of time. This interpretation is quite in accord with the context and with the fundamental line of thought in the entire chapter.

The other interpretation explains "all Israel" as referring to the entire church, the whole family of God in Christ as it is gathered from both Jews and Gentiles. The emphasis in this case is placed on the word "all." This interpretation also is scriptural and is not to be rejected as being guilty of false spiritualization. The church in scripture is certainly called Israel. Many terms derived from Israel's national existence are so used in the New Testament that there can be no shadow of doubt that the realization of the things they denote must be found in the church of the new dispensation. This is true of the temple, the throne of David, the keys of David, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the holy place, and the altar with its sacrifices. The church of the new dispensation has come unto Mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:18–22). From a doctrinal viewpoint there is no objection to either of these interpretations.

Whether you explain that all the elect Jews shall be saved, or whether you prefer the interpretation that "all Israel" refers to the entire church gathered from Jews and Gentiles, the doctrinal result is the same. In both cases the result is one people of God, one flock under one Shepherd, whose final salvation consists of the same glory, who obtain one and the same inheritance, and whose ultimate

redemption is to be accomplished at the same time. Although doctrinally it makes no difference which of these interpretations is preferred, from the viewpoint of the context it is not easy to determine which of these views offers the correct interpretation.

If we lay stress on the little adverb "so" and then look at the preceding verses once more, we are inclined to explain "all Israel" as referring to the entire church. The apostle has pictured the gathering of the church under the image of the olive tree upon which wild branches and natural branches are grafted, that is, the church is gathered into one organism by the calling of the Jews and the Gentiles: "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." Therefore, we are inclined to conclude that "all Israel" is the completed church gathered from Jews and Gentiles.

Yet it seems, in the light of the context, that this interpretation is really untenable. When throughout Romans 11 the apostle speaks of Israel, he plainly refers to the Jews in distinction from the Gentiles. This is a grave objection to the view that Paul employs the term "all Israel" to denote the entire church as it is gathered in the new dispensation. It is an important and fundamental rule of interpretation that the same word in the same context has the same meaning throughout. This is certainly true of the term "Israel" in Romans 11, and it is clearly the case with the use of the term in verse 25: "... blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." The blindness of which the apostle speaks has happened to the Jews. Besides, the term "Israel" in verse 25 refers to the Jews in distinction from the Gentiles. Therefore, it would seem to be a violation of the rule of interpretation mentioned above to give to "Israel" a different meaning in verse 26. This is substantiated by what follows in the same chapter. The reference in the following verses is evidently entirely to the Jews.

The context, therefore, favors the interpretation that "Israel" in verse 26 refers to the Jews in distinction from the Gentiles. The context compels us to limit the word "all" to the elect, the true children of the promise. The same context makes it clear that by Israel the apostle refers to the Jews. "All Israel," then, denotes the fullness of the elect Jews in the new dispensation.

# The Meaning of "So"

We must still call attention to the little adverb "so" (o $\check{v}$ t $\omega\varsigma$ ) at the beginning of verse 26, which refers to what the apostle says in verse 25: "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." Therefore, "so" denotes *the way* or *the manner* in which all Israel shall be saved.

By "the fulness of the Gentiles" is not meant every last Gentile who shall live at some future period. Those who maintain this view have their own peculiar conception of the future with regard to the realization of God's plan of salvation and the coming of the kingdom of God in the world: gradually, the gospel will make its victorious progress, and the white horse will pursue its course until all the Gentiles will be converted. Or, according to others, in some future day there will be a special dispensation of the gospel, so that in a short time all the Gentiles will accept Christ. The knowledge of God will then fill the earth even as the waters cover the bottom of the sea (Isa. 11:9). After the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in, all Israel, all the Jews, will be saved. Upon this glorious and blessed state of all the world, Christ will appear in his second coming. This is a form of the postmillennial view of the coming of Christ.

This interpretation of the fullness of the Gentiles cannot be maintained. This interpretation is impossible because of the plain teaching of the word of God in general, and of Romans 9–11 in

particular, regarding election and reprobation. Just as the fullness of the Jews does not mean all the Jews, but refers to the children of the promise who are counted for the seed, so the fullness of the Gentiles does not comprise all the Gentiles, but according to the scriptural connotation must be limited to the elect of all the nations outside of the Jews.

Besides, the word of God presents an entirely different picture of the future of the church in this world from that which is offered by this postmillennial conception of the conversion of all the Gentiles. We certainly must not expect a gradual conversion of the whole world until all will have accepted Christ before the coming of the Lord. The Bible gives us quite a different picture of the end of this world. According to scripture, we must expect a great apostasy and a marked falling away even among the wild branches that were grafted into the olive tree. There will be a falling away from the faith in the generations of those who were once grafted into the olive tree. As long as this takes place, there will never be a conversion of the whole world. What we must expect is not the gradual spread of Christianity, but rather an increase in wickedness, a bolder manifestation of the forces of iniquity, and the coming of antichrist.

The fullness of the Gentiles, then, does not mean all the heathen or even all the nations in the sense that they all will become nominally Christian. God indeed has his people among all nations, tongues, and tribes, but this does not mean that among the nations of the world the gospel will have a dominating place. The fullness of something is its final completeness, that which is filled. Fullness of the Gentiles does not mean all the Gentiles, but the fullness of the measure of those Gentiles who must be saved according to God's election. That fullness will come in when the very last of the elect Gentiles will have been saved. When the last Gentile, he who completely fills the measure of God's election, will have come in, the fullness of the Gentiles will be complete.

Until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, hardening "in part" is happened to Israel. This modifying phrase "in part" does not mean a partial or incomplete blinding of the Jews in the sense that they are not absolutely hardened and that in them remains some receptivity for the gospel. But the apostle refers to blindness that is happened to *part* of the Jews: to the majority of them, perhaps, but not to all. There is always a remnant according to the election of grace. When the apostle writes that the blindness of part of Israel shall continue and prevail until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, the meaning is that it shall last until the time when the last of the Gentiles who must be saved shall have been brought to Christ.

We must not explain, as some do, that this conjunction "until" warrants the conclusion that *after* the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in, this partial blinding of Israel shall come to an end in the sense that *then* all the Jews shall be saved. This conclusion is frequently drawn, but is false. It is no more than a conclusion, and an entirely unwarranted one. The word *until* may very well be, and often is, employed to denote the end in view, the purpose that must be attained by that which must last until that moment, without implying that after that moment has been reached and the end has been attained, that which prevailed until that moment shall cease. We find this usage, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 15:25: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." We certainly would err if we would draw the conclusion that after the enemies were put under Christ's feet he would reign no more, for he shall sit on the throne of David and reign forever. The meaning is simply that Christ's present reign has the end or purpose in view and looks forward to the moment when all his enemies shall be put under his feet.

This use of the word *until* is also evident in Revelation 20:5: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Many wish to continue this verse by making it read, "And after the thousand years the rest of the dead shall live, too." That is impossible, for the rest of

the dead are the wicked who shall never live again.

The same usage of the word *until* is true in Romans 11:25. When the apostle writes that blindness in part is happened to Israel "until" the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, the conclusion is unwarranted that "until" means that at the moment that the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, this blindness in part shall be removed so that all the Jews shall be saved. If this had been the meaning of the apostle, he would not have concluded in the following verse, "And *so*," but he would have written, "And *then*" all Israel shall be saved. The meaning, therefore, is that the blindness upon part of Israel has its purpose in the salvation of the fullness of the Gentiles: by cutting off some of the natural branches, God has made room for the branches of the wild olive tree. In the meantime, the blindness that is happened to Israel is only in part. The rest are saved and are grafted back into their own olive tree throughout this dispensation. This condition must prevail until the moment when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, that is, until the very end.

This is the meaning of the gathering in of the fullness of the Gentiles and of the fullness of the Jews as it is effected by the drive of the white horse throughout this dispensation.

### The Antithetical Effect of the White Horse

The effect of the course of the white horse through the world is not only positive, but also antithetical. The running of this horse has its effect upon the enemies of the church. For a while the influence of that white horse enlightens them also. They even taste the beauty of the kingdom and of the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:4–5). They understand a good many things concerning that kingdom. The word of God has a general enlightening influence and even a certain civilizing power.

That this is true will be plain if we compare the Christian world with the world of heathendom.

Those who come into contact with the white horse but are not gathered into the church and kingdom of Christ nevertheless understand the truth intellectually. But they do not come to repentance. They will not acknowledge the righteousness of God. They deny their own sin and guilt. Ultimately, they attempt to establish not the kingdom of the righteousness of God, but a kingdom of the righteousness of man; a kingdom of the peace of man without Christ, without the cross, and without atonement; a kingdom that looks exactly like the kingdom of God pictured in scripture, but with the difference that man is the absolute sovereign instead of God. Men want to develop the powers of the world. They want progress in art and science and industry. They exert themselves to develop the hidden powers God has stored away in creation. They even want clean men and women. They emphasize an outward righteousness. They want to prevent war and to banish it from the earth. They want social peace and prosperity. For this purpose they seek one great international combination of nations in order to establish universal peace. In a word, they want to abolish the effects of sin and establish happiness, peace, and righteousness. All this they have learned because they have come into contact with the white horse.

But the chief trouble with those who understand the gospel intellectually is that they deny that Jesus is the Christ. Therefore, they constitute the power of antichrist. They aim at the establishment of a kingdom without Christ and without God, a kingdom of man, the same kingdom Satan has tried to establish ever since man subjected himself unto the power of darkness. For this purpose they use all the institutions God has given and instituted in the world. More and more the state, in combination with other states, must serve the purpose of realizing this antichristian kingdom. Toward the establishment of this kingdom the church must also cooperate, as she has fallen away from the truth and is the apostate and the false church. The church must preach a social gospel. It no longer must

speak of sin and guilt, of righteousness and holiness, of the need of atonement and of regeneration. But it must preach the gospel of human love, the gospel that man is not impotent but divine, that he is not guilty but a child of God by nature. Thus the church must help to realize the antichristian world kingdom. The church also must become increasingly a world church, the attempt at which is plainly seen in the ecumenical movement of our day. The same is true of the schools, both higher and lower, which are pressed into the same service: to realize the kingdom of man—the kingdom of antichrist. All of this is the antithetical side of the effect of the running of the white horse through the world.

# The Relation among the Four Horses

If this effect is understood, it is not difficult to see that the white horse cannot run alone, but must be followed by the red, the black, and the pale horses. Just ask the question, What would be the result if there were not war, social contrast, and death in all its forms, all at the proper time and place? The result would be that the great world-power would be able to realize itself within a short time. The sinful nations, striving without Christ to establish the world kingdom, would organize into an international federation and form the great antichristian world-power. It would control all things—church, society, the school, the home, and the state—everything would be pressed into the service of the realization of this kingdom. Social contrast would cease. There would be universal peace and prosperity. The result would be that this tremendous world-power would leave no standing room in the world for the spiritual kingdom of Christ. The world-power would persecute, and if possible, would destroy the church before the end would come.

Now this may not be—at least not yet. There will come a time when Christ will allow the antichristian kingdom a partial realization. Those days will be hard times for the kingdom of Christ, times of tribulation and persecution. Then the people of God will be able to buy and sell no more, because they have not the mark of the beast. But the great world-power must be realized only towards the end when the time is ripe for it. For that reason its formation, with all things in its hands and under its control, must be prevented until the time is ripe. To that end Christ sends war, although not in the sense that he is the sinful cause of war. Rather, the principle and power of sin exists and reigns in the hearts of men, and this power of sin must manifest itself in some way. Christ through his Spirit so directs and controls this power of sin in the hearts of men that war ensues.

This is plain from history. Never is one nation alone allowed to rule as a world-power for any length of time. No sooner has one nation reached greatness, power, and glory than another arises and becomes its competitor. There are always two or more powers struggling with one another for world control. So it was already with the powers in the old dispensation. It was Babylonia against Assyria, Persia against Babylonia, Greece against Persia, and Rome against Greece. So it is also in the new dispensation. The nations that were formed after the downfall of the Roman Empire strove against one another. The same is true today. Nation must rise against nation. As long as one nation still rises against another, the end cannot come, because as long as this is the case, the world-power destroys itself. Hence war is one of the signs of the times. There will indeed come a time when these wars will cease, at least for a short period. There will come a time when the great world confederacy will be realized. That will be the most dangerous time for the church of Christ.

The same purpose of preventing the establishment of the kingdom of antichrist is served by the black horse. Just as nation rises against nation, so by the running of the black horse one element of society rises against the other because of the tremendous social contrast between rich and poor. Contrast between luxury and poverty is the occasion of much misery in the world. It brings

dissatisfaction on the one hand, and riotous living and immorality on the other. It is the cause of the periodic panics that threaten the entire structure of society with destruction. It causes strikes and boycotts, revolutions and insurrections. Just call to mind the terrible history of the French Revolution with all its horrors and bloodshed, which caused society to shake to its foundations, and we somewhat will be able to realize how the presence of the black horse prevents the establishment of the antichristian kingdom of outward peace and prosperity. To the running of this horse also there must come an end, perhaps through the realization of socialistic ideals, for socialism is advancing in our day with truly alarming strides. But in whatever way it may come, it is certain that the kingdom of the world-power also will realize itself socially and will bring a difficult time for the church of Christ, the people of God in the world. But that time is not yet. Therefore, the black horse runs, and the sin of greed and covetousness is so controlled that it always and again leads to this social contrast and all that is implied in it.

The pale horse serves the prevention of the premature realization of the antichristian kingdom also. This will be plain especially if we consider that the pale horse and its rider have power over onefourth part of the earth. Death mows away the proper persons at the proper times from the proper places that they occupy in the world. Whenever a person has served his purpose in the economy of this dispensation, he is mowed away, and he may serve no more. The pale horse rode through the army of Pharaoh when it became threatening to the kingdom of God in the old dispensation and destroyed that army completely (Ex. 14:23-31). This pale horse made a drive through the army of Sennacherib and killed 185,000 in one night (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36). The pale horse entered the palace of Alexander the Great and killed him by a fever at the moment when he had almost realized the universal world-power. The pale horse visited Antiochus the Great when he became too destructive for the little remnant of Israel. The pale horse still rides throughout the world in the new dispensation. He selects the proper persons at the proper time. Whenever a person's purpose is served and he becomes too powerful and too dangerous for the kingdom of God, the pale horse comes along and takes his life. Therefore, if you ask: Why these horses? Why war, social contrast, and death in this form? the answer is: To prevent the establishment of the world-power of the antichristian kingdom before its time.

One more thing must be mentioned, and that is that the white horse also affects the difference between the nominally Christian nations and the heathen nations that live on the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog. Surely, converts are made from every nation. The gospel is preached to all nations for that very purpose: the church of Christ must be gathered from every nation of the world. Nevertheless, it is evident that the white horse does not cause all the nations to become Christian even in the outward sense. Only the nations of Europe and America become outwardly Christian. Hence by the course of the white horse, the ultimate result will be the distinction between the heathen nations, Gog and Magog, and the nominally Christian nations.

### The Last Three Seals

The groundwork of Revelation is the book with its seven seals. These seven seals are so arranged that the seventh seal reveals itself as seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet as seven vials. The first four seals we have already discussed. Since the revelation of these seals is the cause of the precursory signs of the coming of the Lord, we will here give a brief discussion of the last three of these seven seals.

The content of the fifth seal is the prayer by those who have died for Christ's sake for the speedy

coming of the Lord and his final judgment (Rev. 6:9–11). Their prayer rises as incense before the throne of God (Rev. 8:4), and the answer to this prayer is judgment upon the world (Rev. 6:12–17; Rev. 8:5). The glorified saints partake in the judgment of the world, and they reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4). This prayer stands in connection with the things that must shortly come to pass, and especially with the opening of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12–17).

The sixth seal causes a shakeup of the physical universe, and signs of the coming of the Lord are observed on the earth as well as in the heavens. On the earth there is a great earthquake, and every mountain and island are moved out of their places. Nothing remains in its place. The signs in the heavens are: the sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair, the moon becomes as blood and gives a strange, sickening light, the stars fall to the earth, and the firmament of the heaven is rolled up as a scroll. The effect is universal consternation. Men are amazed and filled with terror; they hide themselves and call on mountains and rocks to kill them because of the dreadful face of him who sits on the throne and because of the wrath of the Lamb. All realize that the great day of God's wrath is come, the day of final judgment (vv. 12–17). What is pictured here in the sixth seal may very well be spread over a period of years so that the signs come gradually and strike consternation into the hearts of the wicked.

Revelation 7 forms an interlude, describing the sealing of the one hundred forty-four thousand and the innumerable throng of the saints in glory. In chapter 8, after an introduction picturing the prayers of all the saints (vv. 1–6), the revelation of the seventh seal becomes manifest as seven trumpets. These trumpets, like the seven seals, are further distinguished into two groups of four and three.

### **The Seven Trumpets**

The first four trumpets constitute a distinct group, all pertaining to the physical universe: land, sea, waters, and firmament. The first trumpet speaks of a great hailstorm: masses of fire mixed with showers of blood, caused by the trumpet blast (v. 7). It represents destructive forces in nature, such as always operate in a measure, but are now increased to an extraordinary degree. This is indicated especially by the blood mixed with the hail and fire and by the fraction one-third. The seals, especially the fourth seal, spoke of one-fourth part. One-third is just a little more than one-fourth; if one-fourth represents the ordinary measure of destruction, then one-third represents an increase in destruction and death. This increase is characteristic of all of the first four trumpets. When the second trumpet is sounded, a great burning mass, like a mountain, is cast into the sea. The result is that onethird of the sea is turned into a rotten pool of blood, and one-third of the living creatures in the sea die (vv. 8–9). It stands to reason that this also affects the life of men and nations. When the third trumpet is sounded, a great star called Wormwood falls from heaven (vv. 10–11). Wormwood is a plant noted for its bitter taste and poisonous oil. It represents some poisonous influence in the atmosphere, affecting the waters from which men and beasts drink. A third part of the rivers and fountains of waters are poisoned, and many men die. When the fourth trumpet is sounded, a third part of the heavenly luminaries—sun, moon, and stars—are darkened (v. 12).

We must conceive of these first four trumpets as following one another in quick succession so that their combined effect is upon the earth at the same time. They inaugurate a period of great suffering, famine, pestilence, death, and utter confusion in the economic and political world.

The fifth trumpet reveals the locusts out of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1–12). From the entire description of these locusts, it is evident that they represent a host of evil spirits, demons, released at their own time upon the evil lusts of men. They leave intense suffering and despair in their wake. God

gives men over to their own evil lusts, their spirit of ungodliness, ambition, power, human wisdom and philosophy, lust, sensuality, appetite, greed, and covetousness. This may be deduced from the description of the locusts and is plainly revealed in Romans 1:24–32.

The sixth trumpet reveals what may be called the triple monsters. The trumpet angel receives the command to loose four angels who are bound in the great river Euphrates (Rev. 9:13–21). These four angels are wicked angels, wicked spirits, for they are bound. Their number suggests that they have a work to perform that concerns all the earth. That they are bound also signifies that they cannot accomplish this work until Christ permits them and sends them out. They are preserved in chains until the very hour and day and month and year in which they must accomplish their evil work, for the work of Christ must be done in his proper time (vv. 14, 15). The meaning of the river Euphrates in verse 14 is that it constitutes a boundary between Israel and the heathen world; symbolically it is the line of separation between the outwardly Christian world and the heathen nations on the four corners of the earth.

These four angels have power to kill one-third of men (v. 15). They do this not directly, but by gathering the forces described in the following verses. John beholds a tremendous host of cavalry and hears the number of them—two hundred million (v. 16). As to their appearance, they are a combination of horses, lions, and serpents. The color of their breastplates is that of fire, jacinth (very dark purple, like smoke), and brimstone (lemon yellow) (v. 17). Out of their mouths issue fire, smoke, and brimstone, by which men are killed, for their power is in their mouth (vv. 18–19), as well as in their tails.

What is represented by this infernal host? Negatively, it does not represent spirits, as did the locusts of the fifth trumpet. Although this host is indeed marshaled through the influence of the four angels who were bound in the river Euphrates, this host does not represent armies of men, for it kills men. Although the gathering of armies is certainly connected with this plague, the description of this host forbids us to think of mere armies. Positively, this host represents a combination and a more terrible manifestation of the red, black, and pale horses of Revelation 6:4–8—war, famine and desolation, pestilence and death—because the four angels kill a third part of men. The time of this plague is evidently a period of great apostasy and wickedness: men are worshippers of devils and idols; they commit murders, sorceries, fornication, and thefts. And they are hardened in their wickedness, for they repent not, that is, they show no sign of outwardly returning to a show of virtue because of fear. Recklessly, they continue in their wicked way (vv. 20–21).

In Revelation 10 to 15, there is a long interlude before the revelation of the seven vials into which the seventh trumpet is dissolved. Chapter 10 is the vision of the mighty angel and of the little book that John is instructed to eat. Chapter 11 is the vision of the measuring of the temple and of the two witnesses who are killed and glorified. Chapter 12 speaks of the woman who is great with child and of the dragon confronting her (vv. 1–6), of war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels (vv. 7–12), and of the woman in the wilderness (vv. 13–17). Chapter 13 gives a picture of the antichrist, the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. Chapter 14 gives the vision of the one hundred forty-four thousand standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion (vv. 1–5), proclaims the gospel of Babylon's fall (vv. 6–12), and closes with a vision of the end of the world (vv. 13–20). In chapter 15 we hear the song of Moses and of the Lamb (vv. 1–4), see the temple in heaven opened and seven angels coming out of the temple having the seven last plagues (vv. 5–8). Finally, chapter 16 is the revelation of the seven last plagues or the pouring out of the seven vials.

The seven angels are commanded to pour out on the earth the contents of their vials, the vials of the wrath of God. We notice that the seven vials are poured out without interruption. This signifies that the wrath of God is filled up in the seven vials and that things are hastening to their end. In fact, it is necessary to conceive of the angels' pouring out of the vials as being simultaneous, at least in part. We cannot fail to notice—although they are poured out without an interlude—that like the seals and the trumpets, they are plainly distinguished into two groups of four and three. The first four run parallel to the first four trumpets: although they affect men, they are poured out upon creation outside of man—the land, the sea, the inland waters, and the sun. In distinction from the rest of the seals and the trumpets, the destruction wrought by the outpouring of the vials is complete. No longer is there a fraction—one-fourth as with the seals or one-third as with the trumpets.

The first angel pours his vial upon the earth (Rev. 16:2). By the earth is meant the dry land, the soil, which by its herbs and fruit produces the necessary food for man and beast. The result of this first vial is a noisome and grievous sore upon the men who have the mark of the beast and upon them who worship his image. Only those who have the mark of the beast are affected by this plague, just as the Egyptians were affected by all of the plagues, while the people of Israel in the land of Goshen were exempt from many of them (Ex. 8:22–24). It would seem, however, that the cattle and the beasts of the field must also be affected by the first vial.

The second vial is poured out upon the sea (Rev. 16:3), in distinction from the dry land. The entire sea is contaminated, for it becomes as the blood of a dead man. The result of this poisoning is that every living soul in the sea dies. It is self-evident that this affects the life of men, not only because the sea offers no more food for man, but also because its corrupted waters spread disease and make navigation impossible.

The third vial is poured out upon the rivers and fountains of waters, that is, the inland waters. The result is that they are turned into blood and that men are compelled to drink blood (vv. 4–7).

The fourth vial is poured out upon the sun, resulting in terrific heat that scorches men with fire. The spiritual effect of all this, however, is that men do not repent. Rather, they blaspheme the name of God in bitter rebellion (vv. 8–9).

The fifth vial is poured out upon the seat of the beast (vv. 10–11), which is the antichristian world-power from its political aspect. His dominion is universal, including all the nations of men. The seat or throne of the beast is the symbol of his authority and power over the whole world. Upon this throne the fifth vial of God's wrath is poured out. The result is that the antichristian kingdom is full of darkness, which must not be interpreted as physical darkness, but rather as the eclipsing of the glory of the antichristian dominion. The beast loses his power and influence. No longer does his rule bring prosperity. There is misery and depression, suffering and desolation under his rule, as is expressed in the words, "they gnawed their tongues for pain" (v. 10). There is great distress and suffering in the dominion of the beast, partly because of the effect of the first four vials and partly because of the darkness caused by the fifth vial.

The sixth vial is poured out upon the great river Euphrates (vv. 12–14), the symbol of the line of separation or barrier between the nominally Christian nations and the non-Christian nations, Gog and Magog. By the pouring out of the sixth vial, the water of Euphrates is dried up in order to prepare the way of the kings of the east (v. 12). The idea of this sign is evidently that whatever barrier exists to restrain the kings of the east from coming and making war upon the nominally Christian (in reality, antichristian) nations is removed. Three unclean spirits come out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet (v. 13). They are evidently evil spirits that proceed from the antichristian power, that undoubtedly assume the form of an ungodly propaganda

or false Christianity, and that work the same mighty signs as does the false prophet mentioned in Revelation 13. The result of the work of these unclean spirits is described not from the viewpoint of their own intention, but from that of God's purpose. By their antichristian propaganda they prepare the nations for war. This war is called the battle of the great day of God Almighty, the day of God's final wrath and judgment. For this battle the nations are gathered together in Armageddon, where the enemies of God will suffer final and complete defeat (Rev. 16:14–16).

The seventh angel pours his vial into the air (vv. 17–21), the idea of which is probably the universal effect and finality of this last vial, as well as the great physical convulsions that accompany this last judgment. As the atmosphere completely envelops the earth, so this last vial involves the entire earth. All the nations are now engaged in deadly conflict in the battle of Armageddon. A great voice is heard, saying, "It is done" (v. 17). With the pouring out of the seventh vial, the series of vial judgments is finished, and the content of the book with the seven seals is now fully realized. The wrath of God that must be revealed from heaven upon all the iniquity of men is now finished.

This, in brief, is the significance of the book with its seven seals, which is taken by the Lamb from the hand of him who sits upon the throne.

# **Chapter 43**

# The Antichrist

### The Historical Development of Antichrist

Before the coming of the Lord on the clouds of heaven, there will be a culmination of the development of the man of sin in the power of antichrist. Very often scripture speaks of antichrist. Even as throughout the old dispensation there was a shadow of the coming Christ, there was also a type of antichrist. The prophecy of Daniel speaks of the little horn that came up among the ten horns on the fourth beast (Dan. 7:8). This little horn is undoubtedly a reference to antichrist, whose typical fulfillment was in the terrible Antiochus Epiphanes, but whose full realization must be expected in the end of time.

And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time (v. 25).

There is a reference to antichrist in the old dispensation in Revelation 12, which describes a great sign or "a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (v. 1). The context shows that this is a picture of the church as she is destined to rule over all things. Of this woman it is said that "she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered" (v. 2). Again, the context shows that this is a picture of the church in the old dispensation as she lived in the hope of bringing forth the seed of the woman, the Christ, according to the promise of Genesis 3:15. Before her stands "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth" (Rev. 12:3–4). This refers, no doubt, to the fact that in his fall he seduced a multitude of angels to rebel with him against the living God. The dragon, then, is a picture of the prince of darkness as he attempts to realize his own kingdom in the world. The ten horns are symbolic of his great power, which, as the number ten indicates, is strictly limited by God, while the seven crowns upon his heads refer to his attempt in his kingdom to imitate the kingdom of God. He is standing before the woman who is ready to be delivered of her child, in order to devour the child as soon as it is born (v. 4).

But his attempt fails. After the woman has borne "a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (v. 5), the child is immediately caught up unto God and to his throne, after which the woman flees into the wilderness, to a place prepared for her by God (v. 6). The whole context shows very clearly that this man-child is none other than Immanuel, the Anointed of the Lord. This is seen from the description of his rule over the nations with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27). From this description it is also plain that the woman with child is the church of the old dispensation. The dragon is the world-power, which in the old dispensation constantly confronted the woman in order to devour the holy seed.

So it was before the deluge when the church was persecuted until only eight souls were saved by the water of the flood. The same was undoubtedly the purpose of the building of the tower of Babel. The intention of its builders was to realize the world-power in order that the church might be swallowed up before Christ could come. This was the intention of the dragon through the world-power of Pharaoh in Egypt. Because the church was to bring forth the holy seed, the man-child, the

Christ, all the powers of the world round about her continually harassed the church throughout her journey in the desert and after she entered into the rest of Canaan. This attempt to kill the holy seed is, no doubt, the significance of the book of Esther. Wicked Haman was the representative of the dragon, whose ultimate purpose was to destroy the Christ. This was also the purpose of the dragon in his ultimate Old Testament representative, Antiochus Epiphanes. Yet all the attempts of the dragon to devour the woman, pregnant with the man-child, fail. The child is born and is caught up to the throne of God. Such is the typical representation of antichrist in the old dispensation.

#### The Name Antichrist

In the new dispensation antichrist is revealed in his real power. In the New Testament we read of his development, his coming, his power, and his final destruction. The term antichrist (ἀντίχριστος) is found only in the epistles of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John, v. 7). The name is composed of the preposition anti (ἀντί), which may either mean "against" or "instead of," and the noun Christ (χριστός). If the preposition anti is taken in the sense of against, the term means "one who stands opposed to the Christ." If the preposition is taken in the sense of instead of, the term signifies "one who purposes to take the place of Christ, to be Christ instead of the real Messiah." There is no reason not to combine these two senses so that the term antichrist means "one who is opposed to Christ in order to take his place."

The apostle John frequently uses this term. In 1 John 2:18, the apostle informs us that the existence of antichrists and the final coming of antichrist are characteristic of the last hour. Therefore, we may be assured that the dispensation in which we now live is the last time:

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:3).

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist (2 John v. 7).

Not only in those passages of scripture that use the term *antichrist* is there a reference to antichrist, but the Lord also speaks of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15). The Lord warns:

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:5, 24).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3–10 is a vivid description of antichrist as "that man of sin," meaning the one whose chief characteristic is sin, and as "the son of perdition," meaning the one who is born of perdition and goes into perdition (v. 3). He is one who opposes and exalts "himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped . . . whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (vv. 4, 9), but "whom the Lord will consume with the spirit of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming" (v. 8).

However, the most complete picture of antichrist is found in Revelation 13 and 17.

### The Beast from the Sea

In Revelation 13, there is a picture of the antichristian world-power from the viewpoint of its political aspect. The beast that rises up out of the sea represents this aspect of antichrist. This beast

has the general appearance of a leopard, but it has the feet of a bear, the mouth of a lion, seven heads, and ten horns. Upon its heads is written the name of blasphemy and upon its horns are ten crowns. One of its heads bears the mark of a deadly wound that has been healed. The beast receives its power and authority from the dragon, that is, the devil, and all the world admires the beast (vv. 1–3).

As to the significance of the symbolism of the sea out of which the beast arises, we find that if we compare Daniel 7:2–3, 17 and Revelation 17:15, the sea is the symbol of the nations of the world, moved by sin from within and swept by the revelation of God's wrath from heaven, restless with wars, revolutions, and troubles both political and economic, always giving birth to new kingdoms and kings, forms of government, dictators, alliances and federations.

In Daniel 7:2–3 we read: "Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another." This vision is explained in verse 17: "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth." It is evident that "the earth" means the nations of the earth. The storm-swept sea represents the nations as they give rise to new kingdoms and their kings. The same conclusion we reach on the basis of Revelation 17:15: "And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." The sea, out of which the first beast arises, represents the restless nations of the world, swept by storms of war and revolution and disturbances of every kind.

The second element in the vision that draws our attention is the symbol of the wild beasts. The beast in scripture is representative of the political world-power: the king or ruler and his domain. Of this there can be no doubt in the light of Daniel 7:17, where the four beasts are interpreted as signifying the four kings who will arise out of the earth, as well as on the basis of Daniel 7:23, which calls the fourth beast the fourth kingdom upon the earth that will be diverse from all kingdoms. A king and his kingdom are inseparable. When the question is asked whether the antichrist will be a person or a power, we may probably answer: Both. He will be a world ruler, a mighty person, a genius, in whom all the world will trust and whom the whole world will admire. But he is not to be separated from the kingdom over which he will have dominion. The term *king* must not be taken in too narrow a sense. In recent history men like Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin were not kings in the literal sense, but they were nevertheless world rulers, who in fact exercised far more power than many a king.

The fact that John beholds not merely one beast, but a combination of beasts—leopard, bear, and lion—most probably points to the fact that the world-power of the last days will be a culmination of other historic world-powers that have existed in the past. However this may be, the picture of the wild beast in the vision teaches that the ultimate manifestation of antichrist will assume the form of a political world-power, a kingdom and its ruler, a government.

The seven heads that appear on the beast represent seven different manifestations of the antichristian world-power in the course of history, some of which existed in the old dispensation, one of which was existing at the time of the vision, and the last of which must still be realized. That this is correct is evident from Revelation 17:9–10: "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space." It is apparent that the seven heads are seven historic representations of the antichristian world-power, various kingdoms or empires as they appear and disappear in time, whose identity it is possible to determine from the text.

Certain it is that the sixth of the seven heads represents the Roman Empire, for Revelation 17:10 says that five are fallen, and one is. The Roman Empire existed at the time John received the vision. From the standpoint of the vision, if we figure backwards and ask what empires are recognized in

scripture as historic world-powers before the Roman dominion, we find that Rome was preceded by the Greek-Macedonian power established by Alexander the Great, the he goat of Daniel 8:5–7, 21. The Greek-Macedonian power superseded the power of the Persians and the Medes, the bear of Daniel 7:5. The Persian dominion followed the mighty world-power of Babylonia with Nebuchadnezzar as its great ruler. Before the Babylonian Empire there was the power of Assyria with its capital in Nineveh. All of these world-powers are mentioned in scripture, so that we may be sure that four of the five that are fallen represent the Greek-Macedonian, the Persian, the Babylonian, and the Assyrian empires.

As to the fifth fallen kingdom, there is room for difference of opinion as to whether it refers to Egypt or to the kingdom of mighty Nimrod in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:8–10). Various considerations would seem to lead to the conclusion that Nimrod's kingdom is meant. Egypt indeed appears in scripture as the house of bondage, bent upon the destruction of the holy seed, but it is hardly reckoned with the great world-powers. In contrast, the kingdom of Nimrod stands at the very beginning of the history of the world-powers, and the Assyrian Empire is represented in the Bible as developing directly from it: "Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh" (v. 11). Besides, we read in Revelation 13:3 that one of the seven heads on the beast was "as it were wounded to death." This expression can be most properly explained as referring to the confusion of tongues, which was the deathblow to the earliest attempts to establish a universal world-power in the land of Shinar. The added information that "his deadly wound was healed" (v. 3), then, refers to the fact that in the end of time, in the final days of antichrist, the division into nations will be overcome for a season, and all the nations of the world will unite into a strictly universal world-power. The attempt that failed in the land of Shinar will then succeed for a short time.

Revelation 13 surely intimates that in the end and for a brief time all the nations will unite around the antichristian banner so that even the heathen nations will give their power to the beast. This is indicated by the symbol of the ten crowned horns that appear on the beast (v. 1). The horn in scripture is the symbol of royal and political strength. The psalmist uses this figure: "For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted" (Ps. 89:17). According to the symbolic meaning of the number ten in scripture, the ten crowned horns represent a fullness of royal and political strength. In this instance the reference is to the whole of those powers that exist outside of the pale of nominal Christendom, the heathen nations that live on the four corners of the earth and that are called Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8. Not from their midst, but from the nominally Christian world in Europe and America, will antichrist arise.

Within Christendom will be the center and throne of the antichristian world-power, as might be expected. The pagan rulers will unite with it and give their power to the beast for a season, but this union will not be permanent. For a time the ideal of Babel, which could not be attained in the land of Shinar, will be realized, and all the nations of the world will give their power to the beast. The difference between paganism and Christianity (antichristianity) will soon assert itself. After a season the heathen nations will arise against the center of antichristendom, and there will be a world war in the strictest sense. All of this is clearly taught in Revelation 17:12–13, 16–17:

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

Viewed from its political aspect, the ultimate form of the antichristian world-power will be the universal and final consummation and culmination of all the historic world-powers, realized for a time by the voluntary federation of all the kingdoms of the world, in which even the nations of heathendom, Gog and Magog, will have a place. This beast receives his power from the dragon. This must be understood in the spiritual sense, not in the absolute sense, for all power belongs to God alone, and without him even antichrist has no power. Antichrist is the servant of the devil and does his will. In antichrist the devil appears to realize his own dominion, and through him Satan is prince of this world indeed. In the antichristian empire all do Satan's will, except the saints. The beast is given a mouth to speak blasphemies against God, his name, his tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven (Rev. 13:5–6). All admire and worship the beast except the saints (vv. 7–8), for whom this will be a time of persecution and great tribulation.

#### The Beast from the Earth

The spiritual aspect of the antichristian world-power is represented by the second beast of Revelation 13. The second beast has its origin in the earth. It has horns like a lamb, but it speaks as a dragon. It is very closely related to the first beast, so closely that it must be conceived of as another aspect of the same antichristian world-power, not as a second power next to that of the first beast.

The first and second beasts belong together. They constitute a unity. This is apparent from Revelation 13:11–18. The whole purpose of the second beast is in the maintenance and acknowledgment of the power and authority of the first. He exercises all the power of the first beast, and does so as his servant (v. 12). He causes men to worship the first beast. He persuades men to make an image for the first beast and causes all who do not worship the image to be killed. He causes all men to receive the mark of the beast in their right hand or on their foreheads (v. 16). The purpose or result of this mark is that those who do not worship the beast may be boycotted and excommunicated from the world, so that no man is able to buy or sell, save those who are distinguished by the mark as worshippers of the beast. The first beast could not exist without the second; its power and influence over men would be inconceivable. Together the two beasts constitute the antichristian world-power, and they must be interpreted as two aspects of it, both of which are indispensable to its existence and authority.

What is the identity of the second beast? It is certainly not another kingdom. Rather, it is the spiritual, ethical aspect of the antichristian dominion. This is indicated by the fact that it rises out of the stable and quiet earth, not out of the turbulent and restless sea. Science and philosophy do not flourish in times of war and upheaval, but prosper in the quiet study of peacetime. The beast's spiritual, ethical aspect is evident also from his appearance as a lamb, not as a wild monster. This is also clear from the emphasis on the fact that the second beast *speaks* and corroborates the truth of his speech by doing great signs and wonders. He functions through speaking—preaching, teaching, and lecturing. By his speech he persuades men to worship the first beast and to make an image for him.

There can be no question that the second beast is the same as the false prophet mentioned in Revelation 19:20:

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image.

All these data lead to the same conclusion. The second beast represents the power of false prophecy—the intellectual, spiritual, and moral aspect of the antichristian world-power. It is the

power of false philosophy, atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, and modernism. It is the power of false religion, religion without Christ, as preached from many a pulpit today. It is the power of false science—science and all its results and inventions pressed into the service of sin and occupied with the wisdom of men, which is natural, earthy, and devilish. This science works miracles by which men are deceived and induced to follow the first beast and to worship him and his image—miracles not in the service of God, but in the service of the devil.

These miracles, wonders or signs, performed by the second beast are not wonders in the scriptural sense, but consist merely in the mighty acts that especially modern man performs and that cause men to wonder after and to admire the beast. Already in our day we can begin to visualize what these wonders and signs will be. We are thinking now of the products of steam and electricity, of airplane and automobiles, of telephone and telegraph, of radio and television. No one can say what the future will bring of these miracles that witness of the power of man and that will be used as the credentials of the antichristian world-power: "And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (Rev. 13:13). These will undoubtedly be days when the very elect would be deceived, unless the days were shortened (Matt. 24:22).

The effect and influence of this second beast will indeed be great and universal. The power of his miracles will be entrancing and will charm the lovers of this world, and his teaching will be accepted universally, except by those who refuse to have the mark of the beast. The beast will supply those who follow him with all modern utilities, conveniences, and luxuries of life. Due in no small measure to the second beast, the antichristian kingdom will be all that can be desired by the natural man. Therefore, in that age of antichristian prosperity and glory, men will worship the beast voluntarily, and all will wonder after him. It is not at all inconceivable that this worship will be offered to one person, the personal antichrist, who will stand at the head of the antichristian kingdom. Why should it be impossible that an individual endowed with the power of a universal genius should arise, one who is able to create a condition of world prosperity that causes men gladly to forget their belief in democracy, to hail this world savior as their lord, and to worship him as their god?

But voluntary worship will not satisfy the antichristian world-power. The worship of the beast will be compulsory. Antichrist will brook no opposition. The antichristian spirit is very broadminded, if only men worship the beast and his image. Those who refuse to bow the knee to this universal idol will suffer persecution. Once more, the sword of the world-power will be turned against the saints of Christ. They will be allowed no room in that empire of antichrist. Social and economic outcasts they will be, for they will not be allowed to buy or sell unless they worship the beast and his image. If they refuse to worship the image of the beast, they will be killed. All this will literally be realized in the period of the antichristian dominion. No one will be able to escape this persecution. There will be great tribulation, such as the world has never seen before. All who refuse to worship the beast and to accept his sign will be exposed; there will be no possibility of hiding away from his vengeance.

In the day of antichrist and the antichristian dominion, men will also be compelled openly to confess whether they are for or against Christ. The lines of demarcation will be clearly drawn by what is called "the image of the beast" (Rev. 13:15). The second beast

deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (vv. 14–17).

How this image of the beast will be realized and in exactly what this mark of the beast will consist, we cannot say. It certainly will be possible, and in our day it is very well conceivable that there will be a physical representation of the beast before which men everywhere will be expected to worship. Even in the French Revolution there was an image of the goddess of reason in the *L'Eglise de Notre Dame*. The mark, whatever it may be, will be given only to those who worship the image. They who refuse to worship the image of the beast will be cast out or killed. This is exactly the reason for constructing the image and for giving the mark. The image will speak, and by speaking will expose those who refuse to worship. And they who refuse to worship will be killed.

Whether this image will speak literally or figuratively, we cannot tell, but it matters not: the image will surely speak in such a way that exposes those who refuse to worship the beast. The image will reveal the "Yes" or "No" of all men and will clearly indicate whether one will be for or against the antichrist. There will be no possibility of escape. The mark will also speak for itself. Not to wear the antichristian badge will surely expose one as being not of antichrist but of Christ. And antichrist will be no respecter of persons: rich and poor, bond and free, small and great alike will be required to show the mark of the beast. Failure to show this mark will expose one as an outcast, vainly seeking a place where he may buy or sell daily bread. No longer will it be possible to serve both God and Mammon even in outward appearance. A time of great tribulation it will be for the saints in Christ Jesus, but at the same time it will be a period in which the lines will be clearly drawn. It will be seen who fear the Lord and who do not fear him, and it will be given of grace to the saints in the cause of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer with him (Phil. 1:29).

#### The Failure of Antichrist

Not antichrist, but Christ shall have the victory. Antichrist will surely fail. His complete failure is already sealed, for Christ has overcome the world and is seated at the right hand of God, clothed with all power and authority in heaven and on earth. The rule and ravings of antichrist will be but for a season: "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months" (Rev. 13:5). The power of antichrist is given unto him and limited by the Most High God.

The period of forty-two months is the same as the twelve hundred and sixty days, three and one-half years, and a time and times and a half a time, mentioned elsewhere in the book of Revelation. As a symbolic indication of time, it refers to the whole new dispensation. The period during which the woman, the church of the new dispensation, is nourished in the wilderness is "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Rev. 12:6). The same period is described as "a time, and times, and a half a time" (v. 14). This is the same period as forty-two months, twelve hundred and sixty days, or three and one-half years. It is the period of this entire dispensation, although it may have a more literal fulfillment in the end. All through this dispensation antichrist is in the world, although in his full power he will become manifest only in the end of time. It is not impossible that in the fullness of his power he will continue only a literal three and one-half years or forty-two months.

However this may be, antichrist shall fail. His time is limited. He will be cut off. According to Revelation 17:16, the end of the antichristian empire will be marked by the universal world war between the central antichristian powers and the pagan nations that live on the four corners of the earth. The ten horns, representing the pagan powers, will hate the whore and make her desolate. Upon the scene of this desolation, the Lord will come to consume his enemies by the breath of his mouth and to judge all the nations of the earth (2 Thess. 2:8).

#### The Number of the Beast

That antichrist shall fail is further indicated by "the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six" (Rev. 13:18). Many interpretations have been offered of this number. Some of them are proof of much learning and are characterized by great ingenuity. Usually the number is interpreted as if it were a puzzle to be solved. The best known of these interpretations, which dates back to the time of the early church fathers and is still accepted by many interpreters of Holy Writ today, finds in the number 666 a representation of the Greek letters that spell *Lateinos* and applies the number of the beast to the Roman Emperor or, according to others, to the pope. The letters of the Greek alphabet have numerical value. In order, the letters that spell *Lateinos* represent the following numbers: 30, 1, 300, 5, 10, 50, 70, and 200. The sum of these numbers is 666.

There are weighty objections against this interpretation, the chief of which is that it appears to be a juggling with the terms of scripture in order to reach a preconceived explanation. The name *Lateinos*, whether referring to a particular Roman Emperor, to the Roman Empire, or to the pope, was before the mind of the interpreter, and the number 666 was quite arbitrarily dissolved into those numbers that would correspond to the letters of that name. If we begin thus to juggle with the terms of Holy Writ, there is no end of possible interpretations. The number 666 may readily be dissolved into other combinations of numbers in order to spell a different name. Irenaeus hesitated between the names *Teitan* and *Lateinos*. Besides, the Greek form of the name *The Latin* is not *Lateinos*, but *Latinos*, so that the word and number puzzle does not even check. No wonder that Alford could write:

Even while I print my note in favour of the  $\Lambda \alpha \tau \epsilon i vo \zeta$  [Lateinos] of Irenaeus, I feel almost disposed to withdraw it. It is beyond question the best solution that has been given; but that it is not the solution, I have a persuasion amounting to certainty.[1]

To us it seems that in interpreting the number of the name, we must certainly heed the introductory words of Revelation 13:18: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast." These words must not be read as if they were equivalent to, "Here is a puzzle. Let him who has ingenuity solve it." Wisdom and understanding take into consideration the light of the word of God in general in order to interpret a particular passage. It is certainly in harmony with the holy scriptures in general to read into the numbers a symbolic significance.

That the number 666 has a symbolic meaning is even more to be expected because it occurs in the book of Revelation. If we apply the rule that most aspects of Revelation are symbolic, we find that six is the number of the earthly creation with a view to time. Four is the number of the earth with a view to its extent or scope. Scripture speaks of the four winds and of the four corners of the earth. Six is the number of the earth and of all earthly things from the viewpoint of their development in time. It is the number of creation week. It is the number of our week of toil and labor without the sabbath. It clearly represents the idea of labor without rest, of effort that is not crowned, of exertion that ends in ultimate failure, of time without eternity. It is the number of vanity of vanities: it is all vanity. The number six, therefore, stands for all the efforts of man in time to find a rest in earthly things.

That the number six is repeated three times and multiplied by ten and ten times ten indicates the completeness of man's effort to bring the things of this world to their highest possible development, for the number ten always indicates a fullness. The number's repetition and multiplication also indicate that man strives repeatedly in the course of history to reach the rest, to establish the ideal situation in the kingdom of man. But repeatedly he fails, for he is mere man. The number of man is



# **Chapter 44**

# The Millennium

#### The Idea of the Millennium

In general the term *millennium* refers to a period of a thousand years, more or less, which according to some is characterized by a special dispensation of prosperity and bliss for the church on earth. The term is derived from Revelation 20:2–3, and 7:

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison.

There are three main views regarding the millennium: amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism.

#### **Amillennialism**

The amillenarians, as the very name (which is of recent origin) indicates, believe that scripture does not teach a millennium in any form. They hold that this dispensation of the kingdom of God constitutes the last hour and that no other dispensations will follow it, except the eternal state of the kingdom of glory. The measure of iniquity will be filled in this dispensation; the end of this present time will be characterized by great apostasy from the church; antichrist, the man of sin, will develop and realize his kingdom for a little season. During this period there will be great tribulation, such as has never before been witnessed on earth. The coming of Christ will terminate everything; the general resurrection of the dead will take place; the final judgment over the wicked and the righteous will be held; and the everlasting kingdom of glory will follow in the new heavens and the new earth, where the tabernacle of God will be with men. The amillenarians explain Revelation 20 in harmony with the whole book in the allegorical or symbolic sense. To this we will refer presently.

### Postmillennialism

The postmillenarians, as the name indicates, believe that the coming of Christ is after the millennium. Before the coming of Christ, there will be a special dispensation of gospel preaching and its effect, so that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth, even as the waters cover the bottom of the sea (Isa. 11:9). Besides, a glorious reign of peace is expected, which includes even the animals, according to some.

Delitzsch writes on the eleventh chapter of Isaiah:

The fathers, and such commentators as Luther, Calvin, and Vitringa, have taken all these figures from the animal world as symbolical. Modern rationalists, on the other hand, understand them literally, but regard the whole as a beautiful dream and wish. It is a prophecy, however, the realization of which is to be expected on this side of the boundary between time and eternity, and, as Paul has shown in Romans 8, is an integral link in the predestined course of the history of salvation . . . There now reign among irrational creatures, from the greatest to the least,—even among such as are invisible, —fierce conflicts and bloodthirstiness of the most savage kind. But when the Son of David enters upon the full possession

of His royal inheritance, the peace of paradise will be renewed, and all that is true in the popular legends of a golden age [will] be realized and confirmed.[1]

Postmillennialists really expect a realization of the kingdom of God on earth, and upon this scene Christ will come. The more modern postmillennialists need not be considered here. They speak of the kingdom of God in an evolutionistic sense and do not believe in a second coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven. It must be remarked, however, that the picture that the postmillenarians offer of the end of this dispensation is not in harmony with Holy Writ. Scripture certainly does not sustain the notion that in the end all the world will accept Christ, that righteousness and peace will reign supreme, and that the church will experience a period of great prosperity before the coming of the Lord.

The very opposite is true. Scripture rather speaks of wars and rumors of wars, of earthquakes and pestilences, of great apostasy from the faith, of the development and consummation of the antichristian power, and of great tribulation and persecution for the church (Matt. 24:4–22; Luke 21:25–28; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Rev. 13; Rev. 17). The idea that the present age will gradually develop into the age of the kingdom of glory is antiscriptural. The word of God teaches very plainly that the end of this world will be the scene of tremendous catastrophes:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10–12)?

Therefore, we cannot accept the postmillennial view of a glorious millennium preceding the coming of Christ.

### Premillennialism

The premillennial view, as the name indicates, in a way stands directly opposed to the postmillennial view. Premillennialism holds that the coming of Christ is before the millennium. This coming of Christ is distinguished as the parousia or the rapture and the revelation. The views of the premillennialists differ; they do not agree among one another. In general, they believe in the rapture, which is not preceded by any signs and can occur at any moment. The rapture consists of the change of the saints who expect his coming and of the first resurrection, that is, the resurrection to glory of the saints who have died before the rapture, followed by the reception of both living and resurrected saints into the air, where they will be with Christ. This raptured state of the church will last approximately seven years, during which time the antichrist will rage in the world and the great tribulation will occur. At the end of the seven years, Christ will come again in the revelation, together with his church, to establish the millennium, during which time the devil will be bound, and Christ will reign in Jerusalem over his kingdom people, the Jews, and his church together. At the end of the millennium, the devil will be loosed; the nations of Gog and Magog will come against the holy city, but Christ will consume them; the second resurrection, the resurrection of the wicked, will take place; all nations will be judged; and the eternal state will ensue, with the church eternally in heaven (according to some), while the kingdom people will be forever on the new earth.

Many and very serious objections can be raised against this premillennial conception. First, it is based upon a false separation of Israel and the church—Israel is the kingdom people and the church is

the body of Christ. The Jews rejected their Messiah. The kingdom people were dispersed and led into captivity until their restoration at the end of time, and in the interval Christ gathers a new people, the church. When the gathering of the church is finished, Christ will restore his Old Testament kingdom people, gather them into their own land, restore the temple with its ritual and sacrifices, and reign on the throne of David. This separation of Israel and the church is not according to scripture. Israel is the church, and the church is Israel, gathered from both Jews and Gentiles. Mount Zion, Jerusalem, temple and altar, sacrifices and shadows have been fulfilled in Christ and realized in the church of the new dispensation.

Second, and in close connection with the preceding, this premillennial view is essentially Jewish and is based upon a Jewish interpretation of prophecy that totally disregards the interpretation of the New Testament. The literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies involves premillennialists in the greatest absurdity, for it requires not only the restoration of the nation of Israel, but also the future existence of the nations that surrounded Israel, such as Assyria, Babylonia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon.

Third, in their view of the first and second resurrections—perhaps even of three or four resurrections—premillennialists are in flagrant contradiction of Holy Writ. Scripture teaches very plainly that the resurrection of the dead, both of the righteous and of the wicked, will take place at the same time and in the same hour:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28–29).

Fourth, the Bible plainly teaches that after the resurrection the saints will enter into everlasting glory. There certainly is no mention of a rapture by which the saints will be temporarily received up with Christ into the air, or of a millennium in which the saints will dwell for a thousand years on the earth in their resurrection bodies in the midst of an imperfect world and in the midst of sin and death. Surely, during the millennium births and deaths will continue, and the human race will continue to develop as in the past.

Fifth, and in close connection with the preceding objection, the premillennial theory involves itself in all kinds of absurdities. How can the glorified saints in their spiritual and heavenly resurrection bodies exist, manifest themselves, and operate in the old world? How can the throne of Christ be established in the old city, Jerusalem? How can sinners in their old and sinful bodies and saints in their glorified state stand together in the presence of Christ, the glorified Lord? Many more objections can be raised against the premillennial theory. But let this suffice, and let us go on to a brief consideration of Revelation 20:1–10.

### The Binding of Satan

Revelation 20:1–3 speaks of the binding of Satan:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

These words describe a vision that John beheld while he was in the Spirit on the Isle of Patmos. A

vision may not be interpreted as if it were a mere and direct foretelling of events, as they will actually happen. Therefore, a strictly literal interpretation of these verses is neither in harmony with the nature of the passage, nor is it possible. John did not actually see an angel come down with a great chain in his hand and the key of the bottomless pit. He did not actually see that the devil was bound and shut up in the bottomless pit. It would not be interpreting, but doing violence to scripture if we would paraphrase these verses as follows: "Then shall an angel come down from heaven with the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand, and shall lay hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and he shall bind him a thousand years." Such a paraphrasing of the text entirely disregards the fact that the passage speaks of a vision.

Rather than a literal interpretation, the question is, What is the central idea of the vision? What fact does John behold being realized before his eyes? The answer to this question is readily given: the devil is bound by divine decree so that he is prevented from accomplishing his purpose. The angel coming down from God to carry out this decree, the key of the bottomless pit, the great chain, and the shutting and the sealing—all these may be regarded as belonging to the form of the vision. They all serve to emphasize that Satan is bound by a divine decree, securely and effectually, so that during the period of his confinement he cannot carry out his evil purpose. Not only suggested, but also very definitely answered by the text is the question whether this confinement of Satan, this imprisonment of the devil, must be regarded as absolute and complete, so that he is restrained in all his activities, or as relative and partial, so that the restraint limits him only in a certain direction and dooms him to partial inactivity.

To this question the text replies without a doubt that the restraint is partial and with a view to a certain sphere of action. The purpose of the binding of Satan is "that he should deceive the nations no more" (v. 3). Verse 8 enlightens more definitely that when Satan shall be loosed for a little season, he "shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." Comparing these two verses, we note that the binding of Satan is limited to certain nations called Gog and Magog; that his confinement prevents him from deceiving those nations; and that this deception, which he is prevented from realizing by his imprisonment or the restraint upon him, would otherwise cause those nations to be gathered for battle against the camp of the saints and the beloved city.

Of Gog and Magog we read in Ezekiel 38 and Ezekiel 39:1–16. Gog is the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, of the land of Magog, constituting a vast horde that descends upon Israel from the north, even from the limits of the horizon, to make a final onslaught on the people of God. Hailstones, fire, and brimstone from heaven cause their utter destruction. In Revelation 20, these same hordes are simply called Gog and Magog; they are described as living on the four quarters of the earth, and as coming upon the camp of the saints from every direction (vv. 8–9). According to New Testament terminology, the camp of the saints, the beloved city, is the church in the world, Christianity in its widest sense, as it exists and develops in the new dispensation throughout the ages. Around it on the four corners of the earth, that is, outside of the pale of history, are the nations that remain pagan. Gog and Magog are, therefore, the heathen nations in distinction from the nominally Christian nations.

In Revelation 20, the meaning of the binding of Satan is that he is so limited in his work that he cannot gather the nations on the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to battle against the Christian nations. He certainly is not restrained absolutely, so that he can do nothing. On the contrary, while he is so limited, he may do many things, both among the nominally Christian nations and among the people called Gog and Magog. In fact, he may instigate the nations to war; he may attempt to unite the nations under antichristian power; he may go about as a roaring lion. But he is prevented from

deceiving those nations to gather them for battle against the church, that is, against the nominally Christian nations.

# The Meaning of the Thousand Years

The period during which Satan is so limited is called "a thousand years" (v. 2). This number cannot be taken in the literal sense for two reasons.

First, many numbers in scripture have symbolic significance. Such, for instance, is true of the numbers one, three, four, six, seven, ten, and twelve, as well as of their combinations and products. They represent some realities and relations in the kingdom of God. The earthly relationships between numbers are a picture of the heavenly and spiritual realities of God's covenant and kingdom. Our week, for example, is a combination of six plus one—labor and rest, time and the eternal sabbath. Hence it signifies the completion and perfection of the kingdom of God. Moreover, the number seven occurs in scripture not only as the sum of six and one, but also as the combination of three and four—the triune God and the world, the perfection of God's covenant. In the Bible the number twelve occurs as the product of three and four, the number of the elect, as is evident from the twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve times twelve thousand servants of God who are sealed, and twelve plus twelve elders around the throne of God and the Lamb.

Second, that numbers have symbolic significance is especially true in the book of Revelation. The whole book is based on the scheme of the number seven. There are seven seals to the book that is opened by the Lamb. The seventh seal dissolves itself into seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet reveals itself as seven vials. The seven golden candlesticks represent the complete picture of the church in the world, as the seven churches of Asia represent that church.

This symbolic significance is true not only of the number seven, but is equally true of the number ten and its products, especially the thousands. The days of the tribulation of the church of Smyrna are ten days (Rev. 2:10). The number of the sealed servants of God is ten times ten times ten, multiplied by one hundred forty-four (Rev. 7:4). The number of those who appear on Mount Zion with the Lamb, who have the Father's name written on their foreheads, is one thousand times one hundred forty-four (Rev. 14:1). The antichristian beast appears with ten horns (Rev. 13:1). The length, breadth, and height of the New Jerusalem are twelve times a thousand furlongs (Rev. 21:16). In the light of all these facts, as well as in connection with the apocalyptic character of the book of Revelation in general, we are certainly justified in saying that it would be arbitrary to insist that the thousand years of Revelation 20:2 must be understood in the literal sense.

If we study scripture concerning the significance of the number ten, it will become evident that everywhere it suggests completeness, a fullness of measure. The number ten is a round number, which therefore suggests completeness. All the instances in scripture where the number ten occurs express the same thought. There are ten plagues upon Egypt, the fullness of the measure of God's wrath over the house of bondage. There are ten commandments, the fullness of the ethical will of God. There are ten times ten times ten times one hundred forty-four, or the fullness of the number of God's people according to the election of grace. There are ten virgins (Matt. 25:1), ten servants and ten talents (Luke 19:13).

According to scripture, then, this number represents the idea of a complete measure of anything according to the will and counsel of the Most High. If we add to this that the number ten to the third power (one thousand) points to a great measure of something and that the term *years* (rather than *days*) suggests a long period, we conclude that the thousand years of Satan's confinement and

limitation signify a long period, determined by the will and counsel of God, which must be fulfilled before the devil can be permitted to deceive the nations that live on the four corners of the earth.

The question now arises, To what period in history does this limitation and binding of Satan refer? Can we apply this interpretation to actually existing conditions in the world? We may apply the period of a thousand years to the present dispensation, from the exaltation of Christ until shortly before his second coming on the clouds of heaven. To this it may be objected that the vision in Revelation 20 follows the vision of the second coming of Christ in chapter 19. But this cannot possibly be adduced as an objection against this view, for the simple reason that the order of events in the book of Revelation is not chronological, but rather ideological. Repeatedly, the book follows the development of the world to the very end from a certain viewpoint, in order then to resume the drawing of the same picture from a different point of view (Rev. 6:12–16; Rev. 11:15–19; Rev. 14:17–20; Rev. 16:17–21; Rev. 18; Rev. 19:11–21). In Revelation 20, we have the same phenomenon from the viewpoint of the history and the end of Gog and Magog.

The nations of Gog and Magog that live on the four corners of the earth are those in the new dispensation who never play a part in the history of the world, but who are waking up in our very day. We refer to the numerically overwhelmingly strong heathen world—the multitudes of China and Japan; the millions upon millions in India; the followers of Confucianism, Buddhism, Islamism, and Brahmism; and the hordes of Africa and of the islands of the sea. What it would mean if these nations were permitted to unite and marshal their tremendous forces against the nominally Christian world may easily be surmised. The church would have no place in the world and no room for development. However, the devil is bound in this respect. In the old dispensation he was repeatedly allowed to deceive the nations to come against Israel. Egypt and Assyria, Babylonia and Persia, Greece and Rome had a controlling influence in the history of the world. But in the new dispensation this relation is exactly the opposite. The Christian nations are the historical powers, and Gog and Magog are hitherto apparently sound asleep. The prince of this world is restrained from employing these forces against the church, the beloved city, the camp of the saints—against the nominally Christian world.

#### The Reign of Souls

The chiliast asserts that the mention in Revelation 20 of the souls who reign with Christ a thousand years can refer only to a glorious millennium in the world. But let us consider the text. John says, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" (v. 4). It is plain that this part of the picture in the vision represents a people who rule and reign with Christ. Such is the meaning of their sitting upon thrones, as well as of the statement that judgment was given to them, for to judge is a function of royalty and implies authority to rule. Who are these royal people whom John saw in the vision? In the latter part of verse 4, John describes them as

the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

It is evident that "a thousand years" refers to the same period during the whole new dispensation as that in which the devil is bound with respect to Gog and Magog. In that period, according to our interpretation of the thousand years, these people reign with Christ. Who are these people, and where are they? The answer of the text is that they are not saints on earth and in the body, but saints in glory before the resurrection of the dead. The expression "the souls of them that were beheaded" permits no

other interpretation. The chiliast denies this in order to be able to save his theory of an earthly millennium and of a separate resurrection of the saints. But the denial is without support in scripture. It is strange that he who always would insist on a literal interpretation of Holy Writ in this case looks for a figurative explanation.

It is essential to the premillennial theory of the millennium that "the souls of those who were beheaded" be transformed into resurrected saints in their glorified bodies. In order to accomplish this, the premillennialist argues that in this expression is an illustration of the figure called *synecdoche*, according to which a part must be taken for the whole. As we speak of so many sails, meaning ships, or as we speak of a hundred head, meaning cattle, so scripture speaks of souls, signifying persons. Thus all the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt were threescore and ten (Gen. 46:27). In the ark a few, that is, eight souls were saved (1 Pet. 3:20). On the day of Pentecost about three thousand souls were added to the church (Acts 2:41). There were in all two hundred threescore and sixteen souls with Paul in the ship (Acts 27:37). Hence the chiliast argues that we must interpret the expression "the souls of them that were beheaded" in the same figurative sense as referring to resurrected persons.

But this will never do. There are two objections against this interpretation that prove it false beyond a shadow of doubt.

The first objection is that whenever synecdoche is employed, whether in our daily language, in secular literature, or in Holy Writ, uniformly a numeral is used in connection with it. We can speak of a hundred head and of fifty sails, but we never speak of heads and of sails. In all the above instances from scripture, the same rule is followed. Seventy souls came with Jacob into Egypt. Eight souls were in the ark. Three thousand souls were added to the church. Two hundred seventy-six souls were in the ship with the apostle Paul. But Revelation 20:4 says simply, "And I saw souls." John does not employ the figure of synecdoche in this instance, therefore.

The second objection concerns the phrase "of them that were beheaded" (v. 4). How strange it would be to refer to persons in the body—whether corruptible or resurrected—as being "the souls of them that were beheaded." The premillennial interpretation, therefore, will never hold. It is utterly false.

#### The First Resurrection

The chiliast argues further that the words, "This is the first resurrection" (v. 5), make it plain beyond a shadow of doubt that in verse 4 there is reference to resurrected saints. This argument also does not hold because verse 5 says, "This is the first resurrection." The pronoun refers back to the statement in verse 4 concerning the souls who reign with Christ. We cannot introduce our own preconceived notion, but we are bound to the text when we answer the question, What is the first resurrection? Therefore, we are constrained to say that the reign of the souls of those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus is the first resurrection.

This interpretation is not in conflict with the rest of scripture, for the Bible speaks of the resurrection of the dead in more than one sense. For instance, it refers to regeneration as a resurrection: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). That this is not a reference to the final resurrection of the body is plain from the expression, "The hour is coming, and now is." The same resurrection, regeneration in the broader sense, is meant in Ephesians 5:14: "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." However, in

Revelation 20:5, "the first resurrection" refers to the state of the saints in glory immediately after death. They are delivered from battle, from the persecution and suffering inflicted on them by the antichristian forces that are always in the world throughout this dispensation, and they reign with the Lord.

The expression "the first resurrection" does not refer to the raising first of a particular group of saints, in distinction from a second raising of the wicked a thousand years later, but to a state or degree in the resurrection of the saints. That this is the correct interpretation is corroborated by a comparison with the similar expression, "the second death" (vv. 6, 14), which refers to the ultimate state of death in hell. First and second death, therefore, are different degrees of death, not different groups of dead people. Surely, this establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that the first resurrection is a stage in life and glorification. If we may complete the parallel, we would say that even as the first death is physical death, so the first resurrection is the glory that follows immediately upon physical death. Even as the second death is the state of perdition of body and soul in hell, so the second resurrection is the final state of glory after the resurrection of the body. Hence, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (v. 6).

Again, the chiliast adduces as an objection against this interpretation the first part of verse 5: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." It is evident that by "the rest of the dead" are meant the ungodly. Hence the chiliast argues that while the first resurrection means the resurrection of the righteous, the fact that the rest of the dead lived not until after the thousand years are finished plainly proves that after the thousand years the ungodly will be raised from the dead. Now it may be admitted that the form of the expression would almost invite us to complete the text as follows: "and then also the rest shall live again." But it must be remembered that the text does not say this and that we have no authority to add to scripture.

Besides, even the chiliast would not venture to finish the expression in that fashion. Although the wicked will rise from the dead, it cannot be said of them that they will live again, as is plain from John 5:28–29:

. . . the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

The resurrection of the wicked will not be a resurrection unto life, but unto eternal perdition. Verse 29 very clearly teaches that this going forth out of their graves unto perdition will take place at the same time, as in one hour, with the resurrection of the righteous. Therefore, Revelation 20:5 can only mean that while John sees the souls of the righteous as living in glory and power, the rest of the dead have no place in this picture at all and do not live again. When they do appear once more, they will be sent into perdition and cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

The glorified saints, then, reign with Christ. On earth they endured suffering for his sake. It was given them of grace to have the testimony of Jesus and the word of God in their hearts and in their mouth. Therefore, it was given them also in the cause of Christ to suffer with him (Phil. 1:29), for they had this testimony in the midst of an antichristian world. The fact that the antichristian power is described as it will manifest itself in its ultimate realization and consummation does not signify that only the saints who will live and suffer in the last days, shortly before the coming of Christ, are included in the saints who reign with Christ. Essentially the power of antichrist, the beast and his image, are always in the world; always the believers have the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, and always they refuse to worship the beast and his image and receive not his sign in their right

hand or in their forehead (Rev. 13:15–17). Therefore, by these reigning saints is meant the entire church triumphant in heaven. They reign and judge the world with Christ, and their reign commenced in heaven with the exaltation of their Lord at the right hand of God. That the saints who overcome and endure unto the end will reign with Christ in glory is a common idea in scripture:

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father (Rev. 2:26–27).

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne (Rev. 3:21).

Concerning the saints' reign with Christ, it is evident that centrally and essentially it is the reign of the exalted Lord himself, to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth and a name that is above all names. Even as the saints must suffer in the cause of Christ while they are still in this world, but have the victory and overcome and judge the world by faith in Christ, so they will participate in his glorious reign in heaven, when they will be completely delivered from all the power of the enemy and be with him forever and ever. They will be given to know his work with regard to the final realization of the kingdom of God, even as Christ knows the Father's counsel and is found worthy to open the book with its seven seals. They will perfectly know the mind of Christ; he will have no secrets from them. They will concur in his judgment of the world and partake in it. They will rejoice in the full realization of his perfect victory. Finally, the reign of Christ and his saints with respect to this world is such that almost until the very end the devil will be bound with respect to Gog and Magog, so that he cannot deceive them and gather them for battle against the camp of the saints.

#### The Loosing of Satan

The binding of Satan, however, is not the end of the matter:

When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. 20:7–10).

What is presented here in a separate vision has partly been pictured in a different setting in preceding chapters. From Revelation 16:12–16, we may gather that Satan's deception of the nations on the four quarters of the earth will be realized in the period of the sixth vial. This is also in harmony with the statement, "he must be loosed *a little season*" (Rev. 20:3). Shortly before the end of this world, this final deception of the nations will take place:

And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon (Rev. 16:12–16).

This passage refers to the same going forth of the devils to the nations that live on the four quarters of the earth, to the kings of the whole world, to deceive them and to gather them for battle against the

camp of the saints. Besides, we learn that this deception of the nations through the devil will proceed immediately from the antichristian kingdom. Unclean spirits will proceed from the center of the antichristian world, and they will have their influence upon the nations that live upon the four quarters of the earth. It matters not now what these unclean spirits represent. They certainly indicate a threefold influence of the antichristian civilization. The final result of this threefold antichristian influence will be that the nations thus affected will unite their forces for war—the last war that will ever be fought on earth.

A similar presentation of the same period of history we find in Revelation 17:12–17:

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them . . . And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

That the ten kings are kings in distinction from the antichristian world-power proper and that their dominion will last only one hour with the beast, that is, a little season, suggests that these ten kings are the same as the power of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20 and the same as the kings of the whole world and the kings of the east in Revelation 16.

If this is correct, we then learn from Revelation 17 that the very first result of the deceptive influence of the devil through the medium of the threefold antichristian influence will be that the heathen nations of Gog and Magog will join into one great world-power with the central antichristian dominion. For one hour or a little season, the world-power will realize its greatest ambition, and a strictly universal empire will be established, of which also the heathen, but civilized, nations form an integral part. However, this empire cannot last. Eventually the ten kings will hate the whore, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire (v. 16). The ultimate result of the devil's deception through the antichristian influence upon the heathen nations will be that they will be gathered for battle against the very center of the antichristian dominion.

If we combine all of these different elements—which undoubtedly have bearing upon the same historic event of the future—we come to the following conception. In the nominally Christian world will ultimately be realized the final consummation of the antichristian world-power, the empire in which will be represented and realized to the utmost the highest ambitions of man. From a purely humanistic viewpoint it will be a glorious kingdom. Thoroughly humanistic it will surely be—religiously, scientifically, politically, socially, and industrially. But it will be anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-church. The saints who refuse to receive the mark of the beast will have no place in that kingdom.

In the meantime, influences will issue forth from that central realization of the antichristian kingdom upon the nations that live on the four corners of the earth. These nations will be civilized. Under the influence of the so-called mission work of the antichristian unclean spirits, the heathen nations will awake out of their prolonged slumber. They will become conscious of their power, will quickly adopt the antichristian civilization, and for a time will join forces with the beast and the false prophet to form one great world empire. Nevertheless, they remain pagan. Although they give their power to the beast for one hour, a little season, this cannot last. The deception of the devil must work out until the bitter end when the heathen and the antichristian nations gather as separate forces for the last war—a world war in the strictest sense.

Viewing the nominally Christian world as the truly Christian nations and as the church of Christ—

which in fact will be antichristian, although the church will still exist in its midst—Gog and Magog will do to it as the nations of the old dispensation did with respect to Jerusalem, and they will say, "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion" (Micah 4:11). This will be their guilt, for their purpose will be to fight against the camp of the saints and the beloved city, that is, against God and his Christ. It will also be their deception. For as in the days of the old dispensation, God used the nations and their hatred against the holy city to chastise and destroy a Jerusalem that had become Sodom, so he will use the hostile spirit of the heathen nations to destroy the antichristian powers and to eat the flesh of the great whore. The camp of the saints they will never touch. The people of God will look for the coming redemption, which will be nigh. Upon this final scene of confusion and iniquity, the Lord will appear to judge, to destroy his enemies, and to deliver his saints, giving them the victory forever.

This, in brief, is our interpretation of Revelation 20:1–10. We contend that this passage certainly does not support any idea of a millennium in the chiliastic sense.

## **Chapter 45**

# The Parousia

#### The Parousia Defined

By the parousia we understand the final, sudden, personal, and visible coming of our Lord Jesus Christ on or with the clouds of heaven, for the purpose of raising the dead and executing judgment, to give everyone according as his work shall be and to make all things new.

The parousia is the consummation of all wonders and, therefore, is necessarily itself a wonder, which passes our boldest comprehension and which certainly cannot be explained from the natural development of things. The parousia is the fulfillment of God's counsel with respect to all things in time.

#### The Term Parousia

The term parousia (παρουσία) means literally "presence" and is opposed to "absence" (ἀπουσία). In this sense the two terms occur together in Philippians 2:12: ". . . not as in my presence [ἐν τῆ παρουσία] only, but now much more in my absence [ἐν τῆ ἀπουσία]." The term also occurs in the sense of the presence of one who is coming and, therefore, of the coming itself, the arrival. In this sense it is used with respect to antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:9: ". . . whose coming [ἡ παρουσία] is after the working of Satan," and with respect to Christ's coming to destroy antichrist in verse 8: ". . . whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming [τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ]." In the New Testament the term is very frequently used to denote the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:27, 37, 39); the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15; James 5:7); the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 2 Pet. 1:16); his coming (1 Cor. 15:23; 2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Pet. 3:4); and the coming of the day of God (2 Pet. 3:12). In the early fathers it is called the second coming in distinction from the first coming, which refers to the advent of Christ in the flesh.

Another term for the same concept, although from a different viewpoint, is *epiphany* (ἐπιφάνεια—2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). Closely related to and synonymous with epiphany is the term *apocalypse* (ἀποκάλυψις). Epiphany (ἐπιφάνεια) means "manifestation," and apocalypse (ἀποκάλυψις) means "revelation." The two are very closely related. *Apocalypse* (ἀποκάλυψις) refers to the revelation of that which is hidden by removing the cover or unveiling. *Epiphany* (ἐπιφάνεια) refers to the making visible by piercing through that which hides, as the sun becomes visible by piercing through the clouds. All these terms scripture uses to denote the second or final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## The Time of Christ's Coming

The time of this final coming of the Lord is not revealed in scripture. Certain it is that the millennial view that the Lord can come at any time is not correct, for the coming of the Lord is inseparably connected in scripture with the end of the world. This is evident from the question that the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy

coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3).

This connection between the Lord's coming and the end of the world is also plainly taught in verses 29–31:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The connection between the coming of Christ and the end of the world is also the teaching of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:23–24:

Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

The apostle Peter speaks of the mockers who deny Christ's coming and the end of all things. They ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Pet. 3:4). Peter compares these mockers to the people who lived at the time of the deluge, when the world that then was perished in the flood. Then he writes, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (v. 7). He describes the day of the Lord:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (vv. 10–13).

All of these passages, and others, plainly indicate that the coming of the Lord will mark the end of the world. Besides, scripture teaches that the resurrection of the dead, both of the wicked and the righteous, will accompany the coming of the Lord. However, when that end and the coming of the Lord will be, no one knows. Even the signs of his coming certainly do not enable us to predict the day and the hour. The Lord himself tells us very definitely, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32; cf. Matt. 24:36).

#### The Error of Postmillennialism

The signs of the Lord's coming that are predicted in scripture also forbid us to support the view of the postmillenarians, whose philosophy is based on the theory of evolution and who expect a gradual realization of the kingdom of God in the world. They put the coming of the Lord, as far as they believe in such a coming, millions of years into the future. James Snowden writes:

Of course in this general progress there have been points and periods of retrogression. Evolution sometimes results in degeneration. The battle line of humanity does not move across the field with equal step and unbroken front. Here and there it wavers, halts, breaks. At times the whole line seems driven back in confusion, as in the Dark Ages. But this retreat is only in order to reform and move on towards victory. The vast evils and unspeakable wrongs of the world do not disprove this progress; rather it is often progress that brings these evils to light and makes us sensible of them. We have faith that nothing can stop this forward sweep of the gulf current of the ages. The hour hand of history can never be turned back. The oak cannot be crushed back into the acorn. Omnipotence is in this movement. The constellations are marching behind

it. God is in his heaven, and all will yet be right with his world.

The world, as we have seen, is yet young. The very planet is still in the workshop and will not be finished for millions of years. Humanity is in its infancy. The centuries stretch out before it in vast vistas. There is before it the prospect of hope and splendid optimism. The future is rosy with morning light. Nothing has been done that shall not be better done. Every human achievement shall be infinitely surpassed. Truth shall be taken from the scaffold, and wrong driven from the throne. More and more shall He whose right it is reign and the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven. This will be the millennium. The visions of the Hebrew prophets of the Messianic kingdom shall be fulfilled in their true spiritual and glorious meaning. Uninspired prophets have caught the same vision. John Fiske, theistic evolutionist, saw it when he wrote: "The future is lighted for us with the radiant colors of hope. Strife and sorrow shall disappear. Peace and love shall reign supreme. The dream of poets, the lesson of priest and prophet, the inspiration of the great musician, is confirmed in the light of modern knowledge; and as we gird ourselves for the work of life we may look forward to the time when in the truest sense the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords." And Browning, the profoundly Christian and optimistic poet of our age, struck the same triumphant note and grand chord:

"For these things tend still upward, progress is
The law of life, man is not man as yet.
Nor shall I deem his object served, his end
Attained, his genuine strength put fairly forth,
While only here and there a star dispels
The darkness, here and there a towering mind
O'erlooks its prostrate fellows; when the host
Is out at once to the despair of night,
When all mankind alike is perfected,
Equal in full-blown powers—then, not till then,
I say, begins man's general infancy."[1]

These words were written at the time of the First World War. Since that time the world has experienced another and more catastrophic world war. As a result, stark pessimism has replaced this optimistic philosophy. Whatever may be the view of philosophy and philosophic theologians, scripture certainly does not hold out any hope for the world or any hope for a glorious millennium before the coming of the Lord. That coming of the Lord, according to scripture, certainly is not millions upon millions of years in the distant future, but is always presented as near. The signs of the coming of the Lord and of the end of the world are being realized before our very eyes. Although we cannot predict the day and the hour, we may certainly believe on the basis of the word of God, as well as with a view to the realization of the signs of Christ's coming around about us, that the day of the Lord is approaching.

# The Order of Events at Christ's Coming

The final coming of the Lord will be a personal and visible coming in his resurrection or spiritual body. This coming of the Lord will be physical, but he will not appear in the same body that he assumed at his incarnation, but in the radically different body of the resurrection. The physical eye cannot see this glorious body of the resurrection. Hence the order of events at the coming of the Lord must be pictured as follows: The sign of the Son of man in heaven will be first. What this sign will be we do not know, but it certainly will be a visible representation of Christ in his glory to all who are living on the earth at the time (Matt. 24:30). Immediately upon the appearance of the sign of the Son of man in heaven will be the resurrection of the dead and the appearance of the Son of man in the body of his resurrection glory on the clouds of heaven. This order is also demanded by the fact that all the tribes of the earth will mourn, even those who pierced him (Rev. 1:7), which naturally cannot take place until after the resurrection of the dead.

Whatever the exact order of events will be, it is important that the church maintain the confession that Christ will return personally and visibly at the end of time.

In the modern conception of social Christianity, there is no room for a personal visible return of Christ. In recent decades there is much emphasis on the idea of the kingdom of God, but a purely earthly and social conception is presented:

One of the most marked characteristics of this time is a new interest in the kingdom of God and a new conception of its meaning. In fact so intense is this interest in the idea of the kingdom that it may be called the master thought of our time. And so new and significant is this conception of the kingdom that it is little else than a new revelation from heaven.

. . . The program [of this kingdom] implies the saving of the person by making him Christlike; it implies the proclamation of the Good News to every creature; it demands for every human being the conditions of a pure, strong, full and happy life; it sums itself up in the creation of a righteous and fraternal human society, in which God is known as Father and men are known as brothers, a society with justice as its foundation and love as its law, a society in which every life has a true inheritance and where all share in the Father's bounties . . .

Thus the men who are following the program of Christ and are seeking the kingdom of God are seeking to make the Good News known to every creature; they are seeking to save men from sin and to make them like Christ; they are seeking to secure for all men the conditions of a clean, worthy, human and moral life; they are seeking to build on the earth a city after the pattern of the Divine City.[2]

Walter Rauschenbusch emphasizes the idea of the kingdom of God, but also according to him this idea is a thoroughly worldly conception. He must have nothing of the apocalyptic, biblical conception of a catastrophe at the end of time and of a personal return of Christ. In his opinion the apocalyptic perspective obscured the thought of the prophets of the old dispensation:

So apocalypticism came to dominate the Christian view of future history. Whenever men looked down the future to gain a religious outlook, they saw it in the artificial lay out of apocalyptic dualism and determinism. The apocalyptic hope has always contained ingredients of religious force and value, but its trail through history is strange and troubled reading. It has been of absorbing fascination to some Christian minds, but it has led them into labyrinths from which some never emerged. It has been the inspiration of earnest Christian men in some lines of Christian activity, but it has effectively blocked their minds with strange prejudices against other important lines of work. It has turned the enthusiasm of great historical movements into injurious fanaticism. It has spawned hopeless little sects. It has been one chief cause why the Kingdom hope has not gained the wide practical effectiveness which it might have, for in this debased and irrational form it is hopelessly foreign to modern life and thought. I know that this charge will pain some devout Christian minds whom I would not willingly hurt, but in the interest of the very hope for which they stand I have to say that the idea of the Kingdom of God must slough off apocalypticism if it is to become the religious property of the modern world. Those who hold it must cease to put their hope in salvation by catastrophe and learn to recognize and apply the law of development in human life. They must outgrow the diabolism and demonism with which Judaism was infected in Persia and face the stern facts of racial sin. They must break with the artificial schemes and determinism of an unhistorical age and use modern resources to understand the way God works out retribution and salvation in human affairs. [3]

This conception of the kingdom of God as a social order in the present world—and in connection with this conception the denial of the final and personal and visible coming of the Lord Jesus Christ on the clouds of heaven—is certainly in conflict with Holy Writ in many places (Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:11; Acts 3:20–21; 1 Cor. 15:24; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:13; 1 Thess. 4:15–17; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; Rev. 19:11–21).

## The Manner of Christ's Coming

In close connection with the personal visible return of Christ is the plain revelation of scripture that the coming of the Lord will certainly not be gradual, but will be sudden and unexpected. Even though scripture speaks of the signs of Christ's coming, these signs are never of such a nature that we can predict the hour and the day of the coming of the Lord:

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Matt. 24:37–39, 44; cf. Matt. 25:1–13; 1 Thess. 5:2–3; Rev. 16:15).

There is a difference of opinion about whether the coming of the Lord will be accompanied by both the saints who died before his second advent and the angels. It seems evident from scripture that this will indeed be the case:

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:31).

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Matt. 16:27; cf. 1 Thess. 3:13; Rev. 14:16–20).

That the saints who died before the coming of the Lord will accompany him is clearly indicated in Revelation 19:11–14:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

That the saints will accompany Christ is also suggested by the reign of the saints with Christ in glory during this entire dispensation (Rev. 20).

### The Purpose of Christ's Coming

As to the purpose of the coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven, first, he will come to raise all the dead in order that they may appear before him in judgment. Both the righteous and the wicked will be raised:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28–29).

Second, in close connection with the preceding, Christ will come in order to pass judgment upon all and to reward everyone according as his work shall be:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be (Rev. 22:12).

Third, the purpose of this final coming of the Lord is to make all things new, to redeem the creature from the bondage of corruption, and to cause it to participate in the glorious liberty of the children of God:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:19–21; cf. Eph. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:10–13).



## **Chapter 46**

# The Resurrection of the Dead

#### The General Resurrection and the Resurrection of Believers

When we speak of the resurrection of the dead, we must bear in mind that a distinction must be made between the general resurrection and the resurrection of the believers. There is indeed a resurrection of the dead unto death, as is evident from John 5:28–29. Of this general resurrection the Belgic Confession speaks:

And then all men will personally appear before this great Judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel and by the sound of the trumpet of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived.[1]

The wicked, as well as the righteous, will be raised from the dust of the earth, but only to receive the body of corruption that is adapted to be cast into the pool of fire (Rev. 20:13–15). The bodies of the wicked will indeed be changed. As the bodies of believers will be adapted to heavenly glory, so the bodies of the wicked will be adapted to eternal desolation.

### The Word Resurrection in Scripture

Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the dead in more than one sense. It speaks of a spiritual resurrection through regeneration and effectual calling:

For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live (John 5:21–25).

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:14).

Scripture mentions a resurrection immediately after death when the soul of the believer enters into the glory of paradise in the house of many mansions (John 14:1–4; Rev. 20:4, 6).

Scripture also speaks of the resurrection of the body, together with the change of the then-living believers, which will occur at the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15–17).

These various forms of the resurrection imply deliverance from the power of death and an entrance into life through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the final sense, the resurrection of the dead is the wonder of grace whereby the God of our salvation calls our mortal bodies out of the dust of death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in order to make them like unto the glorious body of our risen Lord (Rom. 8:11).

#### Faith and the Resurrection

The faith that God quickens the dead must not be confused with a general philosophy about immortality or with the universalist's notion of a general restitution or restoration (ἀποκατάστασς), but is definitely and particularly Christian. The Christian believes the glorious resurrection and looks forward to it as the object of his sure hope only because he believes in Christ crucified and raised.

The two are inseparable. Only through the resurrection of Christ do we know by faith that there is a resurrection of the dead. Only because by faith we are united with Christ can we be assured that we personally will have a part in the resurrection unto eternal life. Apart from Christ and his resurrection, it is impossible to know anything about this mystery.

Hence the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 bases his argument concerning the resurrection of the dead on the fact of the resurrection of Christ; the one is inseparably linked with the other. To deny the one implies the denial of the other:

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins (vv. 12–17).

The apostle argues from the position of some in the church of Corinth that there is no resurrection of the dead and exposes the dire consequences of such a position: They who deny the resurrection of the dead deny by implication the resurrection of Christ. This is not to be understood as an argumentation from the general to the particular, as if the apostle merely meant to say, "You say that the dead rise not. Christ was dead; therefore, Christ did not rise."

The Corinthians had not drawn the conclusion that Christ had not risen; but from their proposition, "The dead rise not," it is evident that they had excluded Christ. The apostle wants to make them see the impossibility of their position. For this reason he argues from the effect—the resurrection of the dead—to its cause—the resurrection of Christ. The underlying idea is that the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are inseparably connected as cause and effect. The cause must produce the effect. It follows that if the alleged effect—the resurrection of the dead—is not true, then also the cause—the resurrection of Christ—must be denied. If Christ is raised, his resurrection must surely have the fruit of the resurrection of the dead.

Hence if the dead rise not, Christ is not raised. His resurrection is in principle the resurrection of the dead for all who are his. His is the sole resurrection: outside of his resurrection there is no resurrection at all, for he is the head of the body, the church, both in the forensic and in the organic sense. When he was raised from the dead, all the members of his body were raised. By his resurrection and exaltation he received the power to impart his resurrection life to all those whom the Father had given him. When he draws them unto himself by faith and unites them with himself, they receive a share in his resurrection life. This resurrection shall be perfected when he shall call forth his own from the grave and make their mortal bodies like unto his most glorious body.

This same truth may also be expressed from a different viewpoint. That God quickens the dead (Rom. 4:17) is a truth that can be apprehended only by the Christian faith. No human philosophy can ever discover or embrace this truth, because the truth that God quickens the dead is evident only from the resurrection of Christ. That God is able to raise the dead is self-evident: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). That he is not only able, but also willing to raise the dead, that this resurrection actually belongs to God's eternal purpose, and that he actually does quicken the dead, has been revealed and can be known only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

#### The Nature of the Final Resurrection

The question then becomes, What does scripture reveal to us concerning the mystery of the

resurrection of the dead?

Scripture reveals that the dead rise and that their resurrection concerns their very person and their whole nature, body and soul. The Apostles' Creed mentions only the resurrection of the body, the resurrection of the flesh.[2] It is good that we maintain this terminology. That the body will be quickened in the resurrection is the plain teaching of scripture. It was evident from the empty tomb and the place where Jesus had lain in the sepulchre of Joseph that the body of our Lord had been quickened.

The apostle writes in Romans 8:11: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." In 1 Corinthians 15:35–54, the apostle asks and answers the question, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" (v. 35). And Philippians 3:21 teaches that the Savior "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

The word of God often speaks of the resurrection of the dead. In that resurrection the body will be quickened, to be sure, but the resurrection concerns our whole existence, according to both body and soul. Just as Christ was raised, so also the believers will be raised with him in glory. Just as in death the believer dies and his body is laid in the grave, while his soul is unclothed and in its bodiless state enters into the house of God in heaven, so in the resurrection the same believer is raised from the state of death. His body is quickened, and his soul is clothed with the resurrection body. The final resurrection is a glorification of the whole nature, a glorification that will enable the saints to inherit the kingdom of God in the new heavens and upon the new earth. For "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50), and the unclothed soul apart from the body cannot enter into the final and perfect inheritance of that kingdom. This must wait until the resurrection of the dead when death is swallowed up in victory (v. 54).

We may ask the question, as some do, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" (v. 35). The answer is that essentially the same body that was buried will be raised from the dead. This is very plainly taught in scripture. The resurrection is not a new creation. This is evident from the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ. That in his case no new body was created is evident from the vacated grave and from the fact that he could show his disciples the marks of his suffering in his hands, feet, and side (John 20:20, 27). His body was indeed completely changed and glorified, but it was nevertheless essentially the same body in which he sojourned on the earth in the days of his flesh and in which he was crucified and stored away in Joseph's tomb.

This is corroborated by the teaching of all scripture, especially 1 Corinthians 15:42–44:

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

In this passage the identity of the body that is buried and the body that is raised is plainly taught. The subject remains the same. The body that is sown is also raised. The figure of sowing is based on the same idea. When one sows wheat, he expects to harvest wheat. This is indeed a profound mystery, and we will never be able to understand it from any natural causes or processes: it is a wonder of grace. It belongs to those things that lie beyond the scope of our comprehension: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

When we consider what becomes of our bodies in physical death—how they literally return to the

dust whence they were taken, so that even their very substances become part of other bodies, and if we contemplate how many bodies of believers were never buried, but were drowned in the depths of the sea, cut to pieces, or burned at the stake and their ashes blown to the four winds of heaven—the resurrection becomes utterly inconceivable to us. It would seem easier, perhaps, to think of the resurrection as a new creation. Yet God will bring again all those bodies and unite them with their proper souls. He is the one who calls the things that are not as if they were and quickens the dead. He is God, and he becomes known as God exactly in performing wondrous things. Always his way is in the sea. The things that are impossible with man are possible with him. He who raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit who dwells in us (Rom. 8:11). Essentially, then, the body that is raised is the same as the body that was buried.

This raises the question, What belongs to the essence of a human body? We indeed say that the body of the resurrection will be essentially the same as the present body, but for the rest it will nevertheless be wholly different from the body of the flesh. This is also very plain from Holy Writ. Hence the question, What belongs to the essence of a resurrected human body?

To this question we may suggest a fivefold answer.

## The Resurrection Body: A Material Body

First, to the essence of a human body belongs the fact that it is material. A spiritual substance is not a body. Although we cannot visualize the form of angels, they apparently have no material body. God made his angels spirits. The resurrection body will undoubtedly be material. When the apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:44 speaks of a *spiritual* body, he does not use the word in the sense of *immaterial*. The word spiritual is not employed in distinction from and in contrast with material, but in distinction from natural or, according to the original, psychical.

Although the body of the resurrection is material, it is not of the same kind of matter as that of our present bodies. Our present bodies are flesh and blood, and the apostle plainly teaches that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (v. 50). Besides, the apostle teaches:

All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star different from another star in glory (vv. 39–41).

However, what is essentially the same matter can nevertheless assume different forms. The seed of the tulip is essentially the same as the bulb that finally develops. Ice, water, and steam are the same matter, but they all appear in different forms. So it is also with the body of the resurrection. It is essentially the same as the body that is stored away in the grave, but in the resurrection it appears in an entirely different form. It is not the body of flesh and blood that cannot inherit the kingdom of God; yet it is a material body, that is, essentially the same as the body that was interred at death.

# The Resurrection Body: A Human Body

Second, the body of the resurrection, like the body that was buried, is a *human* body. Through the resurrection, man is not changed into a different being: always he remains man. Through the resurrection, through all the changes to which man is subject—sin, death, regeneration, the intermediate state in heaven, as well as the final resurrection—man remains man. This implies that he is a rational, moral creature. His nature is such that he is adapted to bear the image of God. This is

true of man's spirit and soul. To that soul belongs a body that can serve as its instrument and can reflect the image of God. It is impossible that a human soul could function through the body of an animal. Therefore, the body of the resurrection that is reunited with the soul is an essentially human body, a body that is capable of serving as an instrument to express and reflect the image of God in the new creation. No doubt it will reflect that image in a far higher sense and with a far greater glory than was reflected through the earthly body of the first man Adam. Essentially, this makes no difference. God predestinated his people "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). The body of the resurrection must serve the reflection of his likeness.

### The Resurrection Body: An Individual Body

Third, to the resurrection body belongs individuality, which is undoubtedly preserved through death and resurrection. Individuality is that which distinguishes one's own body from all other human bodies. All men have the same human nature in common. Wherever you meet man, you experience no difficulty in recognizing him in distinction from other creatures; yet among the millions of men there are no two alike; each man has his own individuality. The glory of God enables him to create millions upon millions of variations in the same nature. The individual characteristics that distinguish men from one another belong to the body as well as to the soul. There can be no doubt that to each individual belongs his proper body; the soul of one could not possibly function in the body of another. As the personal identity and individuality of the soul will be preserved through death and in the glory of our heavenly house, so the body will appear in the resurrection with its own individual characteristics. Each soul will be reunited with its proper body.

Without entering into all kinds of irrelevant questions, on the basis of Holy Writ we may say still more about the resurrection body. Although it will be essentially the same as our present body, it will nevertheless be radically different in form. In the resurrection body we will bear the image of sinless, perfected man, while now we bear the image of sinful man. Further, in the resurrection body we will manifest the image of the heavenly, while now we bear the image of the earthly. Through the wonder of the resurrection, our vile or humiliated bodies will be made like unto the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is evident from 1 Corinthians 15, which explains not only the identity of our present body with the body of the resurrection, but also the difference between the two. Through the resurrection of our body, we are delivered from all the effects of sin and death: "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (vv. 42–43).

#### The Resurrection Body: A Glorified Body

Fourth, our resurrection bodies will be glorified, in contrast to our present bodies, which are "in corruption." In the sphere of corruption they exist. From within they are corruptible; from without they are subject to the forces of corruption. In our present world, which exists under the curse, several forces of corruption destroy the organism of our body. All kinds of tiny bacterial organisms find their way from without into our lungs and bloodstream and disintegrate the body. To them our present body is subject, for the body is corruptible. It cannot successfully resist their destroying power. Even the science of medicine, bent upon discovering these disease germs and counteracting their corrupting influence in the body, in last analysis stands helpless against them. It is impossible to fight death. This

process of corruption has its inception at birth; in corruption we are born, and to the forces of corruption we are subject from the moment we enter into the world. The process continues during our whole earthly life: dying we die. In many different diseases the process of death reveals itself in various ways. It is finally completed when the body gives up the struggle against these forces of destruction and is entrusted to the grave, where the word of God, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19), is literally fulfilled. In the sphere of corruption we are brought into the world. In that sphere we exist as long as we live in the present body. Corruption we breathe; corruption we eat and drink; and the process of corruption is consummated at death. The body is sown in corruption.

However, the body is raised in incorruption. The body of the resurrection is subject to these powers of corruption no more. It is immune. It has the victory over them all. It is incorruptible. In the kingdom of God, there is no power of corruption from without. The inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us is incorruptible and undefiled and fades never away (1 Pet. 1:4). There will be no disease germs in the eternal kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth. In the sphere of incorruption, in which no one will ever say any more, "I am sick," the body will be raised. The resurrection body will be made like unto the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is beyond the possibility of corruption. Corruption can reach it no more. In the resurrection, death has no dominion; it can never enter there in any form. Hence, "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Moreover, the body is sown in weakness, but is raised in power (1 Cor. 15:43). In part this is already implied in the corruptibility of our present bodies and the incorruptibility of the body of the resurrection. Yet scripture expresses this idea from a slightly different viewpoint. Our present bodies have only limited strength, and they must succumb to death, even apart from the forces of corruption that violently destroy them. The measure of that strength is threescore and ten or fourscore years "(Ps. 90:10). As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth" (Ps. 103:15). Indeed, when the blasting wind passes over that flower, it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But even when the hot wind does not violently break its tender stem, it cannot last. For a while it blooms, but its vitality is limited. Soon it loses its beauty and withers away.

So it is with man in his present state. The strength of his physical organism is limited, and there is nothing to renew it. In the first paradise Adam might eat from the tree of life and perpetuate his existence, constantly replenishing and refreshing his power, not only according to the soul, but also according to the body. Nevertheless, from that tree of life man was separated. In the present world there is neither a tree of life nor a fountain of youth by which man may renew his strength. He is like a candle that burns itself out. For a while he may appear in youthful strength, but soon he begins to bend under the burden of years, and he inclines toward the grave. The evil days come, and the years draw nigh in which he says, "I have no pleasure in them" (Eccl. 12:1). The sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain. The keepers of the house tremble. The strong men bow themselves. The grinders cease because they are few. Those who look out of the window are darkened. The doors are shut in the streets. The sound of the grinding is low. He rises up at the voice of the bird. All the daughters of music are brought low. He is afraid of that which is high. Fears are in the way. The almond tree flourishes. The grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. All this reveals the weakness of the body and leads to the day when the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher is broken at the fountain, the wheel is broken at the cistern, and the dust returns unto the earth (vv. 2–7).

Our earthly house (2 Cor. 5:1) collapses over our heads, for it is sown in weakness. But it is raised

in power (1 Cor. 15:43). The body of the resurrection will never be wanting in strength. It will draw from a source of unlimited power and vitality. It will not gradually deteriorate, but it will renew its youth like the eagles (Isa. 40:31). Always there will be strength for the task. Just as in the resurrection no one will ever say, "I am sick," so no one will ever complain of being weary or exhausted. The source of this ever-renewed and ever-youthful strength is the risen Lord through his Spirit. With him the risen saints will be united. From him, the Son of God, they will draw their power. In everlasting youth they will stand in the house of God, to serve him day and night.

Further, while the present body is characterized by dishonor, it will be raised in glory. The body of sinful man is now without its original glory and beauty. No longer is it an instrument for the reflection of the image of God, as it was in paradise. Sin and death, corruption and disease have left their marks on its appearance. As an instrument of unrighteousness it is in dishonor. It is fundamentally ugly. The truth of this becomes increasingly apparent as old age approaches. By many artificial means, men (and especially women) attempt to give their bodies a superficial beauty. Even the repulsiveness of the dead body in the coffin is covered to an extent by the undertaker's art. But all these attempts are vain. By all these superficial attempts to beautify the body, we know and confess that it is sown in dishonor. All of our aprons of fig leaves cannot hide the fact that our bodies have lost their original beauty and glory.

But through the wonder of the resurrection, the body will attain to everlasting glory. All the effects of sin and death will be erased from its appearance, and it will be clothed with a perfection of beauty that is far greater than the glory it enjoyed in the original state of rectitude. It will be made like unto the most glorious body of Christ. The image of the heavenly it will reflect, as an everlasting instrument of righteousness and holiness. It will serve the manifestation of the likeness of the Son of God. It will be raised in glory.

# The Resurrection Body: A Spiritual Body

Fifth, the apostle in 1 Corinthians 15 mentions one more distinction between the present body and the body of the resurrection: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (v. 44).

As we have mentioned before, the idea of "a spiritual body" must not be understood in opposition to a *material body*, nor is this the meaning of the text in the original, in which "spiritual" stands over against "natural." The literal rendering of the word translated "natural" is *psychical*. Our present body is *psychical*, namely, it is adapted to serve as the instrument of our present earthly soul. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).

Through his present body man lives an earthly life. He is strictly limited to the earthly sphere of existence. He has an earthly eye, and perceives only earthly things. He has an earthly ear to catch only earthly sounds. He is bound to the earth and craves food and drink. He cannot perceive or have direct communion with spiritual realities. Heavenly things are hid from him. Even as far as he can know about them and apprehend them in his present, earthly, psychical state, he can do so only through the means of earthly symbols. Through the hearing of the word with our physical ear, we know God, fellowship with him, and apprehend spiritual and heavenly things. But that word addresses us in earthly terms. On the earthly plane of our present psychical existence, God reveals himself to us. In anthropomorphistic symbols he speaks to us concerning himself. We cannot see him face-to-face. Even the risen Lord in his glorious body had to *appear* to his disciples in order to convince them of

the reality of the resurrection. Angels and heavenly things lie beyond the scope of our experience. We have an earthly soul, and in our psychical body we live an earthly life. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard" things spiritual and heavenly (1 Cor. 2:9). We walk not by sight, but by faith, the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1). Such is the implication of what the apostle calls a natural or psychical body.

The body of the resurrection will be spiritual, which means that it will be wholly subservient to our glorified spirit and to the indwelling Spirit of Christ. In the resurrection body we will be able to inherit the kingdom of God, which flesh and blood cannot inherit. In that new and eternal kingdom we shall see God face-to-face; we will behold Christ and always be with him, and we will have direct contact and fellowship with heavenly things. With new eyes we will see the things that are now unseen. With spiritual ears we will apprehend the things that are now beyond the scope of our hearing:

There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:44–54).

Such is the glory of the spiritual body of the resurrection.

The resurrection, therefore, is the reunion of the glorified spirits of the saints with their glorified bodies in the heavenly sphere of incorruption, power, glory, immortality, and spiritual things, to inherit the kingdom of God.

# **Chapter 47**

# The Final Judgment

### The Final Judgment Defined

By the final judgment we understand the wonderwork of the triune God in Christ whereby he manifests all rational, moral creatures in connection with the works performed by them in time, in the light of his holy law and before the consciousness of the entire rational, moral world, judges them, and expresses the verdict which forever determines their future state. The final judgment is the perfect theodicy.

### The Final Judgment in the Old Testament

Scripture throughout speaks of such a judgment at the end of the world. This judgment must serve in principle as a revelation of God's justice, as it is maintained in the everlasting state of the righteous and of the wicked.

Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth (Ps. 96:10–13; cf. Ps. 98:7–9).

All the prophets speak of the day of the Lord, when the Lord will deliver his people and judge the nations righteously:

Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision (Joel 3:12–14).

The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung (Zeph. 1:14–17).

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch (Mal. 4:1).

#### The Final Judgment in the New Testament

In the New Testament the idea of this final judgment and of the day of the Lord is more clearly defined. It is a day of judgment that is connected with the coming of the Son of man:

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Matt. 16:27).

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 13:41–43).

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:31–34, 41).

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man (John 5:22, 27).

His judgment is just, for as he hears, so he judges; he does not seek his own will, but the will of him who sent him (v. 30).

The apostle Paul speaks of "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:5–6), and of "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (v. 16). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Paul charges Timothy to preach the word "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1–2). The epistle of James exhorts believers to be patient, "for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," and "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:8–9). "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Pet. 2:9). When God's love is made perfect in us, "we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

To the seer on Patmos was given a vision of this final judgment:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

The last chapter of Revelation solemnly emphasizes the Lord's coming to judge both the quick and the dead: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

The Belgic Confession connects this final judgment with Christ and his coming:

Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended with great glory and majesty, to declare himself Judge of the quick and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it. And then all men will personally appear before this great Judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trumpet of God.[1]

#### The Nature of the Final Judgment

What is the idea of this final judgment? Various notions have been propounded in answer to this question. That the course and history of this world would be finally closed by a judgment of God was taught in the church from the very beginning of the new dispensation. But different conceptions were formed of this revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Already in the Middle Ages there was the notion that the judgment will take place only in the consciousness of those who will be judged, that is, all the moral creatures: the final judgment will be wholly subjective. Others offered an objective description of the scene of the final judgment and expressed the idea that God's people, especially the monks, would actively participate in the judgment. Still others insisted that there would be no universal and public judgment at the close of the world's history. The only judgment that would ever take place is the one to which every man will be subjected immediately after death: it is appointed for man once to die and after that the judgment (Heb. 9:27).

At the time of the Reformation, as is evident from the confessions, the idea of the final judgment was developed more clearly. The judgment was inseparably connected with the second coming of the Lord. Christ will be the judge. All men, the righteous and the wicked, will appear before his judgment seat, and they will be judged according to their works. The books that will be opened are the consciences of men.

The Westminster Confession speaks as follows:

God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons, that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. [2]

The purpose of this final judgment, according to the Westminster Confession, is the theodicy:

The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.[3]

#### **Denials of a Final Judgment**

In modern times, especially under the influence of German theology, the idea of a distinct, final judgment that will terminate this age and the history of the world is generally denied. There will be no final judgment as a distinct and separate event in the end of time, nor is such a judgment necessary. The world is always in judgment; God executes his judgment constantly. History itself is judgment, and every man always receives according to his work; God inscribes his judgment in the consciences of men. Although this conception fundamentally errs in denying the truth of a final judgment at the close of history, there is nevertheless an element of truth in this conception. We may not look upon the last judgment as an isolated event, a momentary act of God by which he will for the first time and forever judge the affairs of men and set straight whatever was permitted to be crooked in the history of the world.

Although the judgment at the end is a final setting straight, it is by no means the only judgment that God executes, as seems to be the idea of many. According to them, in the course of the world's history, God does not appear as the judge of heaven and earth. To be sure, he judges all the moral acts of men and nations in the sense that he evaluates them as to their ethical worth and writes them all in his book. Occasionally, he reminds the world of his wrath and just judgment by sending special catastrophes, such as world wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. But for the rest, he does not in the present dispensation execute a righteous judgment. Every man is not rewarded according to his work in this present dispensation. Many things are left crooked, for God is tolerant, forbearing, and

longsuffering.

In fact, in the affairs of the world, it appears as if force rather than justice prevails and has the victory. The wicked prosper, especially if they have the power, as they generally do. The righteous suffer and are oppressed. It seems as if there is no judge in heaven and no knowledge in the Most High. But God remembers. He writes all these things in his book. Although for the present he permits injustice to prevail and to triumph, he has appointed Christ to judge the world (Acts 17:31). In his day God will open the books and execute a righteous judgment. Although in this world iniquity is often victorious, and the wicked are in power, in the day of Christ the righteous will be justified, and the wicked will be condemned forever.

It seems to be the idea of many that this last judgment is the only and final act of God whereby he will rectify and set straight whatever was unjust in the present government of the world. In fact, because of some such conception of God as the judge in respect to the affairs of the present time, many find room for the notion that the prosperity of the wicked must be considered a token of God's gracious disposition and attitude toward them. The wicked hate God and blaspheme his name. They commit iniquity and oppress the righteous. Yet God blesses them by bestowing upon them all the bounties of this present life. He sends rain upon the evil and upon the good and causes his sun to shine upon the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). It is true that in the end God will execute a righteous judgment upon them, and that they shall be damned forever in the pool that burns with fire and sulphur. But for the present he is gracious to the unrighteous as well as to the righteous. Thus the present is separated from the future, the temporal from the eternal, and the final judgment of God is an isolated act by which the Most High will really change his attitude toward the righteous and the wicked.

This view of the last judgment in relation to the present government of God must be rejected. It implies an erroneous conception of God as the judge of heaven and earth. God always judges, and he always executes a righteous judgment. He is righteous and just, and he is the unchangeable one. Moreover, always he is governor of the whole universe. It is not so that during the present history of the world he permits the affairs of men to run their own course, carefully noting them in his book, in order at the end of the world to ascend the throne of judgment. Nor does he simply remember their acts, in order to express his verdict and execute his judgment in the end of time. On the contrary, all the works of God are perfect, and all his judgments are just. Always he sits on the throne. From moment to moment he rules. Never do the reins of government slip from his hands. Constantly he judges, and all his moral creatures stand before him in judgment. Although the final and everlasting reward of the righteous in glory and the retribution of the wicked in hell cannot be realized in this present time, God deals with both according to strictest justice.

# **God's Judgment in History**

We cannot always discern this righteous judgment of God in detail. To us God's dealings with the righteous and the wicked often appear to be contrary to justice. It is often the complaint of the people of God that he seems to favor the wicked and to turn his face against the righteous. Thus Asaph speaks in Psalm 73. He saw the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Their eyes stood out with fatness, while his own punishment awaited him every morning. It seemed to be vain that he washed his hands in innocency (vv. 1–14). The same is true of the book of Job, which deals with the same problem. Job's three friends insisted that man's temporal suffering was indicative of some special sin. However, their philosophy did not fit the case of Job, and their speech was painful to him. The fact

that things in this world often appear to be unjust is due to our limited understanding and to our frequent failure to discern the meaning of the present for man's eternal state. God's ways we cannot comprehend. They are deep and mysterious. We consider only that which we see at the moment; the relation between all things we cannot discern.

If, however, it were possible for us to comprehend the work of God, to understand his government of his moral creatures in detail, we would no doubt also clearly discern that God always judges righteously and that he executes a righteous judgment upon men. Never would we complain any more that he favors the wicked and that his face is against the righteous. Always God rewards the good with good; never does the sinner advance one step on the way of iniquity that God does not visit with evil on the spot.

This is certainly the teaching of Holy Writ. It is the righteous judgment of God that the prosperity of the wicked is to them a slippery path down which they hasten to destruction. Thus Asaph saw God's dealings with the workers of iniquity after he entered into the sanctuary of God and took cognizance of the end of the ungodly (Ps. 73:16–20). Thus we are taught in Psalm 92, where the inspired author extols the marvelous works and the deep thoughts of God, which are revealed in the fact that the wicked prosper in order to be destroyed forever (v. 7). Thus it is plainly taught in that dreadful first chapter of the epistle to the Romans: the wrath of God is revealed from heaven over all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. They know God, and they are aware that he is to be thanked and glorified; but they refuse to acknowledge him. God executes a righteous judgment upon them. He makes them foolish. He causes them to grope in the darkness of idolatry so that they foolishly bow before four-footed beasts and creeping things. He punishes sin with sin. He casts them into the mire of sin so that they become more corrupt all the time and thus hasten to their own destruction (vv. 18–32). Surely, also in this world the judge of heaven and earth executes a righteous judgment.

# God's Judgment in the Conscience and after Death

Not only does God deal righteously with his moral creatures in this world, and not only does he constantly execute judgment upon both the righteous and the wicked, but he also inscribes his righteous judgment in the conscience of every man. *Man's conscience is his awareness of God's judgment of his every act*. Because of this judging act of God, men have the work of the law inscribed in their hearts, and their consciences witness with the testimony of God's law, so they accuse or excuse themselves and one another. This is the plain teaching of Romans 2:14–15:

In this sense man's conscience is indeed a book, filled with the handwriting of God and expressing God's just judgment of every act that man ever accomplished and of every thought and desire that ever arose in his heart.

It is also plain from scripture that there is an individual, preliminary judgment immediately after death, which will be executed in the damnation of the wicked and in the intermediate glory of the saints with Christ.

### The Last Judgment

The church of all ages also confesses, on the basis of scripture, that there will be a final judgment of all men and angels at the end of time. The main idea of this final judgment is that of the theodicy, the justification of God in the consciousness of all his moral creatures. It will be the "revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (vv. 5, 16). Although also in this present world God's government is characterized by strictest justice, the justice of God's judgments is not clearly revealed, for many things are hid. We judge according to that which is apparent. The hidden things of the heart, the reasons and motives that lie behind the outward deed, we cannot judge. Moreover, there are many things done in secret, words spoken in secret, secret counsels never revealed, and secret abominations committed in darkness. Besides, we do not clearly discern the dealings of God with men in relation to their moral deeds.

But in the day of judgment, the final day at the end of this age, all will be revealed. Then it will become manifest not only that God will finally reward every man according to his own deeds, but also that he always did execute a righteous judgment in his government of the world. It will be the revelation of the righteous judgment of God also in this respect: he will clearly be revealed as the judge so that the moral creature can no longer deny him. Now the fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1; Ps. 53:1). The ungodly ascribe the righteous judgments of God, especially when they become manifest in great upheavals and special calamities, to the inevitable laws of nature, to fate, or to man's own folly and weakness. Man sets himself against God and vows that he will overcome him in judgment. He will still make a good world out of it all and establish peace and prosperity without God and without his Christ. However, in the judgment day God will so reveal himself that all must acknowledge that he is the Lord of the universe and that he is the righteous judge of heaven and earth. The final judgment will be the revelation of God as the righteous judge. It is the final and complete theodicy.

## A Public Judgment

The theodicy implies that the final judgment will be public in the sense that the righteousness of God's judgment will be clearly revealed to all the moral creatures. It will not be individualistic in the sense that each one will be convinced of the justice of his own sentence, but everyone will be able to behold the whole of the works of God, his righteous government and his just judgment with regard to all his moral creatures. Christ and his cause will be publicly justified, and his saints will share in this public justification. Even the wicked who condemned and persecuted the saints will have to acknowledge that the saints are the rightful heirs of all things. The righteous will behold the retribution of the wicked and acknowledge that the Lord of all is just in consigning them to eternal desolation.

This is plainly and beautifully expressed in the Belgic Confession:

Then the books (that is to say, the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest; and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all.

And, therefore, the consideration of this judgment is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect; because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and

tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and, being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.

But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God will confess their names before God his Father, and his elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause, which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God.[4]

This judgment is final. The history of this world will be terminated by it. The ethical fruit of the moral creature will be ripe. This final judgment will be the everlasting separation of the chaff from the wheat, of the wicked from the righteous, of the reprobate from the elect. All will receive their final, everlasting reward.

#### Christ the Judge

In this final judgment Christ will appear as judge:

For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man (John 5:21–23, 26–27).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

That Christ will appear as judge means that the Son of God will appear in his glorified human nature as the visible representative of the invisible God. He will appear in such a way that all the moral world will recognize him as the revelation of the Lord of all and will receive his judgment as the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Exactly because this final judgment must be the *revelation* of the righteous judgment of God, because God himself is the invisible one, and because Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), his highest revelation, Christ will appear as the representative of God as judge in the visible world. Every knee shall bow before him, and every tongue shall confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10–11). All things will be naked and open before him, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, whose feet are like burnished brass, and out of whose mouth proceeds a sharp two-edged sword (Heb. 4:13; Rev. 1:14–16).

It is quite proper that the judgment of the whole world will be delivered to Christ. It is proper because he has been appointed the high priest and head over the whole house of God. Of that house he is the builder. That house was manifested in its mixed and imperfect state in this world. From that house judgment must begin (1 Pet. 4:17). The head and builder of that house of God's everlasting covenant is also its proper judge. He will cast out from it all who do and love iniquity and all the ungodly and hypocrites, and will gather his own into the everlasting tabernacle of God with men. Not only this, but he also accomplished the judgment of the world when he sojourned among us in the likeness of sinful flesh. He was the perfect servant of the Lord, whose meat it was to do the will of the Father. The world judged him, rejected him, and killed him; but he committed his cause to God, even to the end, and announced to the entire world that their judgment of him was the condemnation of the powers of darkness. How proper, then, that in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, this servant of Jehovah will appear as the judge of all, representing the Father in glory, even as he was the faithful witness in the day of his deep humiliation.

### Final Judgment through the Spirit

Moreover, the final judgment will take place through the Spirit of Christ. This follows from the fact that all the works of God are of the Father, through the Son, and in or by the Spirit. If Christ is to accomplish the judgment as the visible representative of the invisible God, the Spirit of Christ must bind the verdict undeniably upon the consciences of men. This the scriptures teach plainly. Even now the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, has come, whom Christ promised to send after his departure:

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged' (John 16:8–11).

By the word and in the Spirit of Christ, the world is even now judged, either unto life or unto death, unto salvation or damnation. So it will be also in the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgment, which will bring the history of this present world to a close.

#### **Universal Judgment**

Those who will appear before this judge in the final revelation of the righteous judgment of God will be all moral creatures—angels and men, righteous and wicked, small and great. This universal judgment is often denied. Under Pelagian influence, which is always individualistic, it is claimed that only those can be brought into judgment who have been in contact with the gospel and who have had the opportunity to accept or reject Christ. All the others, heathen and small children, must be excluded.

This view is individualistic. Scripture always proceeds from the organic idea. The world is to be judged. The sin of the world, not of a few individuals, has been revealed through the crucifixion of the Son of God. Besides, this view is based on the erroneous supposition that one can be brought into judgment and condemned only because of his rejection of the Christ. Rather, Christ teaches, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Therefore, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (v. 18). This can only mean that through the coming of the Son of God into the world and his rejection by men, the sin of the world is clearly manifested as sin, although even apart from the coming of Christ, the whole world lies in sin and under condemnation in the first Adam.

In the light of Holy Writ, it also cannot be maintained that only the ungodly will be brought into judgment, as is the contention of others. This would be correct if the purpose of the final judgment were only the condemnation of the wicked. But this is not the case. The chief purpose of this closing judgment will be the theodicy, the justification of God as the righteous judge of heaven and earth. This will be revealed not only in the condemnation of the ungodly, but also in the public justification of the righteous in Christ.

It is the plain teaching of the word of God that all moral creatures—men and angels, righteous and wicked—shall be brought into judgment. It concerns angels, both good and bad; for also the good angels must be publicly justified, and the fallen angels still await their final judgment and punishment. The apostle writes to the church of Corinth, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Cor. 6:3). The angels who sinned were "delivered . . . into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). "And the angels which kept not their first

estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude, v. 6).

The final judgment will also summon all nations before the judgment seat of Christ, and there they will at once be separated into the righteous and the wicked, according to the plain teaching of Matthew 25:31–46. That the people of God are not excluded from this last judgment is definitely taught in the following passages:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10).

#### The Judgment of Satan and Antichrist

In connection with the final, universal judgment, the question is worthy of consideration whether the person of Satan and the persons of antichrist and of the false prophet are to be excluded from this general appearance before the tribunal of Christ, that is, whether their iniquity will not be so great and their worthiness of damnation so evident that they will be cast into hell without any formal process of judgment. It is striking that we read in Revelation 19:20:

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

Also in Revelation 20:10, before the vision of the final judgment, we read: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

#### Judgment according to Works

As to the judgment itself, scripture teaches that it shall be according to the works of those who are judged. The Lord comes quickly, and his reward will be with him, "to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). When we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, it will be in order "that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10).

For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified (Rom. 2:11–13).

These works according to which every man shall be judged include not only the outward deeds, but also the inner thoughts, desires, purposes, and motives. We will be made manifest, that is, we will be turned inside out, and our works will be evaluated in the light of God's perfect law. The secrets of men will be exposed in their true value. Nothing will be hid. Our personal works, in connection with our talents and powers, with our position in the world, with the age in which we lived, and with our circumstances and means, and with our relation to the light of revelation we possessed, will then be manifest in their proper meaning and ethical worth. It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida in that day (Matt. 11:20–24). There is nothing hid that will

not be made public in the day of the Lord (Matt. 10:26; Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; Luke 12:2).

This universal and complete exposure or manifestation of all men's works does not exclude the sins of the people of God. Scripture is far too explicit on this point to leave any room for doubt. It is exactly concerning believers that the apostle writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that they must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. In fact, we may well accept that in that day the people of God will see their sins as they never saw them before. But it must never be forgotten that in the day of judgment, Christ and our belonging to him will be our only and perfect comfort. [5]

The Heidelberg Catechism declares that the believer looks for that day "with uplifted head," because he looks "for the self-same One who has before offered himself" for his sake and has removed from him all curse to come as judge from heaven.[6] "Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen."[7]

Indeed, the sins of the people of God will be exposed, but only in the light of the everlasting love of God wherewith he loved them in Christ. They will see their sins, will see them as never before, but only to adore more fully the perfect righteousness of God in Christ whereby they are justified forever. They will see their sins, but only as blotted out in the blood of the Lamb. Because of Christ and their living part with him, they will have no fear in the day of judgment. Even with respect to their own sins, they will be of God's party in that day and will take his side in the condemnation of all iniquity, even of their own, and cling only to Christ in the perfect consciousness of faith and adore forever the wondrous grace whereby they have been redeemed from so great a darkness of death and have become worthy of eternal life and glory.

The end of it all will be the perfect theodicy, the justification of God in all his work. All will acknowledge that God is good. The damned in hell will forever have to confess that their damnation is just. But the saved in glory will everlastingly behold themselves in Christ and boast in God's wondrous grace alone.

### **Chapter 48**

# The Future Age

# The Cosmic Nature of the Future Age

From scripture it is abundantly evident that the whole cosmos will partake of the glorious liberty of the children of God, in the restitution of all things (ἀποκατάστασις παντῶν), in the final regeneration in eternal glory.

This is clearly taught in Romans 8:19–22:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

The "creature" that with uplifted head expects the revelation of the glorious liberty of the children of God and looks for redemption from the bondage of corruption certainly refers to the brute creation. That believers, the children of God, cannot be meant in this passage is evident from its contrast with verse 23, which speaks of God's people: "Not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." The "creature" also cannot refer to the *rational* creature that is evil, whether that be the devil and his host or wicked men, for they do not hope for the final deliverance. Nor can the "creature" refer to the good angels, because they are not subject to the bondage of corruption. Rather, this passage certainly speaks of the entire creation, apart from the rational, moral creatures, men and angels. This whole creation will partake of the glorious liberty of the children of God.

This truth is also evident from Ephesians 1:10:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.

"All things" in this text is further interpreted by "which are in heaven, and which are on earth," that is, the whole creation, not only the rational creature. This is further evident from Revelation 21:5: "Behold, I make all things new."

The same impression we receive from passages out of the Old Testament:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:6–9).

There is symbolic language in this passage, but without any doubt the meaning is that the brute creation will partake of the glory of the eternal kingdom.

The idea of a new creation is expressed literally in the following passages from the prophet Isaiah:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isa.

65:17).

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain (Isa. 66:22).

In the New Testament the same cosmic idea is also expressed.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13).

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:1–2).

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the scriptures reveal very clearly that not only the church, but also the whole cosmos will enter into the glory of the eternal inheritance.

#### The End of the Present Cosmos

The question may be asked, What will be the end of the present cosmos? The answer of scripture is that it will not be annihilated, but that its form will pass away. From Revelation 6:14 we receive the impression that the very firmament in which the heavenly bodies pursue their course will be taken away, for "the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together." That which separates the heavenly bodies from one another will be removed. The result will be the origination of a world fire in which the very elements will melt (2 Pet. 3:12). From that burning and melting mass, in which the form of the present world will pass away, the Lord will cause a new cosmos—the new heavens and the new earth—to appear.

The old body of the physical, present world will perish, just as the old body of believers will perish in the earth; but out of that old body, the Lord will create new heavens and a new earth in heavenly glory. We must beware that we do not form an earthly conception of this new and heavenly kingdom. The new heavens and the new earth will not be like unto the original creation and the earthly paradise, which was only an image of the things to come. The heavenly Jerusalem will indeed be on the new earth, and that new earth the righteous will inherit: "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9): "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). However, the relation between the heaven and the earth will be such that in the most literal sense, heavenly conditions and heavenly relationships will exist on the new earth, and there will be an immediate relation between the new earth and the new heaven above. In other words, the new creation will not be earthly but heavenly, in which all things will be adapted to the glorious body of the resurrection.

#### The Final State of the Wicked: Eternal Punishment in Hell

Finally, a word must be said about the eternal state of the rational, moral creatures, both of the wicked and of the righteous. As to the wicked, scripture teaches very plainly that their end will be everlasting desolation in hell. Hell is the place of eternal punishment, where everlasting suffering will be experienced according to body and soul as the just vengeance upon sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God.

Many oppose the truth of eternal punishment. Some simply maintain that the punishment of sin in time is sufficient: hell is in the present world, and the grave is the end of the wicked. Others claim that somehow in the end all men will be saved; there will be punishment after death, but this will

come to an end. Ultimately, God will deliver all. Many teach that there will be a second probation after death, another chance, which will result either in the salvation of all men or in the salvation of most of them, while after this second probation, the stubbornly wicked will be annihilated.

All of these objections have in common a denial of the truth of unending punishment in hell. The objectors argue that sin is both temporal and finite, and that it would be gross injustice to inflict eternal punishment upon sin committed by the finite creature in time. They also deny that scripture teaches an eternal suffering in hell as punishment for sin. Agents of the Seventh Day Adventists and of the Jehovah's Witnesses, followers of Russell and Rutherford, go about teaching and preaching that there is no hell, that *hell* in scripture means the grave—Sheol or Hades—and that when the Bible speaks of eternal punishment, the word *eternal* signifies an age, a long period.

Against these arguments we remark that sin and guilt cannot be measured by the standard of the creature, but sin must be evaluated in the light of the infinite majesty of God, against whom the sin is committed. Utterly false is the argument that sin is committed by a finite creature in time and that, therefore, justice cannot inflict eternal punishment upon a sinner. The guilt of sin is measured by the infinite majesty of God against whom the sin is committed.

With respect to the argument that the words often translated "hell" in the King James Version do not mean the place of eternal torture, we begin by admitting that there is an element of truth in this argument. The words [Yakiy] (Sheol) and "Aιδης (Hades) often can be better translated by grave or by the state of the dead, rather than by hell. But this does not give one the right to assert that the Bible does not speak of hell as the place of punishment.

Let it be noted that there is also the word γέεννα (*Gehenna*), which always denotes the place of eternal desolation, and which surely must be translated by *hell*. γέεννα (*Gehenna*) is derived from the Hebrew (*the valley of Hinnom*), which in the old dispensation was situated to the southwest of Jerusalem. In this valley the children of Israel committed the sin of sacrificing to Molech, which idolatry was characterized by the crime of human sacrifice. Later we read that the pious King Josiah, who was instrumental in leading the people back to the God of the covenant, caused everything in this valley to be burned (2 Kings 23:10).

According to the prophecy of the old dispensation, the valley of Hinnom became the place of punishment, the place where Jehovah poured out the vials of his wrath over the ungodly (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 2 Chron. 33:6; Jer. 7:31–33). Thus this valley of fire became an image of the eternal place of desolation. Hence the Greek γέεννα (*Gehenna*) is derived from the Hebrew ½ (*the valley of Hinnom*).

Of Gehenna the New Testament speaks more than once:

I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that they whole body should be cast into hell (Matt. 5:22, 29–30).

In these three verses, not the word *Hades*, but the word *Gehenna* is used.

The word Gehenna occurs again in Matthew:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28).

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire (Matt. 18:9).

The Lord accuses the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees of making their proselytes twofold more the children of hell (*Gehenna*) than themselves (Matt. 23:15); and Jesus threatens them, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell [*Gehenna*]?" (v. 33).

Especially decisive against the denial of the truth of an eternal hell is Mark 9:43–48:

And if thy hand offend thee, cut if off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell [Gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell [Gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Moreover, even though the words *Sheol* and *Hades* often refer to the state of the dead, this is not always the case. Of the rich man we read:

And in hell [Hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame (Luke 16:23–24).

That this statement occurs in a parable does not make the slightest difference, for it is exactly the purpose of the parable to teach that while the righteous are blessed, the wicked are tormented after this life.

We note also Revelation 14:9–11:

If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Against the statement that whenever scripture speaks of everlasting punishment it means a long period of time can be quoted as quite sufficient what the Lord states in Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." The point here is that in the original the same word (αἰώνιον) is used for "everlasting" and "eternal." If in the first instance "everlasting punishment" signifies a long period, "eternal life" in the second instance cannot signify anything other than a long period. We know that eternal life in scripture means life everlasting. It follows, then, that "everlasting punishment" in Matthew 25:46 signifies punishment without end.

The question where this place of punishment may be cannot be answered. Scripture gives no definite indication, although it certainly suggests that the place of hell is far removed from the fellowship of the new creation. The place of hell is "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12); it is in "the deep" (Luke 8:31); it is "without," in distinction from within (Rev. 22:15). No more than we may interpret in the earthly sense the terms *the golden streets* and *the pearly gates* that scripture uses to speak of the new Jerusalem, may we understand the terms *fire, sulphur, worm*, and *smoke* in the literal and earthly sense. To be sure, however, these terms indicate an existence in unspeakable suffering of both body and soul.

# The Final State of the Righteous: Eternal Life in Heaven

In contrast to the state of eternal desolation, the Bible pictures the state of the righteous as one of

everlasting life and glory, which is the very opposite of eternal punishment. In the context of his teaching regarding the sheep and the goats, of the wicked Jesus says, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46). The eternal reward is for those who have forsaken all for Christ's sake, for they shall "receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:30).

The state of life everlasting is attained through the death of the Son of God, for "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14–15). In bestowing this gift of eternal life upon his people through the death of his Son, God reveals his love to the world: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (v. 16). This eternal life is a present reality as well as a future state: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (v. 36). Eternal life is the blessing the good Shepherd bestows upon the sheep that the Father gave him: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27–28).

The essential and intrinsic nature of eternal life is the true knowledge of God in Christ: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Eternal life is the fruit of grace, for "as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21).

The apostles were direct witnesses of this life, as John testifies:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us) (1 John 1:1–2).

This eternal life is in Christ. In fact, Christ is the life: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The apostle John writes:

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:20).

What is eternal life? Life itself is a profound mystery, and we will not attempt to give an adequate definition of it. Worldly philosophy has defined it as "the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations."[1] But on the very face of it, this is certainly not an adequate definition. It does not touch upon the real nature of life, but merely describes it from the viewpoint of its manifestation and activity. It does not even mention God, the fountain and author of life. God is the unknowable for the agnostic philosopher. His knowledge therefore is confined to this world, to the things that are seen and handled. So he defines life neither as a relation of the creature to God, nor from the viewpoint of that relation, but merely as a correspondence between the creature and his environment, between man and the world of his experience.

## The Scriptural Idea of Life

The word of God does not offer a definition of life. The nearest approach to such a definition, particularly of life in its highest form, is John 17:3: Eternal life is to know God in Christ. But we can

say something about life without attempting a definition. Life is a principle of free energy, of active force, living in action. To live is to act. Activity is the expression of life. This is true in the deepest sense of God. God, according to scripture, is the living God. Wherever in the Bible God is thus presented, on the foreground appears the idea that he is in himself an active God who reveals himself as such. He is the living God in distinction from idols.

Idols are the work of men; they are altogether vanity. They can neither see, nor hear, nor speak. "But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation" (Jer. 10:3–10). At Mount Sinai Israel recognized him as the living God, for they heard his voice and saw that God talked with man (Deut. 5:24). They witnessed how he divided the waters of Jordan before their feet and drove out for them the nations from the land he had promised them. In all this they knew him as the living God (Josh. 3:10). God has life in himself, which surely means that he is infinite energy, pure activity. He never slumbers or sleeps (Ps. 121:4). He is eternally active with his whole being; he hears and sees, wills and knows, and loves and hates. His holiness is not a cold virtue; it is a living flame, a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). His righteousness is not an attribute that occasionally reveals itself in action; it is an energetic and active power. His mercy is ever fervent. His lovingkindness is forever ardent. All that is in God is eternally and infinitely active.

On the basis of scripture we can say still more about life. Life presupposes relationship, harmonious relationship; to live is to act properly and normally in that relationship. Life cannot exist in solitude; always it is some kind of fellowship. This fellowship may be the reaction of any living creature in relation to the world about it; it may be the reciprocal reaction of two living beings upon each other; it may be the living communion between two personal, rational and moral beings; or it may be the harmonious relation, action and reaction, between the living God and the rational creature. Always life is a principle according to which a being or a person reacts and responds harmoniously upon and to another being or person.

This is relatively true of the lower creation. Thus we speak of the living plant, because by virtue of an inner energy it constantly adapts itself to and reacts with the soil in which it is rooted, the air it breathes, and the rain and sunshine it absorbs and assimilates. Man's body reacts upon the world about him. To it he is adapted; with his physical existence he stands in harmonious relationship to the physical world about him. In that relationship he moves and acts. He inhales the air as the breath of his life, assimilates food for his nourishment, and reacts upon the world of his experience through his senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. We speak also of man's intellectual and volitional life; or his social life, his reaction upon his fellow men in various relationships of life; and of his spiritual life, the reaction of his heart, mind, soul, and all his strength in relation to God.

Always life presupposes certain relationships and reveals itself in the normal actions and reactions of the living beings in those relations. In the highest sense this life is in God. God is not alone, nor is he a mere power; rather, he is the personal, triune God. He is one in being and nature, in mind and will, in holiness and righteousness, in knowledge and wisdom, and in all his infinite perfections. All scripture reveals him as three in persons—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. These divine persons subsist in the one divine being, and they stand in a relation of perfect harmony to one another. The Father generates the Son; the Son is generated by the Father; the Spirit is breathed forth and proceeds from the Father and from the Son. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in being and nature, yet personally they are distinct. The Father knows and loves the Son in infinite perfection in the Spirit. The Son knows and loves the Father in the Spirit. The Spirit knows and loves the Father through the Son in himself, and he searches the deep things of God. Thus the three persons of the holy Trinity live in

eternal harmony and perfect fellowship with one another. There is no separation, no disharmony, no conflict in God. He is a covenant God who lives the life of perfect friendship.

Life in the creature and in man is but a reflection of this perfect and infinite life in the triune God. Life is not the same in man as it is in the lower creature, in plant and animal. To be sure, as a living soul man also lives a physical and psychical life. He reacts upon the world around him. He sees and hears, he tastes, touches and smells. He perceives and interprets the world in which he lives. Constantly, he adjusts himself to his environment, and he lives in relation to his fellow men.

Yet this is not all. He also lives in a conscious relationship to God, as he was originally created. God formed him out of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and made him an intellectual and volitional creature, a being that was adapted to bear and to reflect the very image of God. With this image of God he was endowed. He was created with perfect knowledge, in order that his mind might react in love upon the revelation of the mind of God; with uprightness of will, in order that in all his volitional life he might be in harmony with the will of God and have his delight in keeping God's commandment; and with spotless holiness so that all his desires and inclinations were consecrated to the living God. He acted and lived in the midst of the earthly creation in harmony with the triune God. He was made a covenant creature, and he lived a covenant life. To know and love his God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, to serve him as his friend, and thus to taste that the Lord is good—that was the life of man in his original state of rectitude.

## The Nature of Eternal Life

It is evident from all of this that if life for man, who was created after the image of God, is the fellowship of friendship with the Most High, then eternal life cannot be conceived as an endless extension of our present existence. For our present life is not life, but death. By nature we are alienated from the living God, objects of his wrath and condemnation, enemies of the ever-blessed one. Our mind is darkened so that we are devoid of the true knowledge of God, and we love the lie. Our will is perverse. Our heart is corrupt. Our whole nature is polluted. To speak in terms of the philosopher Spencer, if life is the constant adaptation of man's inner nature to him who is the only good and the overflowing fountain of all good, then the sinner who stands in opposition and rebellion against God certainly lies in the midst of death. Our present existence is not eternal life, but perpetual death.

Eternal life in the scriptural sense also may not be presented as a perpetuation of Adam's life in the state of righteousness. Adam did indeed have the true life. If he had not sinned, he would have continued in the state of life he enjoyed in paradise. But his life would not have been the same as the higher state of bliss that the Bible calls eternal life, nor would it have been possible for him to attain this most glorious state even though he had never sinned.

Eternal life is *qualitatively* different from all other life, also from the life of Adam in the state of righteousness. Eternal life is life that has its source in and that reaches us from the incarnated Son of God. That incarnation is the central realization of the heavenly tabernacle of God's eternal covenant because it is the most intimate union between God and man. The Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity, the express image of God's substance, is revealed in Christ in human nature and lives with us and in us. This is a profound mystery. But this much is clear from scripture: eternal life is conditioned by and has its source in Christ, the Son of God in human nature. He is the life and the resurrection (John 11:25). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). In him the life was

manifested, and he is the revelation of that eternal life which was with the Father (1 John 1:2). He is the true God and life eternal (1 John 5:20).

Eternal life, therefore, is the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom God has sent, that is, it is the knowledge of God that we have in and through Jesus Christ (John 17:3). When the Word was made flesh, the first witnesses beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). As the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he declared the invisible God whom no one has seen at any time (v. 18). This higher knowledge, this greatest revelation of the living God, the first man Adam did not have, and he could never have attained to it.

Eternal life is the knowledge of and fellowship with God that is rooted in the incarnation and is bestowed upon us through the Spirit of the Son of God. It is the real and most intimate fellowship of which the Lord speaks in his sacerdotal prayer:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:21–23).

Moreover, eternal life is resurrection life. It is immortality in the true, scriptural sense. It lies on the other side of death. It is victory over death. It may safely be said that except through the deep and dark way of sin and death, this higher goal of bliss that is called eternal life can never be attained. For this very reason, eternal life can only be attained through the death and resurrection of the Son of God. He walked the way of death and through death into the resurrection; he became the revelation of the God of our salvation in all the abundance of his power and might, of his wisdom and knowledge, of his righteousness and holiness, of the riches of his grace and mercy and everlasting, unchangeable love. Eternal life is the resurrection life that is wrought in our hearts by the indwelling Spirit of Christ and that consists in the knowledge and fellowship of God as he is revealed in all the glory of his blessed virtues in the face of Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is everlasting. It can never be lost, exactly because it has its root in the incarnation of the Son of God. Now we have a beginning of this eternal life in our hearts; it is only a principle. That beginning of eternal life will be translated into the fullness of joy at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Then it will advance into the state of spiritual perfection, as well as to the perfection of the resurrection of the body. It will reach its final perfection of glory when all the saints in Christ, all the elect of God, shall have been gathered; our bodies shall have put on incorruption and immortality (1 Cor. 15:53); the new heavens and the new earth shall have been created (2 Pet. 3:13); and the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever (Rev. 21:3). To be sure, that new creation itself will be beautiful and glorious, for all things will be united in Christ their head. Nevertheless, the essence of all the blessedness and glory of that new world will be the perfected fellowship of friendship with the living God in Christ. Everywhere in that new world we shall see Christ, and in him we shall see the Father (John 14:9). We shall see him face to face (1 Cor. 13:12). All our knowledge will then be theology in the highest sense: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). That will be glory indeed!

## **Index of Subjects**

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