



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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REFORMED  
— PAVILION —

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## MEDITATION

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: but every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten: thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they. And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.

—Exodus 12:43–51

The Holy Spirit pauses in his narration of Israel's departure from the land of Egypt. Israel is at Succoth, having traveled through the night after the passover feast and after the Lord killed the firstborn of Egypt (Ex. 12:37). In Exodus 13:20 the Spirit will return to Succoth to resume the history of Israel's deliverance from the house of bondage. But now the Spirit pauses to reveal significant truths about the Lord's dealings with his people.

The first truth that the Spirit reveals is the ordinance of the passover. "And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover." When he speaks of the *ordinance* of the passover, the Spirit is not merely repeating what he had revealed before about keeping the passover feast. Rather, the Spirit is revealing one very specific aspect of the passover feast. By the word *ordinance* the Spirit refers to an eternal truth of the passover. The ordinance—the eternal truth—of the passover is this: there shall no stranger eat thereof.

The Lord emphasized this ordinance of the passover to Moses and Aaron. No stranger may eat of the passover! If an Israelite man had a servant from another nation living in his home, that servant might not eat of the passover. If a foreigner from another country were sojourning

among the Israelites, the sojourner might not eat of the passover. The sojourner could certainly sojourn among the Israelites. The sojourner could even have a home among the Israelites for a long time. But the Israelites were not permitted to break off a piece of their passover lamb for the sojourner: "neither shall ye break a bone thereof." The Israelites were not permitted to carry a slice of lamb into the foreigner's home: "thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house." For there shall no stranger eat thereof!

There was a way for the stranger to eat of the passover. The stranger must cease being a stranger and must become an Israelite. "When thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof." "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it." "For no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you."

What does this ordinance of the passover mean? First, it is the great gospel doctrine of limited atonement. The passover was atonement. God's firstborn Son took the place of Israel's firstborn sons. The blood of God's firstborn was

shed in place of the blood of Israel's firstborn. But the atonement of the passover was not for all men. There shall no stranger eat thereof! The bloodshed was only for the elect people of God, typified in those days of shadow by the passover's being only for Israel. The good shepherd gave his life only for the sheep (see John 10:11).

Second, the ordinance of the passover pointed to the necessity of church membership in the true church of Jesus Christ in order to partake of the sacraments. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted? Not for all men but for sinning believers, whose salvation is not of themselves but only of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 81). Those who declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly by their confession and life have no place at the Lord's table. And access to the table is by faith alone in Christ alone.

Third, the ordinance of the passover was a prophecy of God's salvation of the Gentiles. By nature the Gentiles are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise. But in Christ the Gentiles are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). And the Gentiles' inclusion in the covenant is not by circumcision in the flesh made with hands, which was merely the Old Testament sign, but by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. For Jesus has come "and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (vv. 17-18).

It is the ordinance of the passover. It is the gospel of our salvation.

—AL

## CONTRIBUTION

### False Doctrine and Abuse, Freedom and Truth

**A**buse is a unique kind of sin. It is a form of murder, but it is no simple homicide committed on the street. In fact, bodily harm may never occur, even though the crime is fully completed. Abuse is murder from the inside out. It attacks the whole person, mind and soul, time after excruciating time, with any number of forms of hatred, shame, or reproach. The destruction happens by lording over; by unlawful domineering; by using any number of methods of manipulation and control, physical or psychological, so that another's loss of agency and freedom is the result, a loss which, in the end, amounts to a destruction of that person's sense of personhood. The spirit is shriveled, and all that is left is an empty shell, even if fleshly veins are still pulsing. A cage made of invisible fences can rival the effectiveness of iron bars, if not surpass it.

The question is, why would such an evil be perpetrated? Why would anyone desire this kind of injury to be inflicted on another human being, especially as this evil very often involves abusers who are close to their victims, victims who ought rather to be protected by them and considered their loved ones? What would be the benefit? The sad fact is that those who are closest to us are exactly the ones who are most capable of inflicting such injury, partly because they are, indeed, close to us. Shame inflicted by a stranger is bad enough, but derision inflicted from someone we look up to in love is worse. Remarks from an unknown source might be (or might not be) brushed off, but belittling comments from someone we know and respect—that hurts. Let that reality sink in. Those who look up to us and love us the most are those whom we can hurt the most...if we would want

to. Let us not want to. Abuse lurks in the heart of every depraved person on the face of the earth. That includes all of us. Let that reality sink in too.

But that still does not answer the question, why? Why would anyone want to abuse another person, another person who most often is weaker or more vulnerable in some way than the one inflicting the abuse? Few people are going to attempt to lord it over someone who has a bigger stick than they do. So why lord it over someone who is more vulnerable, someone who is in need of and expectant of another's help and defense?

There are many reasons for abuse, and all of them are sinful. They boil down to pride and selfishness, which invariably result in hatred of the neighbor. "I am better than you are. I am more worthy than you are. I am entitled to have everything go my way at your expense." It is a blind idolatry of self. May God deliver us from such selves! This type of idolatry takes hold of the abuser, so that the abuser is god over all others in the abuser's own world and eyes, especially over those who can to some extent, or to all extent, be controlled and manipulated. To seek domination over others is a basic, human, sinful desire; and domination is capable of feeding one's pride like no other victual. The combination is not good.

Why is there such a thing as abuse? Why do some people attempt to use other people for their own lust or gain or ego? The reason is not hard to imagine. Satan knew the formula long ago and used it to flatter Eve. "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). Satan was projecting onto the human race his own jealous desire to displace God and exercise dominion over all. Fallen mankind readily adopted that same evil aspiration. That is abuse.

When the strong persecute the weak for their own selfish ends, the evil perpetrated is particularly heinous and destructive in nature. Scripture has much to say about that particular sin and uses the word *oppression* to describe it. Oppression is abuse, and an oppressor is an abuser. Scripture has much to say about abuse,

therefore. The psalms are full of lament because of the proud who persecute the poor and afflicted. "I mourn in my complaint...because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked" (Ps. 55:2-3). Bible history is also full of examples of domineering oppressors. Cain's murder of Abel was sheer persecution, and that was abuse. Uncle Laban's ill use of Jacob for his own selfish gain in the land of Haran finally forced Jacob to flee with his household back to Canaan—where Jacob's twin brother Esau had gathered four hundred armed men together in preparation for Jacob to enter the home territory. No friendly meeting was planned. But for God's intervention, there was no escaping for Jacob anywhere. His descendants fared no better. The Hebrews were hated as they grew in numbers in Egypt and became brutally oppressed as captive slaves under Pharaoh's cruel tyranny. Abuse came into its most brutal and blatant illustration at that time.

Perhaps, though, the prize for being one of the most classic abusers in all of biblical times goes to King Saul, who oppressed his son-in-law David with such jealous pride and unrelenting fury that he repeatedly attempted to kill David at every possible opportunity. Saul had no reason whatsoever to hate David. David had only done him good. Saul even played the victim (which is also what abusers typically do) in front of his men in order to try to manipulate them and gain their pity for his cause. "There is none of you that is sorry for me?" (I Sam. 22:8). In all of that murderous and misdirected oppression, God was giving to David an abundance of material to write about in the psalms. David, as a type of Christ, endured but a picture of the awful reality of the oppression that Jesus would endure to an infinite degree his whole life long and especially on the cross. Many more examples can be found throughout scripture. Abuse is everywhere.

The subject is distasteful in the extreme to consider, but it is also extremely necessary to ponder. Only in being aware of the vise of its grip can there be any understanding about how to

withstand its hold, whether we see in ourselves the harm inflicted from having been sinfully oppressed and persecuted by others or whether we have committed the oppression ourselves. Abuse can be evidenced at every level, from lawless, overbearing governments, either civil or ecclesiastical, to unhealthy family and marital relationships, to bullying among classmates, to much more. But abuse can also be seen apart from any human relationships at all. That, now, is the point of this article. The subject of abuse is bigger than any of the people who might be involved in it.

We may safely say that ultimately Satan is behind all abuse. Satan will use any tools at his disposal to accomplish his ends. Satan is also known as the father of lies. That gives us a good clue as to where this might be leading. Satan uses lies. One of the main characteristics of abusers is that they are liars. Abuse and lying go together. Unlawful authority necessitates a lie. The oppressed have to be convinced that the evil power and dominion that is being exercised over them is a correct and lawful authority and is therefore a legitimate authority that ought to be willingly obeyed—or at least that the authority is an unconquerable one, so that to resist it is hopeless. Either way there is submission. That is the goal of the oppressor. Power. Control. Coercion. Fooled or forced submission will do. All of that, supposedly, will make an abuser happy. But in the end the abuser has to fool himself, too, to make all of his oppression work. All of his oppression is a lie.

Before proceeding further, a few questions need to be answered concerning the falsehoods involved when unlawful power and authority is exercised. What if the unlawful authority really is strong enough to be considered unconquerable? Does that make the control to be true and right? And how is it that an unlawful authority might wish to procure some sort of willing submission from his subjects? If the submission is willing submission, does that make it okay? The answer to those questions can be understood when we consider what true, just, and right authority ultimately is.

All authority is of God alone. Period. He is God. There is no authority outside of God's authority. That means that all authoritative power that is possessed by any other creature in heaven or on earth is given to that creature by God. It is still God's authority, but now it is delegated by God to some creature appointed by God to receive it. That changes everything when it comes to our idea of power. All power belongs to God. That makes all godly power and righteous authority to be sweet and beautiful because it is true authority exercised in the full and beautiful truth of God's being God alone. All of that is opposed to the bitter rigor that necessarily comprises all ungodly power and control that is exercised under the guise of the lie that man has some authority inherent in his own being, apart from any sovereign creator. As complicated and difficult as the knot of abuse can appear to be to unravel, the matter comes down to something quite simple in the end. It is the difference between the truth and the lie. The lie that man is god will kill you. That is abuse.

False doctrine itself, even without its human teachers, is an abusive enemy of the gravest sort. Scripture compares lying and deceit to the sin of shedding blood. "The LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Ps. 5:6). "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery" (Nah. 3:1). The sin of the tongue may seem to be a light thing. Are not a few careless words merely lost to the air? They are not. Words are sharper than swords. An instrument of war can shed blood, but that is all. False words can cut to the soul. Satan, the father of lies, sees to it that this instrument of destruction is hurled everywhere. Falsehood was the first tool he used in paradise, as he set out to overtake God's kingdom. "Yea, hath God said...?" (Gen. 3:1). Satan established the foundation of the lie even before he began to tempt Eve with the content of it. The lie is still his weapon of choice. The lie can destroy and can do so very effectively. It only has to be believed.

"Ye shall be as gods." That is the draw. And that is the lie. Either man is god, or God is God. Those are the only two alternatives. All idol gods, whether they be of wood or stone or



whether they be the sun or the moon or money or self or any other created thing, amount to man's being god. Every idol god must be appeased. That puts man in control. Man, then, is able to manipulate his god. That is the way it works. And if that is the way it works, who is really god? The one performing the manipulation of appeasement is god—so man is god. Paul in Romans makes plain that salvation is strictly by God or by man, by grace or by works, any attempted compromise to mix them notwithstanding. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6). If salvation is by grace alone, then God is God alone. If salvation is by works or even by grace combined with just a few little works, then man is god. False doctrine, therefore, is any teaching that declares that salvation is by works or by any combination of grace and works. True doctrine is to teach that salvation is by grace alone, without any works at all. False doctrine teaches that man is god. True doctrine teaches that God is God. Those are the only two choices available.

Now, what does this difference in doctrine have to do with abuse? Everything. Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). To be made free is the opposite of abuse. To be abused is to be coerced and brought into some form of bondage, to any physical, psychological, or spiritual degree. Regarding false doctrine, it works something like this: if I must perform any amount of good works in order to obtain or keep or enjoy my salvation, that salvation and the joy of it has been bought and paid for...by me. But that is a price I cannot possibly pay and therefore a burden that I cannot bear. That puts me into a captive state from which I can never hope to escape. My life will be spent trying to gain what I will never be able to obtain, even as the proverbial donkey that constantly chases a carrot dangling from a pole just out of reach in front of his nose. He is never able to grab it, but the carrot keeps him running anyhow. It is a clever trick, and false doctrine employs the same principle. The need to meet

the demands of works-righteousness out of pride, guilt, or dread must become the driving force of one's life. There will always be one more good work that should have been done. There will always be one more sin that should have been repented of. There is no end to the list, and no one will ever measure up or fully achieve its completion. The slaves must make more bricks, and they must find their own straw to make them as well. Do more—and more and more. The trap is set and tripped. The sinner is left in the bondage of despair.

Nor does it help to tell me that God gives me the grace to enable me to do the good works that will attain or keep God's good favor shining upon me. Such tormenting thoughts are to the destruction of one's faith and assurance but for God's preserving grace. I know how sinfully corrupt all of my good works are. How can such imperfection garner anything from the thrice-holy God? Done by grace or done of myself, my good works are not good enough to bring me into God's favor and never will be. And if I convince myself that I am somehow able to obtain something from God even though I am a sinner, the resulting pride will be as bad as, if not worse than, the despair. Pride must turn a blind eye to the perfection that God demands and an equally blind eye to one's own sin and depravity. The destruction of soul in that case is no less complete, and the sinner is left in the bondage of pride.

The lie of works-righteousness, whether manifesting itself in despair or in pride, is nothing but a cruel irony in the end. It is exactly in doing and working in order to obtain anything of salvation, including the joy of one's salvation, that one's joy of salvation is obliterated. It is gone. Joy is no longer possible because such laboring is no joy at all but is Satan's heavy load and weight of bondage. "Do, and you will get" is the lie, the lie of the Pharisees with their grievous and heavy burdens that they placed onto men's shoulders, while "they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:4). It is a false view of reality, and to believe it as if it is reality is to be strapped onto a conditional rollercoaster ride, held fast in place by

legalism's heavy yoke, with no ticket to get off. Perhaps the worst part of all is that many who are thus shackled to the lie have also been deceived to believe that they are enjoying the ride. The truth shall make you free—and the lie, indeed, shall hold you captive.

To be held under the curse of the law of God in Adam is to be kept in bondage to sin. The natural man apart from Jesus Christ can do nothing but sin and can will nothing but to sin. Such is spiritual death. That was the death that Adam died on the day he sinned—just as God had said would surely happen. That bondage is real death and the primary meaning of death. That bondage is as the spider's silk that is wound around its prey. It is a fact of nature that a spider's web is stronger than steel, pound for pound. The picture is apt when speaking of spiritual bondage. There is no escaping the cords. But that is not the end of it. Spiderwebs are not merely strong. They are also sticky. The false doctrine that promotes man's pride in his own works functions very much like the glue that coats each spiraling strand of a spider's inner web. The falsehood is tenaciously enticing. "The matter is one of simple cause and effect, is it not? I do this, and then I get that. That is the way the world works. And when I do something so that I get something, I have whereof to boast. I like that." That is the draw. "Ye shall be as gods." Returning to the metaphor, an insect so trapped in that web will surely become the spider's lunch. The predicament is impossible to overcome but for a thorough and meticulous rescue effected by another.

There is such a rescue. There is that which will slice through such a bedeviled entanglement. Even as the lie of works-righteousness will bind one inside its firm and enveloping grasp, the truth of grace alone will set one free in a sure and confident release. The question is, how does that happen? How does the truth set one free? Our creeds teach us that this happens in two main ways: justification and sanctification.

The truth of the grace of God, a grace that is irresistible and entirely sufficient for all of our

salvation, takes all guilt off the sinning saint, to his or her complete freedom of conscience, first of all. Justification is freedom. To believe the truth of grace for what it is in all of its reality of power and beauty is to rest in Jesus' "easy" yoke, which yoke carries no burden at all. When Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30), he means that that burden is absolutely light. It is no burden at all. He bore it all away. Salvation by grace alone is the freedom of full and free justification from all our sins in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Belgic Confession 23 states it as

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.*

No works are involved. Do more and more to know you are forgiven? No, do nothing. And even if the grateful obedience that is worked in me by God's grace were to be required for the freedom of my conscience before God, what terror of soul such a doctrine would inflict! Such obedience has been thoroughly corrupted by my totally depraved flesh. At what point would my obedience be good enough? Never. On the contrary, the only obedience considered in God's courtroom is Christ's perfect obedience and righteousness, which are imputed to my account through the bond of faith that unites me to him. This justification is true freedom from guilt, and in such freedom is all our peace and rest. All burdens are lifted. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Yet the tempter continues to come. How are you going to *know* that Jesus' righteousness has been imputed to your account, hmm? How are you going to know you are really forgiven of all your sins before God? Although good works might not be the ground of your justification,



they surely will be an evidence of it. Where is the evidence? Your good works are shot through with all manner of sins. What makes you think you are justified and forgiven? Satan still wants you on that rollercoaster ride, going up, down, and all around. Looking at your works for proof of forgiveness of your sins in order to truly know you are forgiven will keep you riding on those terrifying swoops and loops.<sup>1</sup> There is only one way off that rollercoaster: faith. Faith, and only faith, knows that forgiveness and salvation is true.

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. (Lord's Day 23)

And how do I get that faith that consciously knows this forgiveness is true for me, even though I have grossly sinned against every commandment of God? It is a gift of grace worked in my heart by the Holy Spirit (LD 25, Q&A 65). That knowledge is simply given to me by God to know, and the Spirit uses the word of God as the means of grace to give it to me.<sup>2</sup> I am the author neither of faith's bond nor of faith's knowledge and confidence. I cannot manufacture such revelation to myself. It is a gift of grace, simply and only grace. Grace is no cause-and-effect matter, no doing in order to get. Grace is only a gift matter, given by God alone for no reason in

me at all but only in God. Faith, therefore, is only a receiving matter.

But wait. Is it like a key that God puts in the lock of the cell of your bondage to the guilt of sin, and now all you have to do is turn that key in the lock? Is it that you have to exercise your faith to know you are justified before God? Or is it that you must have a faith that is an obedient faith, as the federal vision theologians call it, a faith that works? Not at all. That would be to make faith a condition and a work, as if it is something you still must do in order to be set free. But that is not what faith is. Faith results in obedient good works, but faith itself is not a good work. It is a bond. And more, you are on the other side of the lock. You have no access to that key to begin with. You can't turn it. You can't create that invisible, living bond of faith that connects you to Jesus Christ, nor can you manufacture the activity of faith (knowledge and confidence<sup>3</sup>) in yourself. Knowledge and confidence are gifts just as much as the bond of faith is a gift. God himself must turn the key, as "He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also" (Canons 3–4.14). Believing is knowing you are free in Jesus Christ. You can't know that or anything else unless God shows it to you to know.

So faith is as a key, a key to freedom. In every sense of the word, faith unlocks the cell of our bondage to the guilt of our sin. But there is more to this freedom than freedom from guilt. There is also freedom *unto* something. Faith unlocks the door to let us *out* from being under the curse of spiritual death that we deserved for our sins, while it necessarily also lets us *into* the freedom of life, a spiritual life that knows God and loves God forever in the beauty of holiness, love, and gratitude. When a door opens, it lets out, and it

<sup>1</sup> "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 would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior" (Belgic Confession 24).

<sup>2</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7 teaches this as well in question and answer 21: "which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart."

<sup>3</sup> "True faith is not only a certain knowledge...but also an assured confidence" (LD 7, Q&A 21).

lets in. The first sentence of Belgic Confession 24 sums up what we are let into:

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*.

We are let into a life in which we now sincerely desire not to sin, even hate to sin and indeed endeavor not to sin. Thus the bondage to sin is broken. And what broke it? Once more, Belgic Confession 24, an article regarding man's sanctification, states that true faith was the instrument through which that freedom was effected. Justification is freedom from the guilt of sin. Sanctification is freedom from sin itself. These are the two main ways in which the truth sets us free, and they both happen by faith alone. Faith alone is the key.

We are free to obey the law of God. That bears repeating. *We are free to obey the law of God*. It is a great privilege and a matter of liberty to obey it. It is to be like a fish in water. For the spiritual mind, not being able to perfectly obey the law of God brings greatest grief of soul. But fervently endeavoring to obey all of God's law to its fullest degree is freedom. It is joy. It is gratitude. It is love. The law of God written in the inward heart, as Jeremiah reveals is the case within us<sup>4</sup> and Hebrews also confirms,<sup>5</sup> explains why obedience to God's law is a source of greatest delight to us. Being our delight, it is our freedom to obey it.

That the law of God is written in our hearts also represents a significant blow against another weapon that is invariably used by false doctrine, the false charge of antinomianism. "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" Sin over

against what God wrote in our own hearts to do, which then would be to behave contrary to our innermost heartfelt desires? Shall we sin as we please? That is indeed the point then, though not the point intended by the wicked question. We do not please to sin at all. Doing what we please to do—and we please to obey God's law because that law, which is written in our hearts, is our desire to do—is freedom. Even if presently we cannot fully obey the law as we desire, as Paul confessed his wretched state on this earth to be "the good that I would I do not" (Rom. 7:19), yet there is deliverance; and that deliverance is freedom. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (vv. 24–25). The abuse of false doctrine as represented by the false charge of antinomianism denies the reality of the believer's real desire. To love the law of God is no matter of manipulation or coercion. It is an exuberant freedom to do what one wills to do.

Nor *may* love of the law of God or obedience to it be a matter of coercion. True obedience to God's law does not happen while trapped in bondage. It only happens within freedom. The carnal mind cannot understand such things.<sup>6</sup> By grace we only begin to. The carnal mind only knows the law and lives by the bondage of it, which amounts to the law's threatened curse, "Obey me perfectly, and live; or fail to obey me perfectly, and die." Such is also the principle of works-righteousness: "do" to live and get. No genuine obedience can ever or will ever be performed within the operation of such a principle. Not only is that true on the surface of it (because we can't obey perfectly in this life), but obedience by definition is not possible while in that kind of bondage. The sum of God's law is love: love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. If the law were nothing but

<sup>4</sup> "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" (Jer. 31:33).

<sup>5</sup> "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. 8:10; see also 10:16).

<sup>6</sup> "The carnal mind is unable to comprehend this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and the certainty thereof" (Canons 5.15).

a list of tasks, perhaps some obedience could be possible. But the demand of the law is to love. True love cannot be coerced. It can be commanded, but it cannot be coerced. True, real love is possible only within freedom. Why? Because of the nature of true love. True love is boundless as a matter of the will. Coerced love has limits, as it not only will seek to make the minimum effort required to get by, but it also cannot see beyond those bounds. There is a reason the fruit of the Spirit is thus spoken of in Galatians 5:22–23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: *against such there is no law.*” Coerced love is no real love at all. Ask any wife if she feels truly loved when all the love she ever receives is given merely out of being bound by sheer duty. Ask any husband. Yet the lie of works-righteousness ever operates out of that kind of binding principle. Such a false principle of love is repudiated in Belgic Confession 24 when it states, “without it [justifying faith] they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.”

The kind of thinking that coerces love is the thinking of salvation by the law, not by the gospel. The deception is keen here because the law itself is good. It reveals who God is and what is required of those who love him. But the law itself does not save one soul and never did.<sup>7</sup> The children of Israel finally broke free from Egypt’s slavery by blood: the blood of hundreds of slain little lambs; the blood spread on their doorposts; the blood that stood in the place of the blood of Israel’s firstborn. The presence of that blood was the only thing that made the angel of death pass by their dwelling places. Sinai’s laws had not even been given to them yet. Freeing grace—grace which is always free and grace which always sets free—was in the gospel alone, not in the law.<sup>8</sup> The blood painted on the doorposts was a picture. God’s purpose with the blood of the Lamb was to free his people and save them by

grace alone. God’s purpose with the law was to convict, instruct in thanks, demand, and condemn. To mix those purposes and confuse them is to misuse and abuse both of them.

The law, indeed, says, “Obey—or else.” That is a just bondage and judgment for sin against the holy and righteous majesty of our almighty God. Under the curse of the law, we are surely doomed and rightly so. Yet the lie would deceive us to believe that under that law we may yet find some degree of grace and freedom. The truth is that only under the wings of the gospel of the blood of Jesus Christ are we safe and free at all.

If the law of God does not save us or free us, however, and if the law spells our rightful doom, how can the psalmist in Psalm 119 confess with such ardent passion that he loves the law of God with all his heart? The law is written in our hearts, and that is how he can truthfully confess such love. But more can be said about where this kind of love comes from. It comes through faith. It comes through that unlocked and open door. It comes through knowing that the law *does not* save me. It comes through knowing God’s everlasting and unconditional love for me without the deeds of the law. When I *know* his love is freely given to me by grace alone, I *love* his law as the law of thanks. That is the way it works, and that is the only way it works. Thus Paul ended his discourse in Romans 3 on justification by faith alone, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (v. 31). True, real obedience to the law of God only proceeds from faith, from being joined to Jesus Christ in that miraculous and inseparable bond, and also, practically speaking, from being assured of his complete salvation of me.

The charge of antinomianism is incessantly flung at the doctrines of faith alone, charging that faith does, in fact, make the law of God void and that believing you are saved by grace alone without any works at all will inevitably lead you

<sup>7</sup> “In the same light are we to consider the law of the decalogue...For though it discovers the greatness of sin...yet as it neither points out a remedy nor imparts strength to extricate him from misery...man cannot by this law obtain saving grace” (Canons 3–4.5).

<sup>8</sup> “The LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa. 61:1).

to become careless and profane. “What is the point of doing good works if you do not earn anything by them? There will be no incentive to obey the law in that case.” Such is the mentality of the charge. It is a false charge. The charge is designed to instill, once more, the bondage of works-righteousness into one’s mind and soul, as if the freedom that the gift of faith procures is not enough to bring forth loving and obedient fruits of thankfulness to the glory of God. The charge is a rank denial of Lord’s Day 24.

Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

A. By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

What the charge does to the truth in this regard is most dreadful. The truth is that only in faith’s freedom will there be and can there be any real fruits of thanksgiving to God. Once more, as Romans 3 teaches, the truth is that only through faith the law is established. However, the false charge of antinomianism not only claims that those fruits won’t be there; the charge itself also makes them impossible to be there. Fruits of works-righteousness are no thanks at all and are therefore rotten to the core. Yet such rotten fruits are exactly the kind that the charge would have us to grow.

Such false doctrine is abuse, and abuse involves every sort of manipulation: stroking pride, use of intimidation and fear, and instilling false guilt, to name just a few. All of those tactics can be seen in what has been related thus far concerning works-righteousness. There is also one more tactic worthy of mention: conniving to isolate the victim from his or her support base. The heresy of a conditional covenant, which is where all forms of works-righteousness must immediately lead, does exactly that. Every attack on the unconditional covenant of grace is critically severe. The attack seeks to cut off the saint of God from fellowship with his or her God. A conditional covenant

really teaches that covenant communion with God is unattainable, because the fulfillment of a condition remains forever impossible. A conditional covenant strikes at the believer’s fellowship with God and thus seeks to drive a wedge between the sinner and his God.

As in any earthly relationship of love, if one must measure up to certain expectations in order to obtain or keep the love that is in that relationship, the relationship is set up for abuse. The child must be good enough to experience love? The spouse must be good enough to experience love? And what if they are not good enough? That at some point they will not measure up to someone’s particular standards is inevitable. What punishment or lack of love will occur? That is no love. That is abuse. How does God treat his church? Does God tell us, “You must obey me enough if you want to experience my love”? Or “Obey me more, and then you will experience more of my love”? What is the truth of the matter?

God shows us in a most graphic way what the truth of his covenant is. Watch the water drip onto an infant’s head in baptism. That little baby has been brought into God’s fellowship and into the fellowship of his church, and what did that little baby do to get there? To ask the question is to answer it. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. That is the picture and the seal of that sacrament. And that is a picture of all of us at any age. We are all as helpless little babes before the almighty God of the universe. “Ye can do nothing without me” rings across that vast expanse. Do we hear it? We can do nothing. And nothing is required of us for our salvation. Nothing is required except what Jesus Christ alone did. He did enough. He did it all. We could never do enough. We could never do anything. Our relationship with God is ever and always unconditional, and God has made it to be so in Jesus Christ, his elect Son. Being elect in Jesus Christ is all that matters. What we do or don’t do has nothing to do with it. Such a covenant displays his grace and glory to the full.

Calumnies against that truth abound. You make men to be stocks and blocks! You deny the



responsibility of man! And the favorite claim: you will make men to be careless and profane! Such arguments abound because an unconditional covenant has no room for the pride of man; and any blow to pride is a blow to abuse because the foundation and essence of abuse is the domination and entitlement of one in pride over another. In a conditional covenant I can claim more right to fellowship with God than my poor neighbor who does not have as much obedience as I do. The unconditional covenant of grace, however, allows for no such claims. It puts all believers in Christ and therefore puts all of them on equal footing. None can lord it over another, as all must be abased in deepest humility before God in thanks to him who died for all of us poor sinners alike. Who can measure up to God's holy standard in order to come before his presence in fellowship and love? No man. Not one of us can. Of ourselves we all must remain outside the fellowship of God; but by the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ, God brings us in.

The deceivers go so far as to plant a condition in the soil of paradise, as if God's covenant with perfect Adam were a covenant of works. However, it is not as if we *ever* needed to attempt to measure up to God's standards in order to enter into his presence, to meet the conditions of his fellowship. It is not as if God's fellowship was conditional after all or in the first place. To be in God's fellowship was never a matter of condition. Was Adam brought into God's fellowship in paradise because he was good enough to be brought into that garden? Surely not. God created Adam in God's own image as his dear son, a righteous and holy creature who knew God as his only God. That was who Adam was. God made Adam to be in covenant fellowship with him. That was why Adam walked with God in the cool of the day. Adam was in no covenant of works. God set the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before Adam for good purpose but not to prove Adam's worth. The tree was used to prove his unworthiness in the end but never his worth. Adam's worth was in his sonship to God, not in what he did or didn't do.

It works no differently with the second Adam, Jesus Christ. There is only one who ever stands before God in perfect and absolute covenant fellowship *in himself*, and he did so from all eternity: the Son of God. He is the only begotten Son in relation to God. That is who he is. And he is the elect of God; the only mediator of God's covenant; the only head of his elect, covenant people. *That is who he is.* What he did to save us, condescending to our low estate, is what he did because of who he is. He is not our covenant head and savior because of what he did or would do. There were no conditions that the incarnate second person had to fulfill in order to be in covenant fellowship with God. Jesus Christ paid the price of an infinite hell to satisfy God's justice to save us because that is what our sins deserved, and he did that because of who he is. He never ceased being God's Son, even in the darkness of his deepest hell of separation from God. We deserved that separation from God!

So how do we enter into God's presence if it is not a matter of condition or of doing? It is a matter of being. It is a matter of *being in Christ*—in him who, as the Christ of God, is the elect one from all eternity. There are no conditions in election nor in the Trinity. And we fulfill none either. It is a matter of who we are and who our savior is, not what we have done or will do or won't. The difference is between a conditional covenant and an unconditional one, and the difference is profound.

The covenant is rooted in election. That is why the covenant is unconditional. No conditions are involved in election and never were. The covenant stands not because Christ fulfilled any conditions for us but because Christ *is* the covenant. God and man are united in him. The covenant stands because of who Christ is. How do we stand in covenant communion and fellowship with God then? Only in Christ. Outside of him is no covenant fellowship with God. In him is all blessing and joy of God's love and communion.

And how are we in Christ? Once more, the answer is by faith. Faith is the bond that implants us into Christ. That is how we stand



before God. We are the elect of God not in ourselves but only in the elect one. Christ stands, and so then also do we. Being in Christ is everything. What you do or don't do has nothing to do with it at all. The Canons express this foundational truth in simplest terms and beauty. "Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good" (Canons 1.9). All our questions are answered there. Hear the pleasant sound of the sprinkles that drop from that fountain.

There is nothing lovely in ourselves to love. We lay in a ditch, naked and polluted in our own blood. That is scripture's description of us in Ezekiel 16, and that is a thoroughly accurate depiction of who we are in ourselves. There were no conditions there. There could not be. Only one thing explains God's love for us. He sees us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is his, and we are

Christ's. That is all. Election is the only reason we are saved. Election is the only reason we are loved. Election is the only reason we are in fellowship with God. "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I...belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Lord's Day 1). That I belong. That is election. There is no possibility of abuse in that truth. It is, rather, all comfort to our souls and all freedom.

—Connie L. Meyer

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REFORMED  
— PAVILION —

## Article XLIV. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

**T**he significance of the event in the valley of Shinar for the course of history we attempted to make evident to our readers.

The building of the tower of Babel was not simply the deliberate attempt to remain together instead of filling all the earth.

Certainly, it was that too. God's ordinance was that mankind should multiply and fill the earth. And at Babel the attempt was evidently made to act directly against this ordinance of the Most High.

But it was also more than that.

It was the attempt to establish a kingdom, a powerful kingdom, a kingdom embracing all the tribes of the earth. The intention was to unite by means of a hitherto unknown bond of union. The purpose was to establish a world-confederacy. And, as we have seen the last time, this implied in principle nothing short of the establishment of a kingdom of opposition to the kingdom of God in the world.

That this would have been the spiritual character of the proposed world-kingdom stands to reason, lies in the very nature of the case. Sin develops according to the form human life assumes in its development thru history. As humanity develops, the power of sin develops. As long as the human race was represented by only a few individuals, in Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the manifestation of the power of sin was still limited. It could not reveal itself in all the fulness of its hatred against God. As long as life was simple and undeveloped, as long as there were but a few spheres of life, sin naturally could manifest itself only in those simple relationships. But the more human life develops, the

more sin will reveal its power. And whenever human life assumes a new form, or whenever a new sphere of life comes to development, in that form will sin reveal itself, and that sphere will be invaded by the power of sin. Even as a cancer does not gradually disappear because of the counteracting influence of man's physical organism, but develops with that organism, feeds upon the body, so sin develops along the life or organic progress of the race, feeds upon the body of the human organism. And no more than the cancer is gradually overcome by means of physical development but requires the powerful operation of the surgical knife, no more will the power of sin gradually be conquered by the development of the human race, but its disappearance will ultimately require the powerful intervention of the parousia. And if in Shinar's valley the attempt to establish a universal world-power under Nimrod had been successful, the natural result would have been that the cancer of sin would have invaded that new form, or rather that the power of sin simply would have followed the development of that universal kingdom and subjected it to itself. And thus it is plain that the ultimate result could have been nothing less than a premature manifestation of Antichrist in his final power.

If I may make a remark of a practical nature in parentheses, I would say in the first place that the above view stands diametrically opposed to that of Post-Millennialism. Characteristic of the latter view it is that it expects the kingdom of God to come and to score its ultimate victory by way of gradual development. The kingdom will be completed by the efforts of man, and if Christ is to come at all, it will be to find the kingdom all

prepared for Him and to perpetuate a state of perfection and bliss already present in the world. By missionary effort the light of the gospel will be spread over all the world, till all nations shall bow in the name of the great King and worship Him. In the meantime the principles of Christianity will strike deeper root and advance to greater development and fuller application in the midst of the already Christian world, till all spheres of life shall be pervaded by its spirit and based upon its truth. Society will gradually be transformed in harmony with its precepts; the state will be a means to realize its principles, and the church will more and more come to fuller realization of her tremendous task to help in establishing the kingdom of God on earth. If Church, State and Society thus labor together in harmony for the common cause, there can be no doubt but the kingdom of God will gradually be completed; and if there is to be a parousia at all it will mean the almost imperceptible transition from time into eternity, from the present dispensation into the future age. Thus is the view of Post-millennialism. And this view we strongly repudiate. It implies a denial of the power of sin in its organic development keeping pace with the development of the historic illusion that the world is actually growing better. We call this most positively a historical illusion. True, life is developing. Especially along scientific and industrial lines the world has taken tremendous strides of development in recent years. But development is no improvement, is above all no spiritual improvement. While missionary effort increases, the apostasy in the midst of the Christian world is also spreading fast. The basic truths of Christianity, total depravity, atonement, creation and incarnation in the Scriptural sense of the word, are either consciously denied or sadly ignored. Ignorance with regard to Scriptural truths is astounding. Consciousness of sin and humiliation before God even in the face of great calamities have been alarmingly found wanting, sin abounds, the things of this world are uppermost in the minds of many. In a word, while the light of the gospel is being carried into heathen lands, a light which is even

of dubious nature frequently, the apostasy in the midst of the Christian world increases. From many a modern pulpit (and I can speak from personal experience) the voice of Antichrist instead of that of Christ is heard. In society conditions look little brighter. Some outward improvements are being made, and in the success of such movements as that of prohibition a great victory is seen for the kingdom of God. But in the meantime, the present social unrest, the manifestation of the spirit of Socialism, the alarming disrespect for authority, and many other phenomena ought to reveal to him that has eyes to see, that a far different spirit than that of Christ controls the minds and hearts. And as to the illusion that the recent world-war, so terrible in its nature, was actually the last, if one studies what comes to expression from the hearts of various nations, one is inclined to draw the conclusion that the very air is still pregnant with war, and that the present lull is rather due to an exhaustion of the nations than to a real spirit of peace. But above all would we call the attention to the fact that no such glorious future as Post-millennialism would picture to us can be expected on the basis of the Word of God. The tares and the wheat are to grow up together. The man of sin is to appear. The son of perdition must show himself. Antichrist is to come to its culmination. And not a gradual development culminating in a grand future, but dark days for the faithful and the powerful intervention of our great King is the picture Scripture gives us of the end of all things. And if it is remarked that the kingdom of God in its influence is pictured in the parable of the leaven pervading the three measures of meal, we admit that this is true. And we agree that it is exegetically untenable to make the leaven to represent the power of evil in the world. But we deny just as strongly that the three measures represent the world.

In the second place, it is perhaps superfluous to say that in the light of Scripture, I harbor no grand expectation of a League of Nations for the coming of the kingdom of God. From a strictly Post-millennial viewpoint it stands to reason that the proposed league is hailed with enthusi-

asm. When the emphasis is transferred from the inward and spiritual to the external, and improvement must take the place of regeneration, it stands to reason that all such things as social improvements, adjustments of relationships, prohibition, women suffrage, leagues of nations are taken hold of as means for the salvation of a sinful race and the completion of the kingdom of God. To our mind it is an established fact, that whatever form human life may assume, sin will invade it. Salvation is not a matter of form but of being, both for the individual and for the race. And just as certainly as the confederation of Shinar would have developed into an anti-godly world-power, will the world-power that is to be established in the end reveal itself as the Anointed of the dragon. A league of nations will never be a factor in the establishment of the kingdom of God. And, therefore, without entering into a discussion of the political side of this modern question, without deciding for ourselves whether it would be advisable for our country to mingle with European diplomacy, we are assured in our mind that no good can be expected from such a world-league for the kingdom of God.

You come with the customary accusation that I am a pessimist?

In that I wish to differ.

Pessimistic in the light of history and of the condition of human nature do I find the gospel that would make it incumbent upon us to establish the kingdom of God by human might. This may be regarded as evidently a hopeless task. Surely, we must preach the gospel, preach the gospel to all nations. We are Christ's witnesses in the world, and all God's people must be called. Surely, that gospel is to have its effect. We have the certain promise that none of God's people shall be lacking in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The power of Christ's Spirit is to make the gospel effective. Again, we must surely announce the principle of God's Word to the world, for every sphere of life, and apply those principles as far and as long as possible. But the completion of the kingdom I expect, not from the effort of man, neither by a gradual process of evolution, but from the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who holds the book with its seven seals, controls all history, and possesses all power in heaven and on earth.

And, pray, whose is the more pessimistic view of life? Is it his that expects all things from this powerful Lord? Or is it not rather his, that has his expectation from human power and the development of the world?

I say the latter.

—Holland, Mich.

