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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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## MEDITATION

And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: and Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

—Exodus 4:27-31

**T**his was a tender moment in God's deliverance of his people from the house of bondage.

What made it so tender? Shall we look to the reunion of the two brothers? God, having let Moses go in the inn by the way, appeared to Aaron and instructed him to meet Moses in the wilderness. Aaron went out into the wilderness until he came to Mount Sinai, where he met Moses, Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer making their way to Egypt. The brothers had not seen one another for forty years while Moses sojourned in Midian. Their reunion was joyful, as evidenced in Aaron's greeting of Moses with a kiss.

But the reunion of two brothers is not what makes this such a tender moment in God's deliverance of his people from the house of bondage. Rather, we must look to God's visitation of his people, and there we will see such tenderness that it can hardly be fathomed.

Consider: God came to visit his people through Moses and Aaron. The reunion of Moses and Aaron was not merely a family matter, but it was a matter of God's call. Moses was *sent* by God to Israel. And therefore Moses represented God to Israel. And when Moses told Aaron all the words of Jehovah and all the signs which he had commanded him, by this Moses informed Aaron that Aaron also was sent of God to his people. Through Moses and Aaron God came to his people and visited them.

Consider also: the people believed. Moses and Aaron gathered together the elders of the children of Israel. Moses spoke on behalf of God, and Aaron spoke on behalf of Moses. When Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people, the people believed. What a wonder! There was nothing to indicate that Israel would believe. Moses and Aaron were nothing to the people of Israel. Moses had not even been around for the last four decades. And the last time that Moses had acted as a deliverer to Israel, they had mocked him and chased him away. In those forty years nothing had changed. The people of Israel had not grown more receptive, and Moses had not grown more persuasive. Nothing in the people's behavior had indicated that they would now believe Moses and Aaron. But God visited his people! By the mouth of his servant, God spoke his powerful word to Israel. By the hand of his chosen, God did mighty signs in the sight of the people. It was the gospel! The gospel of deliverance from the house of bondage. The gospel of God's unchanging love for his people. And the Holy Spirit worked faith by the preaching of the gospel, so that the people believed.

Consider also: the people responded to the gospel by bowing their heads and worshipping God. Worship is the inevitable effect of the gospel. Worship is the sure fruit of faith. The heart of the man visited by God can only worship.

When God visits his people and looks upon their affliction, they worship! No, let us be personal. When God visits you and looks upon your affliction, you worship.

What a tender moment! The living God visited his people, spoke the blessed gospel to them by the mouth of his servant, worked faith in

their hearts by his Spirit, and gave them their worship as their blessed response. It is a tender moment that plays out again and again in his house. Shall we go up to God's house? For God hath visited his people and looked upon our affliction. Let us bow our heads and worship.

—AL

## CONTRIBUTION

### Job's Friends and Why Is Grace So Difficult to Understand?

Everyone who claims to be a Christian of any sort has heard of the theological and biblical term referred to as *grace*. *Undeserved favor* is perhaps the most well-known way to define the term, and the simplest. A child can understand the concept. You do something wrong, and instead of getting punished for it like you deserve, you receive favor. Grace is wonderful!

It is. But the natural, sinful human mind immediately takes that idea and runs with it—in a wrong direction. If I am not punished for what I do that is wrong, then I can get away with doing anything I want to. There is no punishment for sin. I can sin as I please! Such thinking is called *antinomianism*.

Now, even those who would genuinely like to believe that that kind of reasoning can be true still cannot deny that sin is wrong. Sin is still sin, grace or no grace being present. Grace doesn't transform sin into something good. Grace transforms sinners (that is called *sanctification*, which indeed is by grace alone)—but grace does not transform sin. Sin is never “okay.” That means that, in the end, the whole concept of

antinomianism is impossible. Antinomianism says that to sin is okay. But that is never true.

*Believing* antinomianism is possible because fallen human flesh is capable of believing any foolish thing at any time, including the impossible. Perhaps, even, especially the impossible. But there is no truth in antinomianism, and one who concludes that sin can or even must be condoned if the punishment has already been paid for has no true concept of or appreciation for God's perfect holiness and justice. Sin is never okay before God's righteous judgment. It is never okay in one's own conscience, either, unless one's conscience has been seared. At its core antinomianism is, indeed, impossible.

That antinomianism is impossible is not merely logical. It is also confessional. The Reformed creeds, in fact, are at pains to point out the impossibility of antinomianism. Antinomianism is explicitly called “impossible” in Lord's Day 24, Q&A 64,<sup>1</sup> and in Belgic Confession 24.<sup>2</sup> In the Canons of Dort, the same idea is expressed repeatedly and vehemently.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “But doth not this doctrine [justification by faith alone] make men careless and profane? 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.”

<sup>2</sup> “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 anything 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.”

<sup>3</sup> See Canons 1.13; 5.12; 5, rejection 6; and the conclusion. Especially in the conclusion the writers of the Canons of Dort revealed how fed up they were with the false charge of antinomianism. In the second paragraph they described all of the various ways the charge can be thrown at the true Reformed faith, after which they ended that paragraph with “which the Reformed churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul.”

The question is, why? Why are the Reformed creeds so adamant about antinomianism's being impossible? Is it because there was a concern that many of God's people really would be convinced that if they were saved by grace alone, then they could sin as they pleased and get away with it? No, not at all. The reason lies in a pernicious and perennial accusation that the enemies of grace constantly hurl at those who would teach the truth of salvation by grace alone and mean it. Everyone wants to claim that he teaches that salvation is by grace. Even Rome says that. But to truly teach salvation by grace *alone* is another matter. That teaching is hated by the man who wants to retain some measure of pride in his own works and worth, which is, sadly, every man by nature. So salvation by grace alone is viciously attacked from every quarter, from the proudest theological tyrant to the sinful nature contained in the humblest of souls. The war cannot be escaped. And one of the main weapons used in this war to assault this truth is the charge of antinomianism. "You will think that you can sin as you please if you believe you are saved no matter how much you have sinned, do sin, or will sin. You will be careless and profane! You teach too much grace!" The charge feigns a great concern for holiness, but the concern is nothing but smoke.

The accusation is completely false. That a child of God willingly sins more and more exactly because he believes he is saved by grace alone is, as has been stated, impossible. There is no such thing as too much grace. But the accusation is extremely common. The true church of Jesus Christ has always been the brunt of the false charge of antinomianism. The apostle Paul endured its growl.<sup>4</sup> A singular Augustinian monk from the 9th century known as Gottschalk of Orbais suffered its bite.<sup>5</sup> The reformers of the

16th and 17th centuries experienced it firsthand.<sup>6</sup> Anyone who teaches a doctrine of truly full and free salvation by grace alone even today will be assaulted with the charge.

But also here the question is, why? Why is grace so difficult to understand? Why is grace so misunderstood? Why is it so hated?

One reason grace is so difficult to understand is that in our world, technically, no such thing exists. In our world there is always a cause and effect. People get what they deserve. People reap what they sow. And, indeed, is not that exact teaching in scripture as well? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). One *does* reap what one sows. No one can get around that principle. But grace, which is God's undeserved favor, love, and mercy, does not fit that principle at all. The carnal mind simply cannot understand how that can possibly work. The concept is otherworldly—even heavenly. In the end the delegates to the Synod of Dordt could only throw up their hands regarding the difficulty of explaining what true grace is to someone who does not believe what true grace is or doesn't really want to know. The very last article contained in the Canons shows what the whole of the Canons was all about. It was about explaining grace and doing so especially over against those who would falsely accuse teachers of true grace of antinomianism. True grace is "too much" grace to the gainsayers. They just don't get it. They never will. And they hate it. Hear the frustration of the delegates at Dordt expressed in Canons 5.15 and their resolve:

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

<sup>4</sup> "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just" (Rom. 3:8). "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (6:1).

<sup>5</sup> Gottschalk was beaten and imprisoned as a heretic, being accused of teaching despair to the reprobate and a false security to the elect. Ironically, Gottschalk was persecuted by his Augustinian superiors, while one of the main hallmarks of Gottschalk's teachings was double predestination in the tradition of Augustine.

<sup>6</sup> There is a reason that all three forms of unity address the false charge of antinomianism. The accusation was "slanderously reported" against all of their writers as well.

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. Now, to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be honor and glory forever. AMEN.

Note that when the Canons of Dordt treats the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in this fifth and final head, the subject is still grace. Perseverance of the saints only happens by grace. Every head of doctrine in the Canons has been about grace because no gift of God is ever given apart from grace, apart from God's undeserved favor. Every gift is due to grace; and, to speak foolishly, especially the perseverance of the saints displays the truth of the grace of God. If anything would seem to be due to one's own desert, it would be the perseverance of the saints. Why does every saint make it to heaven? Why is no saint ever lost along the way? Why do all of God's people persevere to the end? The most likely guess would be that it is because they are somehow strong enough to do so. But that is not the case. If anything depends on man's strength, we are no longer talking about grace. Grace only gives the good that is not deserved by any work; or else it is, by definition, not grace. "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).

Perhaps the grace involved in election is a little easier to understand in this regard. No one was standing there in eternity saying, "Pick me! Pick me!" God chose whom he willed, and we had nothing to do with that. It was pure grace. But to persevere in this life as a child of God to

the very end—that seems more likely to involve what we do. Isn't there *something* we do to contribute to that? But the answer is no. We contribute nothing even to our own perseverance. That is by pure grace too. If the Remonstrants could not concede in Canons 1 that election was unconditional and purely by grace (they said that God looked ahead to see who would believe and who would not in order to choose the elect), they surely would not be able to understand in Canons 5 how perseverance could be by grace alone. But theirs was a willful ignorance, no less than a denial of unconditional election is a willful denial. It is a hatred of grace, in the end. On the contrary, the elect "spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it [the truth of the grace of God that is seen in the gift of the perseverance of the saints], as an inestimable treasure."

So how *does* one understand this inestimable treasure? How can the grace of God explain the fact that God's people persevere to the end, and not one is lost? How does grace explain the fact that God's people are chosen unconditionally from all eternity? How does grace explain all of the blessings of salvation that are given to every one of God's elect children—justification, sanctification, and all the rest? The blessings of salvation, all of them, were paid for fully and infinitely on the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ deserved all of those blessings, every one of them. He purchased them. He has every right to them. And he may do with those blessings as he pleases, which means that he may give them to all of his elect if he so pleases. And he does so please. God's undeserved favor and love is behind the purchase of those blessings. All of those blessings come to us by grace alone through faith alone.<sup>7</sup>

But what happens to God's justice in that case? Does God simply set that aside? No, God's justice is not violated when God gives all of those blessings to all of his undeserving elect people because all of those blessings were entirely paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross. The question,

<sup>7</sup> See Ephesians 2.

however, still needs to dig deeper. If no one deserved to receive any of those blessings in the first place and God's justice has been completely satisfied, so that now those undeserving elect people *do* deserve all of those blessings in Jesus Christ (not in themselves!), how is that fair? How is that just? Why do some people receive this undeserved favor, this mercy and love, and others do not? In themselves the elect do not deserve to be blessed of God any more than the reprobate do. How can any of this be fair?

That is what the carnal mind cannot understand. That is where the earthly comprehension crumbles. And we don't need to point to some heathen tribe living somewhere on the other side of the globe that can't understand the justice of justification. Our own natural, sinful minds can't understand this.

A transaction took place. We can understand transactions. Transactions happen in our world all the time. Jesus legally took on our guilt and paid the penalty for that guilt to the very last drop of the ocean of it. There is nothing left for us to pay, even though we have been sinners of the worst sort all of our lives, and we continue to be sinners of the worst sort until the day we die. God's justice was completely satisfied. The price was paid in full. But then the next question is, was God's justice satisfied *for me*? That is what we can't understand without further revelation. I have as many sins as, if not more than, the reprobate person who might be living far away from me or not so far away or maybe even right next to me. My own sinful nature is worse! It is worse because of the battle that rages between my old man in Adam and my new man in Christ. I still sin, even when I know Christ paid for all of my sin. That makes my sin worse. It is true that I do not want to sin, even as Paul confesses in Romans 7:19: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." To my great grief, every good work that I might attempt to do will still be thoroughly corrupted with my intolerable selfishness and pride. In a word, my good works are sin. Which one of them was done so well that it could be called a good work

according to God's perfect standard? Not one. We have nothing whatsoever of which to boast.

The question might also be asked this way: Why does one person receive Christ's blessing and another person does not if the reason cannot be attributed to what the person receiving the blessing has done or not done? How can God's justice and mercy meet without canceling each other out? In all truth, in our world perfect justice and perfect mercy cannot coexist. This is about more than Christ's work of substitutionary atonement on the cross. We know that Christ's payment for all of the sins of all of his elect people was a completely just and divinely fair transaction. We can perhaps begin to understand that as far as the payment for sin goes. God's justice was both revealed and maintained on the cross. What Jesus suffered was what all of that sin deserved. But putting God's grace and mercy with that is another matter. The carnal mind can only see mercy as being a violation of God's perfect justice. You deserve  $x$ , but you receive  $y$  instead. How can that be just and fair, even if the  $y$  was paid for? It wasn't paid for by *you*. How then can such a blessing rightly belong to *you*?

There are some things that have no answer. That is the wonder of grace. Grace is so hated because, in the end, grace cannot be fully comprehended. There can be only one explanation for that wonder: Jesus Christ, the Son of God come in the flesh. This doctrine of who Jesus is can reveal the difference between a teacher who comes with the truth of grace alone in Jesus Christ and a teacher who comes under the auspices of antichrist.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 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 4:2-3)

Who, really, is Jesus?

That Jesus is the Son of God come in the flesh may sound like an elementary statement to make. Doesn't every Christian confess this? How is this going to help us know the difference between a true teacher and a false teacher? But no, not every Christian teaches this. One can claim to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God come in the flesh, but claiming to believe it and actually teaching it are two different things. Jesus Christ is the gospel, the good news of salvation. But there are many different interpretations of the gospel out there, and that means there are many different teachings out there of who Christ really is. The Christ, or christ, of Arminianism or Roman Catholicism is different than the Christ of the true Reformed faith. And not all those who claim to believe the Reformed faith have the same Christ either. Their gospels can differ widely, and that means their saviors can too.

Job's friends definitely had a problem understanding grace, so much so that in the end God had Job offer sacrifices for them because they did not confess the truth about who God is.<sup>8</sup> Job's friends claimed to be of God's people and sincerely thought they were very religious men, men who were even more pious than Job. They charged Job with sin upon sin. And why did they do that? Did they know something of Job's wicked activities and hypocrisy? No, they had no evidence whatsoever. Job was a man of unmatched integrity on the earth. How do we know that? Because God said so. When God brought Job's extraordinary godliness to the attention of Satan in Job 1–2, Job's character is brought to our attention too—for a reason. Job's friends did not have a leg to stand on in their accusations against Job. Why, then, were they so confident that Job was such a terrible sinner? Because God gives to people what they deserve. You reap what you sow. Job had reaped such an unheard-of amount of pain, affliction, and sorrow that the only explanation could be, they thought, that Job

had done something extremely awful. God must be very angry with him. This kind of suffering went far beyond what anyone would consider normal to life here on earth. What happened to Job had to have an extraordinary reason behind it—which it did. But the reason was not anything the friends could imagine. The friends were certain that Job had sinned a terrible sin and had brought all of that calamity down upon himself. Job's friends stood on that principle of the law to the bitter end and to the great affliction of Job. They were no help at all to that devastated man sitting in the ashes.<sup>9</sup>

They had no true concept of grace. They did not understand what the gospel of grace is. They brought to Job a gospel of works-righteousness, which is no gospel at all. Job saw through their hypocrisy and false doctrine, but that did not shield him from their evil accusations. Job was in a state of unimaginable agony, and what did his friends do for him? They added to his pain. They not only failed to bring the true gospel to Job, which would be bad enough; but also they brought a false gospel to Job, an anti-gospel, an antichristian gospel. How Job survived the whole ordeal is truly a wonder of the grace of God's preservation. When the lie is brought to a suffering saint, the lie kills—except for the grace of God to preserve that saint. Satan did everything he could within God's limits on him to hurt Job. The friends came to finish Job off, whether they realized it or not.

What kept Job from utter despair? Remember that all along Satan's goal was to get Job to curse God to his face.<sup>10</sup> Satan wanted to destroy the sweet communion and fellowship that existed between Job and his savior. If Job could be brought to a point of truly resenting and hating God, Satan would succeed in his exceedingly wicked plan. If Job's trust in God could be destroyed, everything would be destroyed. It would be akin to plucking one of Christ's sheep out of

<sup>8</sup> See Job 42:7–9.

<sup>9</sup> "Then Job answered and said, I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all" (Job 16:1–2).

<sup>10</sup> "And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 2:4–5).

the Father's hand.<sup>11</sup> Job would be an outstanding prize in such an endeavor, a ring of golden rings.

Note that the issue, then, is faith. Satan was trying to destroy the bond that existed between Jesus Christ and Job. That is what faith is: the bond that God establishes between Jesus Christ and all his elect sheep by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. It was exactly that union that was the target of the devil. That union is mysterious and spiritual and therefore is untouchable by Satan and all his hosts. But how faith manifests itself in the lives of God's people is more approachable. If Satan could destroy the manifestation of faith, the activity of faith, the knowledge and confidence that faith has in God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, then...perhaps he could win. That was his goal. Faith in its essence Satan will never be able to directly touch. But faith in its activity he very much tries to touch—and tries to destroy.

And Job's friends came only to add to Job's misery. "You sinned, Job. You're only reaping what you sowed. Repent! Repent of your sin! We don't know exactly what you did, but you did something to deserve all of these wretched circumstances. Repent! Repent, and then God will show you his lovingkindness and mercy again. He will prosper you again."

That was a lie that completely distorted the grace of God. These friends knew nothing of the true savior, Jesus Christ. They truly knew nothing of how the grace of God operates. All they knew and understood were carnal concepts and notions, even with all the grand and lofty thoughts they paraded in their speeches. These friends were intelligent men who wore a form of godliness well, but they did not know what grace was. And that undermined everything.

Job knew what grace was. He had been given grace. He knew what a sinner he was. He knew he deserved nothing from God. "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Job knew that these awful trials came directly from the hand of God,

Satan or no Satan being present. He understood grace. God had shown him tremendous undeserved favor in the past. He knew that all of his physical, emotional, and spiritual blessings came to him by grace alone. The only way he could enjoy such undeserved favor was because there was a savior who made such favor to be just and fair to be given to him. God's favor and grace was Job's, and he knew he didn't deserve it of himself. How, then, could he justly possess such favor? Only in Christ. Job did not know Jesus by name, but he knew him in reality. "For I know that my redeemer liveth" (19:25). Job not only knew that there was a redeemer, but he also knew that that redeemer was his. That was an amazing confession for Job to make in the face of all the evil that had come upon him. I believe we may safely say that it was humanly impossible for Job to make such a confession. Only God could give that kind of knowledge and confidence to a broken man such as Job or, indeed, to any man.

Satan thought he could demolish the manifestation and activity of Job's faith. Knowingly or unknowingly, Job's own wife colluded with the plan. Job had no one he could turn to on this earth. His children were dead. His friends only ended up persecuting him further. His wife was on Satan's side completely. Who was left? Only his living redeemer. That was all. And that was enough. The bond was still there. Even when Job no longer felt that the bond was there, he knew it was there. That is faith. That is something that only God can create, give, and maintain. Job had God's grace and understood what it was through faith. Only God can choose to give to a man that knowledge, confidence, and understanding that is the activity of faith. Job's circumstances proved it, backward and forward. God may, can, and does choose to give faith and salvation to whomever he wills. That is God's grace, glory, power, beauty, and love at work.

God's grace and love was not purchased by Jesus on the cross. God's grace and love was always there. God is grace. God is love. But God's

<sup>11</sup> "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29).

grace and love *purposed* the cross of Jesus Christ. That is how God's mercy does not violate God's truth. That is how God's love does not cancel out God's justice. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven" (Ps. 85:10–11). They met in Jesus Christ, who is very God and very man. That is who Jesus is as the Son of God come in the flesh.

Job's friends only understood cause and effect. A man reaps what he sows. That is the law, and that was the end of the story for them. But that notion ignores the real and certain union that exists between God's people and Jesus Christ, and to ignore that union is in effect to deny that such a union of true faith exists. And to deny that union is to deny the one with whom one is united. The attack of Job's friends was an attack both on faith and on Jesus Christ, therefore, as Satan tried to do everything he could to destroy Job's trust in God. But God was doing everything to perfect Job's faith and to keep Job's union to his living redeemer. That is grace. And that is the power of grace. Grace is power. No one needs to wonder who will win in this conflict.

And that brings us back to our original question. Why is grace so difficult to understand? Why is grace so misunderstood? It is because grace has everything to do with faith, the bond that exists between Jesus Christ and all his own. When that bond is denied, as it so often is in many different ways, then grace will be denied too. Only through that bond does any blessing flow to God's people. The bond must be there. Take that bond away, and you lose what comes by means of that bond as well. Thus grace is effectively misunderstood and denied when faith is denied. To attack the faith that God works in his people, uniting them to Jesus Christ, is to attack the grace of God to his people. They go together.<sup>12</sup> By grace God elected his people and united them to Jesus Christ from all eternity; and through that union which is called faith,

God gives to all his own all the gifts of his grace. The connection is manifold.

One could also look at it this way. When we ask how it is that salvation comes to us by grace alone, can we really grasp what that means in all of its fullness? As mere creatures we cannot. The words "We are saved by grace alone" can so easily roll off our tongues. Whether or not we truly understand what that means is another matter. We will be adoring God's grace for all eternity and will forever be enthralled by it. If we would truly understand on this earth what it means that we are saved by grace alone, our lives would be very different here. We would be perfectly secure. All would be well with us. All is well because God is God, and by his grace he preserves all of his own to the very end. Not one will be lost. Job wasn't lost either. Job's confidence of faith was strengthened instead of destroyed, though it was hammered to its thinnest limits.

How did that happen? God himself answered Job. God did not let Job's friends have the final word. Job's friends had a god who was mighty, majestic, and just, but that was all. The true God of grace was nowhere to be found in their speeches. Note once more that grace is power and is, in fact, both power and beauty. That is what the friends of Job did not understand. How powerful is their god if he must wait for a man's obedience before he can bless that man? Beauty without power is vain, and power without beauty is cruel. God operates in both power and beauty. That is grace. God does not wait on man. God is God. God answered Job, and God's answer was one of unfathomable power perfectly mingled with the most elegant beauty of his grace and love.

God's answer to Job is not for the faint of heart. To read God's answer superficially might leave one wondering if Job would be crushed in the end. But no, such infinite majesty and holy wisdom was the only thing that would save Job. Why? Because a glimpse of God's power and beauty together is enough to comfort any man

<sup>12</sup> Consider once more both Lord's Day 24, Q&A 64 and Belgic Confession 24. Both of these points of doctrine connect faith (as the bond to Christ) with grace and the gifts of grace.

when that power and beauty is there to deliver. God was there in all of his majesty to deliver Job. All of the glory that can be seen in the physical creation around us was displayed to Job in order to show him who his redeemer really is. He is God. He has all power in heaven and on earth, even to the utmost reaches of the farthest universe and galaxy. There are no limits to his strength and ability. And this God loves us. Is there anything more beautiful than that? Is there anything to fear when *this* mighty God loves us? That was the message to Job. That is the message to us.

The trial of Job's faith would come to an end. Job became immensely wealthy in this world's goods, possessing more than he had possessed before; but that was only a picture of the real wealth that he had—and never lost. He had God. Satan could not move one hair out of place on Job's head without God's permission. That is grace.

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5–6). That was Job's response. The knowledge of the power of grace, the knowledge of God's free and complete salvation of us, does not leave us to foolishly and greedily dive into more sin. Job's response was not one of antinomianism. It was the opposite. He saw his own unworthiness even more. He detested his sin even more. While his friends were still admiring their own piety that supposedly kept them out of such dreadful disasters as had come upon Job, Job was admiring God's grace and mercy. God made sure of that.

Who was careless and profane? Not Job. And not any of God's people who are shown such grace either. One who believes he may sin because of grace received or who immediately accuses a child of God of antinomianism because he teaches "too much" grace does not understand grace and all of the gifts that accompany grace. Such gifts include trials, afflictions, and

persecutions of every sort, along with the richest of spiritual blessings, the blessings of knowing God and his love. The God who made heaven and earth, the God who knows the number of the clouds and sends each bolt of lightning forth at its appointed time and place across the globe, the God who has entered into the depths of the sea and the treasures of the snow—that God knows how to bless his people. He has all power, and he displays all beauty. Such blessing will not include making his people to be careless and profane.

Why is grace so difficult to understand? Because we have not entered into the treasures of the snow or the springs of the sea or into leviathan's den, nor were we there when the foundations of the earth were laid. There are many, many things we do not know. Who can truly understand the power and the beauty of God's grace? We are not intended to know all of it, not here and not now. It is God's glory to own that knowledge, and it is his glory to give it to whomsoever he will. That means that all the glory of God's grace is his alone and not ours. "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." That is all we can say too. That is why grace is so hard to understand.

Job was comforted in the midst of God's crucible. Greatly comforted. Certainly not by his friends. But God used all of Job's afflictions to comfort Job in the end, turning all of that evil to profit. Job knew he was being tried in a crucible of fire in order to come out as gold.<sup>13</sup> That didn't quench the fire to be any less for Job, but it did give him the hope that is born of faith. Satan could not touch the knowledge and confidence that God gives to all of his own any more than one can divorce any wife from any husband or any husband from any wife.<sup>14</sup> It can't be done. And that was what Satan was trying to do: to divorce the bride of Jesus Christ from her groom. It can't be done. When God establishes a union, whether of marriage or of faith, no one can break that bond.

<sup>13</sup> "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

<sup>14</sup> "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6).

The trial that God allowed to come down upon Job's righteous head was awful. Was that because Job was so sinful that he deserved it? No, not at all. It was because he didn't deserve it. Job knew that he was a sinner in himself and therefore deserved every calamity that came upon him and worse, but he also knew that the righteousness he had was not his own and therefore was perfect. He knew that he had his living redeemer's righteousness. In Christ he deserved only blessing and good. This was a

lesson in grace. Grace is undeserved favor, and along with that comes undeserved wrath and punishment for another. The price *will* be paid. By whom? is the question. Job atoned for no man by his suffering, but he did offer sacrifices that foreshadowed the perfect Lamb, who would atone for all of Job's sins and all the sins of all Christ's elect. That was Job's comfort. That is our comfort too. And that is grace. That is undeserved favor, indeed.

—Connie L. Meyer

## HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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**Our Doctrine** by Rev. H. Hoeksema

### **Article XX. Mankind's Relation to the Fallen King (conclusion) and Pseudo-Calvinism (continued)**

#### **A. MANKIND'S RELATION TO THE FALLEN KING (conclusion)**

The main purpose of our previous article was to call the attention of our people once more to the fact, that the doctrine of original sin does not imply a certain fatalism or natural necessity or blind determinism without justice and righteousness, but that it rests on a judicial basis on the which God, the righteous Judge, is perfectly justified, when He causes us to be born under the punishment of sin and death. There is nothing new in all this. On the contrary, our best reformed theologians have always done the same thing. But it is nevertheless necessary that we are repeatedly reminded of this truth in all its significance both from the pulpit and thru the written word. Especially is this true in our own time. Our age surely is not characterized by an over-emphasis of doctrine, neither is there any danger at all that in our church our reformed truth is over-emphasized. Much rather does the danger lie in the opposite direction. There is

much rather an under-valuation of doctrine than an over-emphasis. And, therefore, especially in our time, it is so very necessary to emphasize the various points of doctrine and establish the church of God in the truth of His Word.

It is necessary that the church understands the doctrine of original sin and all it implies. And it is necessary too that we clearly grasp again that God is not unrighteous if we are born in sin and conceived in corruption, but that this is but just punishment of those that are actually guilty. Fact is that we are born in sin. From the earliest moment of our existence we carry with us our corrupt nature and the power of death compasses us about. We are subject to the law of sin and death. But as we pointed out, this being subject to sin and death is a punishment. It is death. And death is not merely a natural result of our condition, but it is a punishment, a righteous punishment for sin. And, therefore, the question naturally arose: Is this punishment of spiritual death, this natural corruption merely

the inevitable outcome of some blind, fatalistic natural law, so that the innocent is condemned and punished with and for the guilty, or does the whole thing rest on the absolute righteousness of an Holy God? In other words. You kneel down by the cradle of the infant and you confess that this infant is sinful and corrupt, is by nature in the power of spiritual death. And you ask the question: Is this justice or blind fate? We answered: This is justice. This infant is guilty together with the whole human race, and it is according to the justice of a righteous God that this punishment of spiritual death is inflicted on the infant from its earliest moments on. And to explain this truth which is so evidently the truth of Scripture, as we pointed out, we held, that not only the organic and physical unity, but also its judicial solidarity must strictly be maintained. And these two, the organic and the judicial unity of the human race must be understood in the proper relation to each-other.

In both respects the unity of the human race must be strictly maintained.

As an organic unity you may compare the human race to a tree of which Adam is the root. A tree differs, say from an engine, in that it is an organism. Both the tree and the engine constitute one whole, a unity, the embodiment of an idea. But the difference is that the tree is an organism, all its members developing from a common root and permeated by the same life; while the engine is a mechanism, the parts of which are mechanically put together and sustain only an external, mechanical relation to one another, even though these parts are constructed and fitted together according to a definite plan. The human race, then, is not like the engine but like the tree. It is not a mechanism but an organism. God did not realize His plan of humanity by creating, say two billion different individual beings, each occupying his own place in the whole, but nevertheless without sustaining any vital relationship to the rest of mankind. He might have done so. He evidently created the angels in this manner. But He did not do so with the human race. He created just one man, and from that one

man He formed one woman, and from these two the whole race of mankind developed. This implies, that in Adam God created the human race. Then Adam stood in paradise, all alone, human nature was there, and it was there completely, though in principle. True, this human nature had not displayed itself in all its abundance and fullness. This was only to be accomplished thru the millions and millions that were to be born from him. But a fact it remains that in Adam the human nature was present completely. Nothing was ever added to that human nature from without after it had been created. All that was to appear of this human nature after Adam was simply a further and organic development of this same human nature. And, therefore, even as in case of a tree the smallest branch and twig and the remotest leaf and fruit are vitally connected with the root of the tree, so are we all organically related not only to our fathers and grandfathers, but just as really to our first father in paradise. The human nature as we each severally as individuals represent it today is after all a development of the human nature as it was in Adam. To trace this relation is, of course, out of the question. But if we could but trace it we would find how with a thousand veins and vessels and fibers we are very actually connected with Adam, the root of our organism.

For this same reason it must be strictly maintained, as also the Heidelberger points out, that our human nature was corrupted in paradise. Not merely Adam's human nature was defiled because of his sin, but our human nature. It is not so, therefore, that every child first commits a sinful deed of his own, and because of this individual sin of his own defiles his individual human nature. That is the Armenian conception. But from conception and birth on our nature is corrupt. We are born into a corrupt human nature, into a human nature, that was corrupted thru the sinful deed, the absolute sin which Adam committed in paradise. Adam was the root of the organism. And when he sinned and became corrupt because of his sin, the entire organism was corrupted in its very root. From Adam, the

sinner, never any other human nature than a corrupt one could possibly develop. And it is into that corrupt human nature that we are born.

This will hold good even for our actual sins. Our actual sins are after all the outgrowths of the principle sin Adam committed in the garden. Just because he was the root of the organism, and the entire human race was principally in him, the sin he committed was also a root-sin, a principal sin, a sin as he alone could possibly commit. And even as our individual human natures are after all only a further display and development of the human nature as it was present in Adam, so also our actual sins are the fruit and the further development of the root-sin Adam committed in paradise.

But, and here is the idea we tried to emphasize and explain in our previous articles, the element of responsibility enters in here. After all the organism of the human race is not a tree. The difference is exactly that the members of the human organism are moral beings. They are responsible. Man is himself responsible for all he does. Repeatedly it is emphasized in Scripture, that we shall be judged according to our works. We shall bear the punishment of our own guilt, and the children are not to be punished for the sins of their fathers. And, therefore, we may depend on it, if the child is punished, even before it has committed any individual sin, with a corruption of his nature, with spiritual death, at the basis of this corruption there must lie a guilt that makes it worthy of this death. And, for that reason we emphasized the fact, that the human race is not merely a physical organism, but that it also constitutes a judicial whole. All individualism in the bad sense of that word must, therefore, be discarded, even judicially. Adam was not merely our father, he was not merely the root of the race, but he was also our representative head. Judicially we were in him when he stretched forth his hand to reach for the forbidden fruit. Judicially we, therefore, sinned in him. Judicially we are also guilty in him. This guilt is imputed to every individual human person. It is this guilt, imputed to his

person that makes him worthy of death as a punishment, and this punishment he receives thru the organic relation with the human race of which Adam is the root.

This is the “theodicy,” the maintenance of the righteousness and justice of God in regard to the truth of original sin.

And in regard to us, it is the assumption of our full responsibility. Never must this truth be denied. Not even for the day of judgment. Surely, we shall be judged according to our works. But to our works belongs too that one great root-sin, committed by our first father and head in paradise. And in the same sense, to our works belongs the works of Christ, if by God’s grace are we in Him.

In the day of judgment we shall be like Him. Therefore, there is no fear.

## B. PSEUDO-CALVINISM

One characteristic of Pseudo-Calvinism is, that although it resembles our genuine faith, it would ultimately lead us right into the midst of the world in the evil sense of that word. Evidently, it does not maintain the sharp distinction, so clearly announced in Scripture between “world” and “world,” and hence it comes to call Anabaptism what is nothing but the only true christian attitude and must result in amalgamation with the world in its evil sense.

A second peculiarity of this new thing among us is, that it makes abundant use of reference to Dr. Kuyper and Dr. Bavinck and once in a while a reference appeared to Dr. Volbeda as if these great men would lead us in the same direction. The name of Bavinck is employed to combat the free christian school! The name of Kuyper to defend the community church! And the names of both these illustrious Hollanders are employed to maintain a certain Kantian distinction!

Mirabele dictu!

Naturally, there is a great danger in this.

Of course, it is far from me to accuse the men that employ these names in this way of intentional deception. On the contrary, I believe they

are honest both in their conviction and methods. They understand Kuyper and Bavinck as they quote them.

And yet one feels immediately there is something wrong, somewhere. Anyone that is acquainted with Kuyper knows that he cannot be used correctly in defense of this Pseudo-Calvinism.

What, then, is the trouble?

Naturally, they don't understand Kuyper and Bavinck and hence, they unintentionally quote them wrongfully.

About this feature a few words next week.

—Holland, Mich.



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