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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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And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work; after the work of the ephod thou shalt make it; of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it. Foursquare it shall be being doubled; a span shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof. And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row. And the second row shall be an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. And the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper: they shall be set in gold in their inclosings. And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes. And thou shalt make upon the breastplate chains at the ends of wreathen work of pure gold. And thou shalt make upon the breastplate two rings of gold, and shalt put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. And thou shalt put the two wreathen chains of gold in the two rings which are on the ends of the breastplate. And the other two ends of the two wreathen chains thou shalt fasten in the two ouches, and put them on the shoulderpieces of the ephod before it. And thou shalt make two rings of gold, and thou shalt put them upon the two ends of the breastplate in the border thereof, which is in the side of the ephod inward. And two other rings of gold thou shalt make, and shalt put them on the two sides of the ephod underneath, toward the forepart thereof, over against the other coupling thereof, above the curious girdle of the ephod. And they shall bind the breastplate by the rings thereof unto the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, that it may be above the curious girdle of the ephod, and that the breastplate be not loosed from the ephod. And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.

—Exodus 28:15–29 (See also 39:8–21.)

The Breastplate

The breastplate was the holy garment worn over the high priest's heart. Its colors matched the ephod: blue, purple, and scarlet linen, with golden thread worked throughout. It was made twice as long as it was wide but then folded in two to make a square of nine inches. This made it twice as thick as the other garments, perhaps to bear the weight of the twelve precious stones or perhaps to be a pocket for the Urim and the Thummim (Ex. 28:30).

The breastplate was the costliest and most dazzling of all the garments of the high priest because of the twelve precious stones set in golden clasps upon the breastplate in four rows

of three. On each gem was engraved the name of one tribe of Israel. This was the second place on the high priest's garments where the names were engraved, the other being the onyx stones on the shoulder clasps of the ephod.

The most important rule regarding the breastplate was that it must never be loosed from the ephod. It was bound to the ephod by golden chains and blue linen lace that ran through golden rings on the corners of the breastplate. Even when the high priest was not wearing the garments, the breastplate must remain attached to the ephod. This explains why, much later, David called for the ephod when he would know the will of God (1 Sam. 23:9).

He was not after the ephod as such but the Urim and Thummim, which were in the breastplate, which was always attached to the ephod.

The reason for this strict rule regarding the breastplate was so that it would always be worn over the high priest's heart. From the moment he put on the ephod, he would "bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart" (Ex. 28:29). He would bear those names right into the holy place of the tabernacle "for a memorial before the LORD continually" (v. 29). The breastplate testified of the high priest's love for the children of Israel and thus pointed to our true high priest, Jesus Christ. For "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

The breastplate also testified of Jehovah's mercy in choosing his people as precious to him, in spite of their natural worthlessness. About complaining Ephraim God said, "You are an emerald!" About idolatrous Dan God said, "You are a sapphire!" About fornicating Benjamin God said, "You are a diamond!" It was the high priest who made them so, for he had them upon his heart, redeeming them from their sin and carrying them unto God.

In your unworthiness and sin, remember your high priest, who bears you on his heart and whose love has made you a precious jewel in the sanctuary of God!

—AL

FROM THE RAMPARTS

The Life of James Arminius (5)

When controversy arose around Arminius' teaching on Romans 7, he declined to debate the doctrine of predestination, insisting that neither the sermon nor the passage had anything to do with that subject. He could not employ that tactic when he came to Romans 9. As one biographer notes, while predestination was "just under the surface" in Arminius' treatment of Romans 7, with Romans 9 Arminius finally revealed what he truly believed about predestination and the sovereignty of God in salvation.¹

As with Arminius' sermon on Romans 7, his sermon on Romans 9, preached in Amsterdam, has not survived. What we do possess, however, is a letter he wrote to Gellius Sneecanus, a former Roman Catholic priest who had earlier published a work in which he asserted that "the doctrine of conditional predestination is not only conformable to the word of God but cannot be charged

with novelty."² When Sneecanus later published another work applying that same reasoning to Romans 9, Arminius wrote to express his appreciation for Sneecanus' approach and to set forth his own interpretation of the chapter. This letter thus serves as Arminius' clearest statement of his understanding of Romans 9.

Confessions

Before examining Arminius' treatment of Romans 9, it is helpful to regain our Reformed bearings by considering what the Belgic Confession teaches concerning predestination. By looking first at this confession, we can see what Arminius, as a Reformed pastor, was bound to uphold in his ministry. More importantly, it provides the proper doctrinal foundation, so that when we turn to Arminius' teaching, our feet are already set upon solid Reformed—that is to say, scriptural—ground.

¹ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan [Francis Asbury Press], 1985), 193.

² Bangs, *Arminius*, 193.

In article 13, titled “Divine Providence,” the Belgic Confession teaches that nothing happens in the world apart from the appointment of God, including sin and everything we would ordinarily call evil. The confession maintains both that God governs sin and that God is not the author of sin. And when we acknowledge that this truth stretches beyond the limits of our understanding, we rest content as disciples of Christ and refuse to pry curiously into what God has not revealed.

Article 16, titled “Eternal Election,” explicitly teaches God’s sovereign election and reprobation, based not on foreseen faith or unbelief but solely on the eternal and sovereign good pleasure of God.

We believe that, all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, merciful and just: merciful, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he in his eternal and unchangeable counsel, of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

Note carefully: God delivers and preserves from perdition those whom he has chosen in his eternal and unchangeable counsel. Here we have a decree of God concerning the future state of men: that some are saved from perdition, according to his eternal purpose, before they do any good or evil. The cause of this election is not found in man but in God’s “*mere goodness*” and “*without any respect to their works.*”

As for those whom he does not deliver, God reveals his justice by leaving them “in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.” This “leaving” is not a passive neglect but an active decree of reprobation: by not saving them from their sin, God has sovereignly determined that they remain in it.

Scripture

Among the proof texts cited for this doctrine is Romans 9:17–18, where scripture teaches that God raised up Pharaoh for the very purpose of hardening him, “that [God’s] name might be declared throughout all the earth.”

Romans 9 is one of the clearest statements of predestination in all of scripture. While many doctrines are taught by good and necessary consequence, this one is stated *explicitly*. The apostle affirms that before any person has done good or evil, God has predestined some men to eternal life and others to eternal death. Indeed, even in the case of the twins Jacob and Esau, before they were born God declared, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:13).

The charge that unbelief levels against this doctrine is that it makes God the author of sin. Paul answers this directly in Romans 9:14: “God forbid.” And for the one who persists in such objections, Paul responds: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (v. 20). As the potter, God has the right to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor, “to make his power known” upon the vessels of wrath and “that he might make known the riches of his glory” upon the vessels of mercy (vv. 21–23).

Romans 9 presents God as wholly sovereign and infinitely beyond human comprehension, one who takes counsel of no man and whose mind no man can fathom. The believer’s only fitting response is not to pry curiously into the secret things of God but to join Paul in confessing, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

Arminius’ View

Romans 9 was a problem for those who objected to predestination as taught by Calvin and Beza in Geneva. Arminius himself admitted as much: “I freely confess that that part [of scripture] always seemed to me enveloped in the deepest shade, and most difficult of explanation.”³

³ James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols, vol. 3 (London, 1825; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 485.

Difficult, indeed, but only for the man unwilling to bow his neck to the text's plain meaning. Romans 9 could hardly be clearer: God is the potter; humanity is the clay. Out of the same lump, God forms one vessel to honor and another to dishonor, and he does so before the individuals have done any good or evil. Why? Because it pleased him. And when men object, as they surely will, the apostolic response is not to soften the truth or argue the objectors into submission but to silence them: "Who art thou that repliest against God?"

This was not acceptable to Arminius. Why not? Was it because he could not make sense of it logically? Was it that his brilliant mind could not grasp how God could be absolutely sovereign over sin and yet not be the author of sin? Was that English Calvinist right who said that Arminianism is the religion of common sense, whereas Calvinism is the religion of Saint Paul, so that Arminius, needing a formulation that satisfied his reason, objected to the plain teaching of Romans 9?⁴ Whatever else may have been underlying his objections, we can say with certainty that the root cause of Arminius' view was unbelief.

Foreseen Faith

For Arminius the question of Romans 9 should not be framed as Beza (whom he frequently named in his letter to Snecanus) posed it: "whether the word of God is not made of none effect, if most of the Jews are rejected," but rather in this way: "whether the word of God is not made void, if those of the Jews who seek righteousness, not from faith, but from the law, are rejected by God."⁵

The difference is profound and reveals the heart of Arminius' theology. Did God look ahead to see who would seek salvation by faith and

who by works and then decree election or reprobation accordingly? Or, as one writer put it, do the elect believe, or are believers elect?⁶

For Arminius God's decree rested on foreseen faith (or unbelief). God looked ahead to see what man would do and then determined man's destiny based on that foreknowledge.

What, then, would Arminius do with Romans 9:8–13, where the apostle teaches that God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born and before they had done either good or evil?

Arminius responded by insisting that Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, are to be understood not as individuals but as types: they "are to be considered...as types of 'the children of the flesh' and 'of the promise.'" He appealed to Galatians 4:24, where Paul refers to certain Old Testament persons as allegorized, *ἀλληγορούμενα*, to argue that the primary meaning in Romans 9 is likewise allegorical.⁷

Arminius' view was that in Romans 9 Jacob and Esau serve only as type and antitype. In other words, we should not look at these twins "in themselves, but as *types*; therefore the things which are attributed to them must be accommodated to the *antitypes*, or rather to the things signified."⁸

The concept of type and antitype is found throughout scripture and is rich with biblical meaning. The type is the representative figure, and the antitype is the reality to which that figure points. So in the Old Testament you have the passover lamb (type), which points to Christ (antitype). Or in the Old Testament you have Adam (type), who points ahead to Christ (antitype). In Romans 5:14 Adam "is the figure of him that was to come," the Greek word translated "figure" being *typos*.

⁴ Bangs, *Arminius*, 18.

⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 3:488.

⁶ Nicholas Hemmingius, as quoted in James Nichols, *Calvinism and Arminianism Compared in Their Principles and Tendency* (London: printed for the author, 1824), i; cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 208.

⁷ Arminius, *Works*, 3:490.

⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 3:493.

Another example is the waters of the flood saving Noah and his family: Noah and his family were saved through water (type), prefiguring baptism (antitype). This is taught in I Peter 3:21: “The like figure [*antitypon*] whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.”

What is striking about Arminius’ argument regarding type and antitype is that he has the type as the two classes of people—one group that seeks salvation by works and another group that seeks salvation by faith—but he does not give the antitype. Normally, we would see the antitype as being fulfilled somehow by Christ; but in this case it appears that the antitype is only the group itself, so that the antitype of Jacob would be believers, and the antitype of Esau would be unbelievers. The fulfillment is not Christ, just a group.

And it does not work. It does not do justice to the passage. Romans 9 stresses the individuality of Jacob and Esau, their shared womb, their birth order, their unborn state, their lack of works, precisely so that God’s sovereign choice might stand. Arminius’ approach drains the passage of its force because Arminius’ approach was never designed to accommodate sovereign grace.

Why did Arminius offer such an explanation? Because he was offended by divine sovereignty. He could not abide that God determines a man’s destiny without regard to foreseen deeds or decisions. And so he constructed elaborate syllogisms and enthymemes, mishandled typology, and crafted an un-Reformed understanding of the text, all to remove God’s absolute sovereignty from the text.

What was Arminius ultimately aiming at? This: God looks into the future; sees whether a man will seek salvation by faith alone or by works; and, based on that man’s decision, either elects or rejects. Carl Bangs, a sympathetic biographer, summarizes Arminius’ teaching on Romans 9 as the claim that God adopted as his children those whom he foresaw would believe and counted as foreigners those whom he

foresaw would not. Bangs adds, tellingly, “This is the answer Arminius can accept.”⁹

Arminius would have nothing to do with the teaching of Theodore Beza—a teaching faithful to the passage—that God sovereignly, of his own good pleasure, determines, completely apart from any consideration of what a man may or may not do, whether a man will be elect or reprobate. That was not an answer he could “accept.” It did not fit with his definition of justice, and because he could not understand how God could be sovereign over sin and yet not the author of sin, he created a teaching of his own fancy.

But we can say more about the reason for Arminius’ explanation of Romans 9. Certainly, his inability to reconcile God’s sovereignty with the truth that God is not the author of sin played a part. But that was not the main issue. The chief problem was this: Romans 9 did not leave enough room for man. If God elects a man before he has done any good, what glory could possibly accrue to that man? Surely there must be something man must do in order to be saved. And so Arminius—and many churches after him, following in his spiritual example—devoted himself not to plumbing the depths of God’s glory, mercy, and sovereignty in salvation but to plumbing the depths of the cesspool of man and “developing” doctrine to determine precisely what man must contribute to his salvation, all in an effort to salvage some measure of glory and honor for man.

Consider this: if Arminius’ interpretation were correct—if God merely reacted to human choice—would anyone ever object, “God is not fair”? Would anyone ever say, “Why does God yet find fault?” Would Paul ever need to silence the objector with “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” Of course not. The objections Paul anticipates arise only against the doctrine Arminius rejected, unconditional election and reprobation.

The whole of Romans 9 rises up against Arminius’ theology. If man decides and God merely

⁹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 195.

ratifies, who would ever accuse God of unrighteousness? Who would ever say, “Who has resisted his will?” Only a doctrine of sovereign, unconditional predestination provokes such questions.

The Reformed explanation of God’s raising up Pharaoh is that, according to God’s decretive will, Pharaoh was appointed to harden his heart so that God’s power might be displayed; and according to God’s preceptive will, Pharaoh was commanded to repent and believe, such that his refusal was wholly his own fault. These are sometimes called God’s hidden and revealed wills.

The response to the weakness of our minds in grasping how God can be sovereign over sin yet not the author of it is not to object but to bow. Submit to the text. Acknowledge that God is God and that his judgments are unsearchable and his ways past finding out.

Arminius refused. He mocked the faithful interpretation of Romans 9, declaring, “And it is wonderful in what labyrinths they involve themselves, blinded either by unskillfulness or by prejudice, or rather by both.”¹⁰ He treated divine mystery as theological incompetence.

How did Arminius explain a verse like Romans 9:19: “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” He said that the chapter clearly teaches that God wills to harden those whom God *foresees* will not believe. “For nothing is plainer in Scripture than that sinners persevering in their sins against the patience of God, who invites them to repentance, are those whom God wills to harden.”¹¹

Snecanus, the man to whom he wrote, taught a conditional predestination; and with this Arminius wholeheartedly agreed. For him everything came down to contingency. Man’s

salvation is not determined by divine decree; it is determined by the decisions and actions of man. God waits for man to act before himself acting. Man’s act of believing (or not believing) precedes God’s act of determining. Man acts first; then God acts.

Arminius was shrewd. And subtle. He said that Romans 9 was only about justification by faith, a doctrine no Reformed man would object to defending. Who could find fault with a man whose only purpose was to defend the doctrine of justification by faith against those who were teaching justification by works? I imagine that in this instance Arminius might even have been comfortable defending justification by faith *alone*. It merely happened to be man’s act of believing that, in Arminius’ view, became the basis upon which God then determined a man’s eternal state.

When error comes into the church, that error is subtle. It comes into the church clothed in the language of grace. Was there a man who spoke more of Jesus, grace, mercy, and love than Arminius? He wore those words out. Arminius, in fact, taught that what separates one man, who believes, from another man, who does not believe, is grace.¹² Yet for all that, his teaching was not the gospel of grace; but it was another gospel, which is no gospel. His doctrine binds men, either driving them to despair because they cannot do the one thing he says is necessary or making them Pharisees, confident in their own righteousness.

The Canons of Dort, when the synod was finally able to convene, taught that the doctrine of election and reprobation set forth in Romans 9 gives believers “unspeakable consolation.” Yet this same truth, the Canons warn, is one that “men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction” (Canons 1.6).

¹⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 3:505.

¹¹ Arminius, *Works*, 3:506.

¹² As Bangs puts it, “Grace rescues free will, but not without the choice of the will thus rescued” (Bangs, *Arminius*, 216). This is to gut grace of what made it grace in the first place. Grace that is not everything for nothing is not grace; it is a debt that is paid. Man has to play a part, and “the part man plays is believing” (Bangs, *Arminius*, 216).

Postscript

In 1598 William Perkins (1558–1602), a theologian and professor at Cambridge University, wrote a pamphlet defending predestination. In this pamphlet he wrote that “no good thing can be done unless God doth absolutely will and work it,” and “no evil can be avoided unless God do hinder it.” He went on to teach that we know God’s will “not only by the written word, or revelation, but by the event. For that which cometh to pass doth therefore come to pass because God hath willed that it come to pass.”¹³

Arminius, who admired Perkins, nevertheless rejected Perkins’ position on predestination. He drafted a lengthy response to Perkins, though Perkins inconveniently died before he could read it. Carl Bangs comments that “in the midst of the complexity and disorder of the incoherent document, however, are the most complete ingredients of Arminius’s doctrines of grace,” and later observes that “it is the basic document of Arminianism.”¹⁴

In this work Arminius argued that man is predestinated as a sinner. If predestination concerns man only after the fall, then, so Arminius reasoned, predestination takes place after God has seen what a man will do with the offer of salvation. In effect this destroys predestination entirely and leaves God reacting to man’s choice. Arminius could not fathom how predestination could occur before Jacob and Esau’s “having done any good or evil” without making God the author of sin.

Arminius himself put the difficulty this way:

*I should wish it to be explained to me how God can really from His heart will him to believe in Christ, whom He wills to be alien from Christ, and to whom He has decreed to deny the necessary helps to faith: for this is not to will the conversion of any one.*¹⁵

Perkins had explained this by setting forth the distinction between God’s revealed will and his hidden will, which Arminius rejected as “useless subtleties,” according to Bangs.¹⁶ For Arminius the issue always came down to the free will of man. Either man was completely free to choose good or evil, in which event he was responsible for the outcome, or God was the author of sin.

Arminius should have submitted himself to the creed he was bound to follow. In article 13 the Belgic Confession admonishes the child of God,

as to what [God] doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into it farther than our capacity will admit of, but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which he has revealed to us in his word, without transgressing those limits.

He should likewise have heeded Calvin, whose writings, including the *Institutes*, Arminius carefully studied and whom we will quote here at length.

With Augustine I say: the Lord has created those whom he unquestionably foreknew would go to destruction. This has happened because he has so willed it. But why he so willed, it is not for our reason to inquire...And let us not be ashamed, following Paul’s example, to stop the mouths of the wicked, “Who are you, miserable men, to make accusation against God?” [Rom. 9:20 p.]...Why does not some fear at least restrain you because the history of Job as well as the prophetic books proclaim God’s incomprehensible wisdom and dreadful might?

¹³ Bangs, *Arminius*, 208.

¹⁴ Bangs, *Arminius*, 209.

¹⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 320; emphasis is Arminius’.

¹⁶ Bangs, *Arminius*, 210.

If your mind is troubled, do not be ashamed to embrace Augustine’s advice: “You, a man, expect an answer from me; I too am a man. Therefore, let both of us hear one who says, ‘O man, who are you?’ [Rom. 9:20]. Ignorance that believes is better than rash knowledge. Seek merits; you will find only punishment. ‘O depth!’ [Rom. 11:33.] Peter denies; the thief believes. ‘O depth!’ Thou seekest reason? I tremble at the depth. Reason, thou; I will marvel. Dispute, thou; I will believe. I see the depth; I do not reach the bottom. Paul rested, for he found wonder. He calls God’s judgments ‘unsearchable,’ and thou settest out to search them? He speaks of his ways as ‘inscrutable’ [Rom. 11:33], and thou dost track them down?” It will do us no good to proceed farther, for neither will it satisfy their petulance nor does the Lord need any other defense than what he used through his Spirit, who spoke through Paul’s mouth; and we forget to speak well when we cease to speak with God.¹⁷

Perkins’ understanding of the scope of the command of God to believe and the promise of God to save also came under the scrutiny of Arminius. Perkins, according to Bangs, “had taken the position that the ‘promise of the Messiah’ or the offer of salvation made by God and the ‘commandment to believe’ are to be distinguished, and that the command is more general than the promise.”¹⁸ In Reformed theology the external call of the gospel is universal and indiscriminate—“promiscuous,” according to the Canons of Dordt—but the saving promise of that gospel is applied only to the elect through the inward work of the Spirit.

Arminius rejected this distinction and asserted that “the promise, as made, and the command to believe, extend equally widely.”¹⁹ That was the seed of what is now called the well-meant offer of the gospel: the idea that God sincerely wills the salvation of those who hear the external call, and what distinguishes one man from another is what that man does with the offer. God desires the salvation of all who hear that call, but his will is thwarted when a man does not do his part, namely, believe.

The well-meant offer of the gospel appeals to men because it accords with their sense of justice, but it is contrary to the word of God and turns the sovereign God of the Reformed faith into the powerless God of Arminianism.

And this is precisely what Arminius’ view does: it renders God powerless. He cannot even accomplish what he wills to accomplish, namely, the salvation of all who hear the external call. Perkins saw the unavoidable implication of such a position. In his treatise he wrote that if the grace of God can be rejected by the man to whom it is given, then “sin, Satan, the world, death, and hell are more mighty than Christ the Redeemer.”²⁰

In responding to this Arminius attempted to walk a tightrope: he refused to deny free will, yet he was careful not to embrace a full Pelagian affirmation of it, as Bangs observes. His solution was to invoke grace, grace that restores free will just enough to enable a man to choose faith. Arminius believed that in this way he avoided making God wholly powerless, since God provides the grace that assists the will.

Bangs summarizes Arminius’ position in a way that does not salvage the theology at all—though that fact would not trouble Bangs in the least: “In all of this man does nothing apart

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 3:23.5, 952–53.

¹⁸ Bangs, *Arminius*, 214.

¹⁹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 214, quoting James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1, 307.

²⁰ Bangs, *Arminius*, 215, citing Perkins, *Works*, II:605.

from grace: he earns nothing, he contributes nothing; but he chooses freely, and it is a choice which he can refuse to make, for grace is not an irresistible force.”²¹ Such is the powerless grace of the powerless God of Arminianism, the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel,

²¹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 216.

and any church that teaches or tolerates such instruction.

Having considered Arminius’ teachings on Romans 7 and 9, we now turn back to the biography and life of Arminius, which life included a move from Amsterdam to Leiden.

—DE

HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

December 8, 1921

(p. 757)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article CXXXVIII: The New King and His Kingdom: Under the Law

“And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of God of none effect.”—Gal. 3:17

Thus far it has been our purpose to trace the organic, ever advancing and progressing development of the covenant and kingdom of God in the world.

We followed this development from paradise in the promise of the seed of the woman, through the line of Seth to Noah and the time of the flood. We further traced the development of the same covenant and kingdom from Noah, through the line of Shem to Abraham. And lastly we treated the covenant as it was more definitely established with Abraham and his seed, and marked by the sign of circumcision.

We tried to make clear that the development of God’s covenant is always organic. And this means, in the first place, that there is a steady growth, a gradual advance of one and the same covenant. It is not every time a new, a different covenant, displacing the old one, as Coccejus had it. But it is the same covenant essentially that is revealed in Paradise, that is following the line of Seth, that is established with Noah as

embracing all things, that is established with Abraham and his seed. And this covenant progresses and develops organically. The progress never stops, is never checked, still less does it ever retrace its steps to a former stage of development. Even as you cannot stop the growth of a tree; even as you cannot expect that the tree regresses and grows smaller at times, in order then to advance again in its development; so the development of God’s covenant is gradual and steady, always advancing toward the final goal: the eternal tabernacle of God with men and the kingdom of glory. One period in the history of this development is preparatory for the next and leads up to the next form until the final goal is reached. And thus it is characteristic of the old dispensation that it prepares for the new, always points forward to the new, and while certainly the new dispensation is that of fulfillment and points back to Christ and his atoning work, it still points forward to the Parousia and prepares the way for it.

It is for that reason that the covenant follows the line of continued generations, the organic development of the human race. The rule is always, “thou and thy seed.” In paradise it is the seed of the woman, realized in the generations

of Seth. At the time of Noah it is he and his seed that are embraced by this covenant, realized in the generations of Shem. And when the covenant is established with Abraham this is no different. Thus also when the new dispensation is heralded in and its first message is sounded to the astonished audience in Jerusalem on Pentecost, the same general rule is announced: "Unto you is the promise and to your children." Always developing organically in the line of generations.

It is, however, for the same reason that not all the children of the flesh are also children of the promise. As in any organism there are dead branches, so also with regard to the organic development of God's covenant. There are dead branches that are naturally connected with the generations of God's people, yet spiritually separated and distinct from them. Ishmael is cast out. Esau is a fornicator. And among Israel not all are Israel that are called by that name. There are children of the covenant and of the kingdom that shall be cast out. There are dead branches in the organism. And even in the sphere of God's covenant as it manifests itself historically in the world the free and sovereign election of God makes separation.

On the other hand, this organic development also explains that we meet with live branches where, superficially considered, we would not have expected them. Thus we meet with Melchisedec, Ruel or Jethro, and probably also Abimelech. For we still maintain that the interpretation that assigns to these men a place outside of the holy line is an erroneous one. You can never explain Melchisedec and all that Scripture tells us about him if you make of him a mere heathen, living by natural light. But you can explain him and the other men very well if you remember that the covenant at the time of Abraham still embraced far more than this father of believers, though he is singled out as the father of the future people. Shem and an entire company of God's people are still living at the time, and many years after the call of Abraham. And Jethro is a descendant of Abraham and Keturah. What we read of these men is easily understood if we remember their

intimate connection with the main line of God's covenant in the world.

With Israel, particularly with the law-giving at Sinai, we enter upon a new period of development. God gives his covenant and kingdom a definite form and manifestation in the world, even though this form is typico-symbolical, a shadow of things to come. And he does this by establishing his covenant with and his kingdom among a single nation, and, in the second place, by giving to that nation an entire body of laws that is to guide them, and actually make them realize their calling as God's people in the world.

The covenant-people of God are placed under the law.

When we speak of the law in this connection, we use the term in the sense in which the Apostle Paul employs it in his letter to the Galatians. It then includes not only the decalogue, but the entire body of legislation given to Israel through the mediation of Moses, laws civil, ceremonial, and moral. The words used for law in general in the Old Testament are "Torah," "Micwah" and "Edhah." Of these the last means testimony and presents the law as witnessing of the principles established by Jehovah as a basis upon which he deals with his covenant people. The second, Micwah, refers to the law as a command from God, a charge, demanding obedience. The first, Torah, is the word most generally used and, perhaps, the most significant. It comes from a root that signifies "to throw." This meaning is applied to the throwing out of the hand for the purpose of pointing out. And thus the word means to direct, to point out the way. It expresses one of the main purposes of the law. The law was to direct Israel. It was to point out the way to the child under bondage, to the minor who still was in need of minute direction. This is actually what the law does. It does not only lay down general rules according to which Israel was to walk before its covenant God, leaving ample liberty of action, but it prescribes in minutest detail all the way, from step to step, in which Israel is to walk. The great moral and

spiritual principles are announced in the decalogue. But the ceremonial law, Israel's outward religious life, is carefully mapped out. The plan of Jehovah's dwelling is shown to Moses in detail, the sacrifices, feast days, etc., are minutely prescribed. And what is true in regard to the ceremonial law of Israel applies also to its civil law. It determines the relation of Israelite to Israelite, of master and servant or slave, of man and wife, of the people to their animals and their land, etc., all with such emphasis on detail as to leave little or nothing to the free and spontaneous action of the Old Testament people of God. It directed, pointed out the way, carefully, painstakingly, from step to step, in which Israel was to walk before Jehovah.

This body of laws is not to be explained from naturalistic sources as to its origin. It is the product of revelation. Never must we allow the theory to be accepted among us, as if the Mosaic law was partly a copy, partly a higher development and purification of what was originally heathen legislation. There is, no doubt, similarity in certain respects between parts of the code of Hammurabi and the Mosaic code. But, in the first place, it should never be forgotten that the dissimilarity between the two codes is far greater than the similarity; and, secondly, the similarity can easily be explained in a manner directly the opposite from that of the higher critics. At any rate, the Mosaic law is never to be explained in a naturalistic way. From merely

natural sources, without special revelation, there never would have been a Mosaic law. No more than sacred history can be explained from profane history, by naturalistic causes, no more can you explain Israel's law from the development of law in the world in general. If you confuse profane and sacred history, you will lose the latter. Sacred history is always an act of God. It is God's wonder history in a sin cursed world. Isaac is the wonder child. His birth is never to be explained naturalistically. Israel is the wonder people of God. Its deliverance from Egypt, its wanderings through the wilderness, its being nourished with the wonder bread and the wonder water, its conquest of the land of promise, its entire history culminating in the appearance of the wonder child, Immanuel, all this cannot be explained from historical and natural causes in general. And the same is true of its laws. It was a body of legislation given by God through special revelation to his wonder people Israel in order that it might be able to realize its calling in the world. True, the law was given for more than one purpose and produced more than one effect. This we hope to see in the future in the light of Scripture. But so much must be clear, that the law and the people belong together, and that no more than you can explain the people from general, naturalistic causes, no more can you trace its laws to a general Babylonian source. They are the gift of revelation.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

