



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 4

MAY 2, 2026

*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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Editor: Rev. Andrew Lanning
From the Ramparts Editor: Dewey Engelsma

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And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

—Exodus 31:12–17

The Sign of the Sabbath

Having given Moses the law and all the instructions for the tabernacle and the service of his name, God here concluded his instruction in the mount. It is a passage to be marked well, for it is the climax and crescendo of God’s speech to Moses upon Sinai. Just before he sent Moses back down the mountain, God spoke to him—and speaks to us—the most lovely promise concerning the sabbath day. Let us listen in, for we shall hear glad tidings of great joy.

As his final word of instruction, God ordained the sabbath day *as a sign of his covenant* with Israel. Oh, yes, God had already ordained the sabbath day (Ex. 20:8–11). But here God ordained the sabbath day as a sign of his covenant. Just as circumcision was an Old Testament sign of God’s covenant with his people (Gen. 17:11; Rom. 4:11), so also the weekly sabbath would now be a sign of God’s covenant with his people.

Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations...Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever. (Ex. 31:13, 16–17)

The sabbath as a sign of God’s covenant? This is a most unexpected use of the sabbath. But it overflows with comfort for the child of God. For in the sign of the sabbath is the gospel of our rest and refreshment in and with God through Jesus Christ.

How was the sabbath a sign of God’s covenant? First, the grouping of seven days into one week is entirely divine. There is no indication anywhere in the creation that a week should consist of seven days, with one day set aside for rest. There are astronomical indications of what a day is (one cycle of light and dark). There are astronomical and tidal indications of what a month is (all the moon phases, from new moon to full moon and back again). There are astronomical and seasonal indications of what a year is (one revolution around the sun or from planting to harvest and back to planting again). But there are no astronomical, seasonal, tidal, or any other natural indications that seven days makes a week. Indeed, Egypt under the Pharaohs, from whom Israel had just been freed, followed a ten-day week. The only reason that seven days made one week for Israel was because “in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested” (Ex. 31:17).

Second, the sabbath pattern of working for six days and resting for one day distinguished Israel from all the other nations. The Egyptians did not keep the sabbath. The Hivites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites of Canaan did not keep the sabbath. Those other nations certainly had their own pagan festival days and seasonal revels. But the sabbath was unique to Israel. Among all the nations around her, only Israel kept it. “Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you” (Ex. 31:14).

Third, because Israel’s sabbath was the same as Jehovah’s sabbath, the sabbath was a sign that, among all the nations of the world, Israel alone belonged to God. God’s covenant of grace and friendship was not with other nations but with Israel alone. God claimed Israel alone as his people, and thus Israel alone had the right to claim Jehovah as her God. To no one else did God speak the covenant formula, “I am your God, and you are my people.” Thus no one but Israel could say to God, “We are thy people and the sheep of thy pasture” (see Ps. 100:3). Jehovah had worked six days and rested on the seventh. Israel worked six days and rested on the seventh. It was the sabbath sign of the covenant that Israel belonged unto God.

And how blessed to belong unto God! For he who belongs unto God enters into God’s rest and refreshment. For “in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Ex. 31:17). And what refreshment is the refreshment of God! Not as though God wearies in his toil or must slacken his hand to recover strength. No, God’s rest and refreshment is his delight in the works of his hands, for all his work is good and perfect. And he who belongs to God enters into God’s rest. For God’s covenant children behold him in Jesus Christ and see that all his work is good and perfect. God has taken wretched sinners and by the blood of the Lamb has forgiven us and made us blessed children. Thus the sabbath day—the day of rest—was a sign of God’s covenant with Israel.

And how blessed is Jesus as the fulfillment of the sign of the sabbath! For the Lord Jesus Christ is our rest. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Freely, without works, by faith we enter into God’s rest through the finished work of Jesus. For in Christ “there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his” (Heb. 4:9–10).

—AL

EDITORIAL

Final Justification (1): The Glorious Return of Jesus Christ

In this article we continue to investigate the lovely subject of final justification, having introduced this topic in an answer to a letter.¹ The final justification of God’s people will be God’s public declaration at the final judgment that his elect people are perfectly righteous in Jesus Christ and thus are worthy (for Jesus’ sake) of eternal life with God in the new heavens and earth. Final justification is the glad tidings

of the gospel for God’s people, and we ardently long for it. Christ’s bride, by Christ’s Spirit, says, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20)! Come for that “day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to [the apostolic] gospel” (Rom. 2:16)! We continue our consideration of final justification in this article by rejoicing in the blessed return of Jesus Christ on the clouds of glory. The truth of final justification begins

¹ See Andrew Lanning, “Reply,” *Reformed Pavilion* 4, no. 2 (April 18, 2026): 4–5.

with the truth of the return of Jesus Christ. For the one who returns is the judge who justifies the child of God: the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Background of Jesus' Return

The return of Jesus Christ on the clouds will be a most glorious event. His glorious return from heaven will be set against the background of the great upheaval of men upon the earth. The worldwide antichristian kingdom—which until recently had been a most glittering and prosperous kingdom—will be devouring itself in civil war. The world of men—which until recently had joined together in a great push to establish the highest development of man's kingdom that the world had ever seen—will be suffering the devastating plagues and pain that God has unleashed upon them. The people of God—having been persecuted in the great tribulation of the antichristian kingdom—will continue to be hated and persecuted of all men.

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat,

and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.—Rev. 16:1–11

The plagues upon men and the persecution of the church are two of the signs of Jesus' return. In response to his disciples' question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3), Jesus instructed his church that his return would be preceded by certain signs. The *fact* that there are signs rules out any premillennial theories about the end of the world. Premillennial theories include a sudden and secret and sign-less rapture of the church into the air, contrary to Jesus' instruction that there are signs. The *nature* of the signs rules out any post-millennial theories about the end of the world. Postmillennial theories teach that there will be a golden age for the church in the world, in which golden age the institutions of the world will be Christianized. But the signs of Jesus' coming do not include a golden age for the church. The signs include the persecution of God's people, as the nations "kill you" (v. 9); the signs include "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (v. 21). Indeed, the people of God will suffer such tribulation before the coming of Christ that "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sakes those days shall be shortened" (v. 22). The hope of God's people under such persecution can never be that her earthly circumstances will improve in an earthly golden age for the church. Rather, the hope of God's people is that Christ is coming again! "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him" (25:31). The hope of God's people is not that they have an inheritance in an earthly kingdom—which earthly kingdoms are always cruel to God's people and which earthly kingdoms always perish—but

that they have an inheritance in the heavenly kingdom. Their inheritance is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet. 1:4–5). Only the doctrine of amillennialism does justice to the fact and the nature of the signs of Christ’s return. The signs are now! We do not look for the premillennialists’ earthly kingdom of the Jews. Nor do we look for the postmillennialists’ earthly golden age of the church. Rather, we look for the coming of Christ from heaven! “Behold, he cometh with clouds” (Rev. 1:7)!

The Return of Jesus Christ

The signs immediately preceding the return of Jesus will be the tremendous signs in the heavens. In those days “shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matt. 24:29). With all the world plunged into darkness, the only thing for men to see will be the glorious return of the Lord from heaven.

Then “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven” (I Thess. 4:16). Oh, blessed day! Oh, glorious appearing! For the brightness of his glory shall rend the darkness. “Every eye shall see him” (Rev. 1:7). “They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). Men will not see a mere pinprick of light way up in the dark sky. But they shall see the blazing glory of God shining from the Lord Jesus Christ, for Jesus is “the brightness of his glory” (Heb. 1:3).

Resounding throughout the heavens and the earth at Jesus’ return will be the shout of Jesus, the trumpet-voice of God, and the voice of the archangel. Christ’s voice will reverberate even into the graves, raising the dead. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thess. 4:16). Those of God’s people who are still living upon earth shall then be transformed—that is, we

shall be raised as it were from the dead without suffering death. “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Cor. 15:51–52). “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thess. 4:17).

Attending Jesus at his return shall be the entire mighty army of all his holy angels, rank upon rank and file upon file as the heavenly host. “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels” (II Thess. 1:7). With the glorious Jesus Christ at the head of his angels and all his raised people, he shall complete his return to judge. “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all” (Jude 14–15).

The shout of Christ at his return will also raise the reprobate ungodly from the dead. They will not be raised to life but to the everlasting and imperishable destruction of soul and body in hell forever. All these shall mourn and wail at the sight of Christ. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev. 1:7). “And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30).

The return of Jesus Christ will be the fulfillment of his oft-repeated promise to his church. In the midst of all our sorrows and persecutions here below, we have this heart-gladdening promise of Christ ringing through the ages: “Behold, I come quickly” (Rev. 22:7). “The time is at hand” (v. 10). “And, behold, I come quickly” (v. 12). “Surely I come quickly. Amen” (v. 20). Amidst the burden of her grief and oppression, the church clings in faith to that promise and repeats it in her continual prayer, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (v. 20)!

Jesus' Return as Judge

The connection between Jesus' return on the clouds of glory and final justification is that Jesus returns as the great judge. The purpose of Christ's return and of the resurrection of the dead is that Jesus might judge all men in the final judgment. This is the perspective of the confessions.

Apostles' Creed: "From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

Nicene Creed: "And he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead."

Athanasian Creed: "From whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." (article 40)

Belgic Confession: "Finally, we believe, according to the word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare himself judge of the quick and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it." (article 37, "The Last Judgment")

Heidelberg Catechism: "What comfort is it to thee that 'Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead'? That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person who before offered himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven; who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory." (Lord's Day 19, Q&A 52)

This is the perspective of the confessions because it is the teaching of scripture. For example,

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations. (Matt. 25:31–32)

What a comfort to the child of God as he awaits the return of his Lord. The one who returns to judge all men is my Lord! The one who returns to judge me is my savior, who has already stood before the bar of God's justice in my place! He is the one in whom I am righteous, the one in whom I have been accepted of God, and the one in whom I have peace with God. This Lord Jesus Christ, who is my righteousness before God, is the one who will judge me. The child of God—righteous by faith alone and not by works; righteous in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ alone; righteous in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ—looks forward with eager anticipation to the final judgment. He knows the judge! He knows the verdict ahead of time! For the judge is Jesus Christ the righteous, and I am already now and forever righteous in him.

Final justification in the final judgment is not a source of fear or of doubt for the sinful child of God. For final justification in the final judgment is not by the believer's works. Rather, final justification in the final judgment is granted freely and graciously. For the judge has already spoken. Indeed, the judge, Jesus Christ, has "before offered himself for my sake to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me" (Lord's Day 19, Q&A 52).

Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20).
(Belgic Confession 37)

(To be continued)

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Article CLX: The New King and His Kingdom: The Only Begotten

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***And the Word was made flesh.”—John 1:1, 14

The doctrine of the incarnation implies in the first place that Christ Jesus as he walked on earth was seen in the flesh, suffered and died and was glorified, that this Christ is personally the Son of God in the unique sense of the word. He is Son of God as none other is and can be called God's Son. He is the only begotten, the eternal Son, Son by eternal generation, very God himself.

It is this distinctive Sonship of Christ which our confessions emphasize first of all. We read in Art. X of the Belgic or Netherlands Confession:

“We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the only begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made nor created (for then he should be a creature), but co-essential with the Father, the express image of his person, the brightness of his glory, equal to him in all things. He is the Son of God, not only from the time that he assumed our nature, but from all eternity, as these testimonies when compared together teach us. Moses saith that God created the world; and John saith that all things were made by that Word, which he calleth God. And the apostle saith that God made the worlds by his Son; likewise, that God created all things by Jesus Christ. Therefore it must needs follow that he, who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ, did exist all that time, when all things were created by him. Therefore the prophet Micah saith, His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. And the apostle: He hath neither beginning of days nor end of life. He therefore is that true, eternal, and almighty God, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.”

The same clear distinction is drawn by the Heidelberg Catechism in Question 33: “Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?” And the answer reads: “Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God by grace for his sake.”

And if our confessions had been composed in our own day, it could not have emphasized a more important distinction. The distinction is an up-to-date one, and it is important in our own day to clearly draw the distinction between Christ as the eternal and only begotten Son of God and our own childship in him. Our age dislikes distinctions. The modern tendency is to wipe out all distinctions. Distinctions between church and church, disdainfully called “denominationalism”; distinctions between the church and the world, hatefully called “narrow-mindedness”; distinctions between sin and grace, mistakenly confused with Anabaptism; distinctions between regeneration and social reform; distinctions between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil. These and many other distinctions the world of today hates. And it is well that our Reformed people have their eyes open to the danger of our age in this respect. The danger is by no means imaginary that we are fascinated by this same spirit of amalgamation and obliteration of all lines of distinction. Even in our own circles one may observe the beginning of this tendency. One who holds the sharp antithesis between the light and the darkness, between the world and the church, between the regenerated and the unregenerated, does so at the risk of being designated a radical, a fanatic, a sectarian. Oh, it is so easy to go along with the spirit of the times in

this respect. It is such a charming song that sings of general brotherhoods and unity! It leads in the direction of the line of least resistance. Follow the sound of this siren's song, allow yourselves to be fascinated by its charm, and there is no battle, no struggle, no self-denial—you can love the world and have perfect peace for your soul! On the other hand, refuse to go along, insist upon the distinctions mentioned, refuse to amalgamate, and you must prepare to fight. It is so hard to be known as a fanatic, a narrow-minded, bigoted separatist. And yet, this reproach is to be expected. Christ bore the same reproach. The saints of all ages suffered this reproach. It is predicted in the word that the people of the Lord will have to go outside of the gate with him, bearing his reproach. The world doth not know us because it doth not know him; it hates us because it hated him and the servant is not greater than his master. And therefore it is indeed necessary to draw the line of distinctions and draw it sharply. And especially the modern minister shoulders a heavy responsibility in this respect.

But to return to our subject. Even as our age hates all distinctions of the same nature, so it obliterates the sharp distinctions between Christ's divine and his human nature, between his eternal Sonship and the sonship of believers, and, finally, between the sonship of believers and the sonship of all men. You see, they say, we believe with you that Christ was the Son of God. We do not deny his divinity; we do not differ with you on the question of his Sonship. On the contrary, we would emphasize that he was truly the Son of God. But, so they continue in the same breath, we are children, too. All men are children of God. Only, before Christ came into this world men did not know this. They had a wrong conception of God. They entertained the evil thought that God was infinitely far above them, a being far beyond their reach and comprehension. Besides, they imagined that they were loaded under guilt before this God, and that he looked down upon them in his fierce anger. They pictured him before their mind as a despot, furious in his wrath, and in fear and trembling they tried to

satisfy him with the blood of bulls and goats. But all these illusions were removed by the coming of Christ. He was real man. And he was also clearly conscious of his Sonship. He knew God as his Father, and he told the people so. He revealed that men are the children of God and that he is the Father of all humanity. Christ said: I am a man. But I call God my Father and myself the Son of God. So are ye men, and you must understand that ye also are children of your heavenly Father. I am a man, and yet I am divine. So ye are men, and ye must learn to become conscious of your oneness with God. Don't conceive of God any more as a being far away and high above you. Don't imagine that he is some terrible despot, righteous and unapproachable in his holiness; furious in his anger because of your sin. No, he is a forgiving Father, and you are his dear children. Surely, Christ was the Son of God, and so are we his children. Just believe it and have peace. You feel that with the obliteration of the distinction between the unique sonship of Christ and our sonship all other distinctions must be removed. Then there is no distinction between Christ's divine and his human nature. Then there is no distinction between God and man. Then there is no distinction between the sonship of believers and the relation of unbelievers. It makes no difference what you believe or whether you believe. Then there is no sin and no atonement. Then there is no reward and no punishment. Then there is no kingdom of the devil in distinction from the kingdom of God. Then we must, indeed, revise our entire view, and they that still maintain all these distinctions are false separatists, narrow-minded sectarians of the sixteenth century. And the sooner you participate in the great movement of amalgamation, the better.

And, therefore, it is well that we have the distinction clearly before our mind, and that we never cease to confess very emphatically that Christ Jesus is the Son of God in an altogether unique sense of the word. We need not enter into a discussion of this sonship now, since we did so in connection with our discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity. If only we remember now that the

subject in Christ, the person of Jesus, is the second person in the holy Trinity. As such he is the eternal Son, generated from eternity to eternity by the Father, partaking with the Father of the same divine being and nature. And this Son of God, very God himself, partaking of the divine nature in the fullest sense of the word, assumed human flesh, the human nature, soul and body. He did not change into a human person so that before his incarnation he was a divine person and after his coming into the flesh he was a human person. No, the person in Christ is always divine. Neither were there two persons in Jesus, a human and a divine. He did not assume a human person. On the contrary, there is only one person, and that one person is the second of the holy Trinity. And this divine person, the eternal and only begotten Son of God, assumes human nature. Christ is one person, but in two natures, the human and the divine.

Only in this way can we understand that Christ was free from original sin personally.

If Christ had been a human person with a human father, the sin of Adam would have been imputed to him as well as to all that are born from our first head and father. And in that case he could not have been the Captain of our salvation, leading the children of God from sin and death to glory everlasting. But now it is different. Christ has no human father. He is no human person. He cannot be reckoned in Adam. He is the eternal and only begotten Son of God, a divine person with a divine nature. And this divine person with his divine nature enters into our human nature, combining the human and the divine in most intimate communion in the unity of his divine person. He is free from guilt, free from the condemning sentence of the law, free from death. He may not be born under sin and death, but though according to his human nature in all things like unto us, he is holy and undefiled. And such a Mediator we needed.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

