

G R A C E

SOUND OF

... it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ... Hebrews 13:9

Issue 169 July-August 2010

Continuity/Discontinuity Part Two

John G. Reisinger

In our previous article, we discussed various ways in which theology, rather than biblical texts, often drives competing versions of the doctrine of continuity/discontinuity. In particular, we considered the two theologically-derived covenants crucial to Covenant Theology: a Covenant of Works made with Adam before he fell and a Covenant of Grace made with Adam after he fell. In this article, I want to look at several key texts of Scripture that I believe have a direct bearing on the subject of continuity and discontinuity. Once we have a biblical foundation upon which to build, then we can construct a systematic theological formulation of the doctrine, rather than vice-versa. The first text is 2 Corinthians 5:17. We need to look at and unpack two translations of this verse. As we do, we will establish a vital point upon which New Covenant Theology rests, and we will find a partial answer to the problem of continuity and discontinuity.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV, emphasis added)

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THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON JUSTIFICATION: Part 1

A Brief Introduction to the Discussion

Steve West

[A note from the editor: This is the first of a four-part series which will be presented in the *Sound of Grace*. Subsequently, the series will be published as a booklet by New Covenant Media. We are grateful to Steve for providing this material and pray that God will be pleased to bless our readers—to the glory of God.]

Introduction

The subtitle of this booklet really does convey my intention. This is neither “A Brief Defense” of the new perspective, nor is it “A Brief Critique.” Both defenses and critiques of the new perspective are not in short supply these days (although brevity certainly is!). There does seem to be a significant lack, however, in entry points into the dis-

cussion. This is not the last word, but it is hopefully a useful first word, which will provide a point of departure for more careful study.

When someone begins to study an unfamiliar topic, it is a principle of research that they are supposed to start with a general work, and move from there to more specific works. For example, an encyclopedia article provides an overview of a topic, while a scholarly journal article provides an in-depth discussion on technical matters. If you have never studied a given topic before, the journal article is not the place to start because it presupposes that you already have a basic grasp of the topic. It may contain many excellent insights, but until

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (NIV, emphasis added)

The KJV translates the Greek noun *ktisis* as *creature*; the NIV as *creation*. It is important that we understand the difference. *Ktisis*, a noun, derives from the verb *ktizō* (to create: to produce from nothing; to form out of preexistent matter; to make or compose) and is closely related to another noun, *ktisma*. The first noun, *ktisis*, stresses the work or the *process* of creation—the original *formation* of an object. Think in terms of a founding, a doing, an act—a creating. The latter noun, *ktisma*, emphasizes the *product* of creation—the result of the work of *ktisis*.

Preachers and teachers often quote this verse to prove the necessity of a radical moral change in a person's life when that person has made a profession of faith in Christ. In this view, *new creature* refers to the product of moral transformation. The professing disciple's old sinful habits have disappeared and new and godly habits have taken their place. If these things have not happened, then the person's confession of faith is suspect. The new creature is evidence of the process of new creating, but the evidence is the significant thing. The emphasis is on the product rather than the process, which is closer to the meaning of *ktisma*. Phillips' paraphrase embodies this view of the text.

For if a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether—the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new.

A paraphrase represents the translator's personal understanding of a text put into everyday language. If the translator has caught the truth of the text, then his paraphrase is a great help. If he has not understood the text theologically, then his paraphrase will cloud the issue. I find Phillips' paraphrase helpful most of the time,

but in the case of this verse, I think he missed the original author's intention.

I have often noted that when we misunderstand a text of Scripture, we do not make just one mistake—we make two. First, we make the text say something it is not saying. If the particular doctrine we have mistakenly derived from the text is taught somewhere else in Scripture, then we are not teaching false doctrine; we are merely using the wrong text to teach a biblical truth. The second mistake, however, can be far more serious: we miss the truth the text is teaching. If this truth is not taught anywhere else in Scripture, then we have lost that truth.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul is not talking *primarily* about the morally changed believer, even though the text legitimately implies that. If we make the text mean that, as do Phillips and the translators of the KJV, we are not teaching something contrary to biblical revelation. Elsewhere, Paul constantly teaches the necessity of a changed life as evidence of true conversion. We are neither questioning that fact nor minimizing it. We insist, however, that in this text, Paul's main point is not the creature—the product of creation—but the creating itself—the process of creating a new way of knowing made possible by a historical change in redemptive history. In verse 16, Paul links Christ's death and resurrection to a new way of knowing our fellow human beings—we know after the flesh no longer. For the Corinthian believers, this meant that they would no longer judge according to appearances. Status, wealth, and power (the three significant cultural factors of the early Roman Empire) would not figure in how they viewed their fellow human beings. In the Roman world, “knowing after the flesh” meant paying attention to visible distinctions between people and enforcing separations on the basis of those visible markers. To “know” contrary

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THE CASE OF NAAMAN—PART X

2 Kings 5:15—19

Dr. Philip W. McMillin

And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant."

But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

So Naaman said, "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon — when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing."

Then he said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him a short distance.
2 Kings 5:15-19 NKJV

We see a man totally changed in character from the man who left the prophet's door in anger because his pride was injured. His religion has been completely changed, his view of God has been changed, his self-image has been changed, and his desires are very different.

Five times in this passage Naaman declares himself to be Elisha's servant. In a self-effacing humility, Naaman admits that only now can he say he knows God. He offers a gift to the prophet who has lifted a death sentence that would not yield to the power or the honors of any man. Once he urged Elisha to take the gift, but no more. I think Naaman saw that for man to accept riches for God's work would dishonor God. He saw that

Elisha had no desire to run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, for the prophet too was the servant of another, whom he honored above all possessions.

Naaman understood that what would be accepted by the prophet's God was the worship of his soul. So publicly and with assurance, this great general said without shame, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel." Hedging and hesitation have no place in the vocabulary of a sinner saved by grace. It is a bold assertion, "Now I know!"

Naaman was like Abraham in that he rejoiced to see Christ's day and he saw it and was glad (cf. John 8:56).

With a trembling heart, this man had gone down to muddy Jordan believing that obeying the command of the prophet would result in his cleansing. Once he dipped, but the hated lesion was still there. Twice he dipped, and the sore was as evil as ever. Four more times he dipped, probably hoping each time that he would see a change, but the mark of death was still unchanged. People die, hoping against hope that the rider on the pale horse will not find their door.

Six times Naaman had dipped in Jordan with no benefit. Job asked, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14:4). Probably Naaman's heart beat like a hammer as he began to dip the seventh time. I'm sure he wondered if that prophet's God would heal him. I remember a time of dread when I called on God and wondered if he would answer me or if my sore would take me to the pit.

I'm sure there was fear and dread as Naaman came up out of Jordan the

seventh time. I don't know if I could have looked until I worked up my courage. But when he looked, the plague was gone. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. I think the banks of Jordan rang. "Now I know, I know, I know, I know. I know who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. There is no God except in Israel!" Naaman knew that Rimmon was not God, Jehovah was. Born from above by irresistible grace, he knew God and he confessed him publicly. It would be common knowledge in Ben-hadad's court that Naaman acknowledged no other God but Israel's. Nicodemus may come to Jesus by night, but this man professes faith before all his servants.

I want us to notice also that Naaman now has access to the presence of the prophet. In his unclean state, he received his orders at the door. But now that he is cleansed, he stands before the man of God, and so in a figure he stands before God. That is what Paul tells us of both Jews and Gentiles when he speaks of access to God in Christ—"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). In Hebrews 6:19 and 20, speaking of those who flee for refuge in God lest judgment overcome them, the writer relates: "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." And in Hebrews 9:24 we are encouraged: "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the

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to that way was to begin creating a new community where a person's soul or heart was the significant thing.

“Regard no one from a worldly point of view,” Paul writes. In other words, “Change your worldview. Do not judge by appearances, as is the way of the world (the Roman world to which Paul and his readers belonged). Create a new world, through Christ, wherein your heart attitude, rather than your social status (your wealth and position), is what matters at the judgment.” This new world (new creation) is a reconciled world (God, through Christ, reconciled the world to himself—2 Cor. 5:17-21), a new dwelling place, a new way of being. It includes improved morals, but these improved morals stem from a radically changed worldview—a “reconciled” worldview. This new worldview is creative—it is a *ktísi*—the formation of an object.

The new object made possible through the creative act of reconciliation is the “new creation” of the church, viewed as the body of Christ, or as the “new man” in Ephesians 2:1-22. This new creation was generated by the advent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is the “in Christ” experience wherein a believer is united to Christ in his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement. This is a post-Pentecost experience; it is built on the newly established New Covenant, which derives from our Lord being seated on a throne with all power. Being part of the new creation is being “seated together with Christ in heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6). A New Covenant believer lives on the resurrection side of the cross. He is part of the new “Christ’s creation” that was established on the redemptive work of God’s Messiah and the advent of the Holy Spirit. He is part of the new kingdom. He has entered into the new age.

In the “new creation” of which Paul

speaks, **all things (KJV)** have become new, which implies that **all things in the old have passed away (KJV)**. The old creation **has gone (NIV)**. The text is clear; the old way of viewing the world, of thinking about the world and the people in it, is obsolete. If Paul is talking about a moral change, who among us can say, “all things” have, once and forever (aorist tense), passed away? In the new creation of which Paul writes, “all things” have become (aorist tense) new (KJV). That is sinless perfection if it is talking about a moral change.

The coming of new things necessitates the going of the old version of those things. Part of the “old things” that are gone is the Old Covenant. Although Paul’s immediate context in the letter is the overturning of social conventions of the Greco-Roman world, the context that precedes it is Jewish—explicitly, the Mosaic Covenant (2 Cor. 3:1-18). This is what is salient for our discussion of continuity and discontinuity. Just as there is a New Covenant that is radically new and different that replaces an Old Covenant that is obsolete, so everything that the Old Covenant brought into being has been done away with and has been replaced by something much better. The Old has served its purpose, and we have moved on to new and better things. **However, the new things that have replaced the old were clearly prophesied in the old as “coming.”** The new that came was not a surprise, but was exactly what was expected because it was promised in the old. The new and the old are both essential parts of God’s one sovereign purpose of redemption by grace through faith. They are radically different despite the fact that both serve the same ultimate goal.

Theologically, we view the move from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant in terms of promise and fulfillment. We do not start at ground zero in the New Covenant. We build

on the Old. There is only one story line in Scripture. The New Covenant does not start a new story line, but demonstrates that the one unchanging story line has moved from promise to fulfillment. This theme of fulfillment is why the Old Covenant is no longer significant. The promised reconciliation has occurred. In a sense, within the New Covenant, there is both a total continuity and a total discontinuity. Some adherents to New Covenant Theology miss this point.

1 Peter 1:9-12 is helpful at this point.

Receiving the end of your faith—even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

When New Covenant Theology insists that everything in the New Covenant really is new, we are not implying that the New Covenant is completely unrelated to what went before. We agree with the statement, “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed.” I repeat; the principle to which we ascribe is that of promise/fulfillment. The new that has come has given us the very things to which the Old Covenant believers looked forward in hope. We are not in any sense suggesting that the Old Covenant equals *bad* and the New Covenant equals *good*. We are insisting that the Old and New are both *good*, but the *New is much better than the Old*. The Mosaic law is as “holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7:12) today as it was when God gave it at Sinai, but

Christ the Builder of His Church

Fred G. Zaspel

In 1982 the Marxist government in Ethiopia closed all of the Meserete Kristos Churches and put their leaders in prison. It was the beginning of a terrible time of Christian persecution. The church went underground and continued meeting in homes. After the overthrow of the Marxist government in 1991, the church resurfaced to discover that they had grown tenfold from 5,000 to 50,000 believers.

Amazing, isn't it? But this is a great part of the history of the Christian church—advance through persecution. The church was still in its very infancy when it found that the society around it did not approve. In Acts 4-5 its leaders were hauled before the authorities, whipped, and threatened with severe persecution if they continued to preach in the name of Jesus. Yet we read that in the aftermath that “the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7). Throughout the book of Acts and on through the centuries it has been the same—“advance through storm” as one famous church historian put it. Through Roman emperors and Russian Czars and Marxist tyrants and societal paganism it seems that every attempt the adversary has made to stamp out the gospel flame has resulted only in spreading the sparks to begin new fires. Russia, China, Viet Nam, Ethiopia—consistently, history has witnessed up to our own day the

advancement of the Christian gospel at the hands of those who sought only to extinguish it.

Observing all this compels us to recall that *the church is not merely a human enterprise*. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The success of Christ's church is a cause the Lord Jesus has taken upon himself. He reigns as universal Lord, and in the exercise of his sovereign rule his church moves forward. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it”—every attempt has proven futile.

Isn't it reassuring to know that the success of the gospel lies in Christ's hands and not ours? Certainly, we are responsible to be faithful, and we must recognize that it is largely through the faithfulness of his people that Christ carries on his work. But ultimately, the success or failure of the gospel does not lie in our hands but in his. To me, that is a very comforting thought. I have seen in the pages of history and in my own life and experience enough failure to expect the whole gospel enterprise to come to a screeching halt. But no, Christ rules over even our failures, and we may be assured that his plan is not one step behind the divine schedule.

The Roman Empire and emperors—Nero, Diocletian, and all the worst of them—are all gone. But the church is still here. In our own generation

we have seen the fall of communism, one of the chief persecutors of Christians history has ever produced. Twenty-five years ago we would not have believed it, but it is dying. And Christ's church is still here and thriving, “by schisms torn asunder, by enemies distressed,” but still alive and well. In communist China today the church is thriving in staggering proportions—fifty years ago who would have thought it? Christ's promise to build his church has not fallen to the ground. His church building program is right on schedule.

What is true of the church collectively is true of each believer individually. The Lord Jesus Christ has promised to keep us all until that glorious day when the entire redeemed church is gathered to sing its collective praise to him whose reign of grace has triumphed in final victory over all his enemies—to the salvation of his people and to the glory of the Triune God.

And recall *how* this victory was won. It was won through awful persecution—through a cruel and unjust execution of an innocent man on a criminal's cross. God has a habit of this. He takes the world's worst and sovereignly works through it all to accomplish his own good pleasure for us.

IF WE ACCEPT THE DIVINE ENTRY OF GOD INTO HUMAN HISTORY THROUGH THE MAN JESUS CHRIST, WE CANNOT HELP ACCEPTING THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THE FELLOWSHIP WHICH HE FOUNDED. FOR IN A TRUE SENSE IT IS AN EXTENSION OF THE ACTUAL VISIT, SUSTAINED BY THE LIVING GOD.

J.B. PHILLIPS

McMillin—Continued from page 3

true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

What a type! We stand outside the door and receive orders for cleansing. When we obey, we are welcomed into the presence of the mighty prophet of God who brings us into the very presence of God.

In short, we come to God at enmity with him. We think to war with the God of Scripture and succeed. All sinners are like that. But the Spirit of God awakens us to the danger of our position. Luke 14:31, 32 shows what the enlightenment of the Spirit causes us to do. This is also what Naaman did: “... what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.”

Faith consists in realizing that we cannot wage war with God and win; and so we, by faith, send out a delegation and ask conditions of peace.

Justification by faith involves recognition of our inability to find in ourselves conditions of peace which God will accept, making peace with God in Christ and his work, and receiving the liberty of God by grace. How can we help but rejoice in that as Paul states? That is how access to the presence of God comes. And, as Naaman called himself the servant of Elisha

in verse 16, so we take Christ’s yoke upon ourselves and gladly become his servants.

The earth and the pardon—verses 17 and 18 are very interesting. The change in Naaman goes ‘deeper than the stain had gone.’ He knew that a sinner’s peace with God required sacrifice. I think he understood, too, that until the final sacrifice was offered, the shedding of other blood was required. Sin should be remembered and God’s cleansing looked for expectantly until Messiah came.

But I like what Naaman asked for. Naaman now knows the difference between sacrifice to idols and sacrifice to the living God. He will never again worship an idol, a false god.

The commentators seem to say ignorance made Naaman place an especial significance on the soil of Israel. They think it a sort of superstition. I don’t see it so. He was healed of leprosy in Jordan, yet he won’t carry back water from the river as a fetish. And he asks for the earth as a present from Elisha.

I think it was to remind him where and by whom he was healed, and I think that the sacrifices he offered to Jehovah would not be offered upon the ground of an idolatrous nation. He would have all Syria know openly that he served another God who accepted nothing from man’s hand as if he needed anything.

There is a relationship between the soil and his new and only God. He would offer only on God’s soil!

“In this thing may the Lord pardon...” I don’t want to get into the arguments of various commentators on whether this refers to what Naaman used to do before he came to Elisha or if it refers to something he will have to do back in Samaria.

I think, as was frequently the case, that he had been or still was a slave. The best opportunity for slaves in war-like ancient countries was to excel in war and gain honor. That raised them to preferred status in their countries.

The amazing thing to me is that having been saved for minutes or hours, he knew his former religion was false and that he now lived under the eyes of God. What he did with a free conscience before now is a troublesome specter. And he knows only the Lord can forgive. Many today don’t know half that much!

Remember, he has publicly announced his faith and as soon as he is back in Syria, his fearless resolve to never worship or appeal to Rimmon will be known. He alone, in Syria, will be sacrificing to Jehovah, bowing in prayer, seeking forgiveness of sin from heaven. That will be a public thing, known to all.

He may be Ben-Hadad’s servant, but he has left no doubt that first of all, he is the servant of the living God. That is enough to convince me—his valor, his honesty, his honor are beyond doubt. May we take as firm a stand for God as did Naaman!

EVERY MAN OBEYS CHRIST AS HE PRIZES CHRIST, AND NO OTHERWISE.

THOMAS BROOKS

CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE IS TO BE THE RESPONSE TO OUR ACCEPTANCE, NOT THE REASON FOR IT.

JOHN BLANCHARD

Christ's Greatest Trophy

Part 1 of 2

J.C. Ryle

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:39-43

There are few passages in the New Testament which are more familiar to men's ears than the verses which head this message. They contain the well known story of 'the penitent thief.'

And it is right and good that these verses should be well known. They have comforted many troubled minds; they have brought peace to many uneasy consciences; they have been a healing balm to many wounded hearts; they have been a medicine to many sin-sick souls; they have smoothed down not a few dying pillows. Wherever the gospel of Christ is preached, they will always be honored, loved and had in remembrance.

I wish to say something about these verses. I will try to unfold the leading lessons which they are meant to teach. I cannot see the peculiar mental state of anyone into whose hands this message may fall. But I can see truths in this passage which no man can ever know too well. Here is the greatest trophy which Christ ever won.

I. Christ's power and willingness to save sinners.

This is the main doctrine to be gathered from the history of the penitent thief. It teaches us that which ought to be music in the ears of all who hear

it: it teaches us that Jesus Christ is 'mighty to save' (Isa. 63:1).

I ask anyone to say whether a case could look more hopeless and desperate than that of this penitent thief once did.

He was a wicked man, a malefactor, a thief, if not a murderer. We know this, for such only were crucified. He was suffering a just punishment for breaking the laws. And as he had lived wicked, so he seemed determined to die wicked, for at first, when he was crucified, he railed on our Lord.

And he was a dying man. He hung there, nailed to a cross, from which he was never to come down alive. He had no longer power to stir hand or foot. His hours were numbered; the grave was ready for him. There was but a step between him and death.

If ever there was a soul hovering on the brink of hell, it was the soul of this thief. If ever there was a case that seemed lost, gone and past recovery, it was his. If ever there was a child of Adam whom the devil made sure of as his own, it was this man.

But see now what happened. He ceased to rail and blaspheme, as he had done at the first; he began to speak in another manner altogether. He turned to our blessed Lord in prayer. He prayed Jesus to 'remember him when He came into His kingdom'. He asked that his soul might be cared for, his sins pardoned and himself thought of in another world. Truly this was a wonderful change!

And then mark what kind of answer he received. Some would have said he was too wicked a man to be saved; but it was not so. Some would have fancied it was too late, the door was shut,

and there was no room for mercy; but it proved not too late at all. The Lord Jesus returned him an immediate answer, spoke kindly to him, assured him he should be with Him that day in paradise, pardoned him completely, cleansed him thoroughly from his sins, received him graciously, justified him freely, raised him from the gates of hell, gave him a title to glory. Of all the multitude of saved souls, none ever received so glorious an assurance of his own salvation as did this penitent thief. Go over the whole list, from Genesis to Revelation, and you will find none who had such words spoken to him as these 'Today shall you be with Me in paradise.'

I believe the Lord Jesus never gave so complete a proof of His power and will to save, as He did upon this occasion. In the day when He seemed most weak, He showed that He was a strong deliverer. In the hour when His body was racked with pain, He showed that He could feel tenderly for others. At the time when He Himself was dying, He conferred on a sinner eternal life.

Now, have I not a right to say, 'Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him?' (Heb. 7:25) Behold the proof of it. If ever sinner was too far gone to be saved, it was this thief. Yet he was plucked as a brand from the fire.

Have I not a right to say, 'Christ will receive any poor sinner who comes to Him with the prayer of faith, and cast out none?' Behold the proof of it. If ever there was one that seemed too bad to be received, this was the man. Yet the door of mercy was wide open even for him.

Have I not a right to say, 'By grace you may be saved through faith, not of works; fear not, only believe?' Behold the proof of it. This thief was never baptized; he belonged to no visible church; he never received the Lord's Supper; he never did any work

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you understand the fundamentals of your subject, you will probably not understand or appreciate the insights the article contains. Studying general works first and progressing to more specific and technical works as you grow in your understanding is the way to most effectively learn.

In my judgment, the vast majority of literature about the new perspective is technical and heavy. This is very, very understandable, given the issues and level of debate. However, the new perspective is not remaining purely in the scholarly domain where such writing and argumentation is expected. I personally know pastors and missionaries who are very receptive to this new view of justification. In a discussion after church one morning, it also came to my attention that there are people in my congregation who are reading Don Carson, John Piper, and N. T. Wright about justification. The discussion about the new perspective is not only at the scholar's lectern; it is not only in the pulpit; it is also in the pew.

As a pastor, I want the congregation to read the best theology by the best scholars. Over time, however, I have come to suspect that most people in the congregation are not going to spend several weeks pouring over both volumes of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, the works of N. T. Wright, Dunn's journal articles, and all the rest. The literature is immense, technical, and *expensive*. Piper and Wright have now offered up more popular level works, but they are still hardly an easy read for those who are completely unfamiliar with the topic. This goes for pastors as well. The pressures and constraints of pastoral ministry are well known, and it is sheer fantasy to imagine that pastors have the liberty to buy, read, and digest all the literature they want on all the issues they want. What is needed, in my opinion, is a relatively short and

concise entry point to the discussion, and I hope that this booklet serves that purpose.

There are advantages and disadvantages to any approach. One of the weaknesses in a small work like this is that the supporting argumentation will be short-changed. Conclusions will be noted, but most of the reasoning will be passed over in silence. Or, one or two key points may be noted, but it needs to be understood that these points are also the subject of supporting arguments. The reader needs to be aware that there are long chains of data and reasoning underlying the general positions cited, but such reasoning clearly cannot be identified (let alone analyzed) in a short introductory piece.

The greatest risk in a project like this is caricature, *but that is one thing I am trying very hard to avoid*. Even when positions are oversimplified, I hope it is not to the point of complete distortion. Anyone engaging in further study will tidy up the lack of nuance.

Unfair Arguments

Before examining some of the issues involved in the new perspective on justification, it may be profitable to remind ourselves of some types of arguments which are unfair, illogical, and irrelevant in all rational discussion (and especially *Christian* discussion). I will begin with a personal anecdote, because it will reveal how my own biases have tripped me up in the past, and also because it just happens to be a perfect illustration of completely unfair reasoning. Some time ago when I had been an assistant pastor for a year or two, I was talking to an individual after our church service one evening. Although I do not remember exactly how it came up, the conversation included me making some negative comments on the new perspective. To tell the truth, I had never read a word about it. I could not explain it. I did not know the names of the main

proponents, what their arguments were, or really anything about it at all. Perhaps the best way to describe my position was pure ignorance.

Because I was ignorant in both meanings of the word, however, I had no difficulty making some disparaging remarks about the new perspective. The individual I was talking with had no problem seeing how foolish I was being, and gently probed to determine how much I really knew. My crowning remark was: "I don't know very much about the new perspective on justification, but my understanding is that it's new, and there was nothing wrong with the old view!" How utterly embarrassing!

There are many lessons to be learned from conversations like that (some of which revolve around folly, pride, the tongue, wanting to be impressive, and falling on your face). There are also many questions to be asked. For example, why was I so completely against a position I did not understand? My response was a classic example of a knee-jerk reaction. Perhaps I am not the only one who has reacted that way, with just as little knowledge.

Historically, my response was a repudiation of the very Reformation principles I would have been zealous to maintain. While the tangles of Catholic theology around the time of the Reformation are more diverse than normally admitted, it is the case that at times Luther himself faced the exact same type of reaction concerning his "new" perspective. Those of us who look to Luther as a theological hero and who cannot believe that some people would put tradition over Scripture, need to make sure that our tradition does not cloud the Word of God. The watchword is *Sola Scriptura*, not *What did Luther say?* We cannot dismiss the new perspective simply on the basis that it is not the "old" Reformation perspective.

Furthermore, there are many, many

things on which I think Luther, and Calvin for that matter, were dead wrong. I am a Reformed Baptist, not a Lutheran or a Presbyterian. I do not give full consent to the Augsburg Confession or the Westminster Confession. I have read much more Calvin than Luther, but from my reading of them I simply disagree with much of what they say (the same goes for my reading of the early church fathers). Now there is of course a tremendous amount that they say which I accept with great joy! Nevertheless, the fact that the Reformers said something does not make it true, nor does it make it binding on the heart and mind of the Christian. Tradition and church history are important, but they are not authoritative.

Theological hero worship is not limited to figures from church history. There is also a very real danger that we will identify our contemporary champions and simply accept whatever their judgments happen to be. For example, I will pick D. A. Carson, because I have been blessed incredibly by his speaking and writing, and he is, frankly, brilliant. Someone else has sat under N. T. Wright, however, and profited from his books, lectures, and wisdom. So, naturally, they pick him as their hero. What happens when my Carson and their Wright conflict? My default position is that I will go with Carson, while their default position is that they will go with Wright. It is wonderful and necessary to have teachers that we respect, but we must place ourselves under the ultimate authority of the Word of God. Incidentally, I have suspected that if we made people read theology *with the authors' names removed from the books*, there would be a crisis of confidence in many places; after all, we wouldn't know what the work of our champion was, and so we wouldn't know what the "right" position was that we were supposed to believe!

There is another bad argument lurking

in the same neighborhood of "tradition." Whenever there is a "new" position or practice, invariably the charge is leveled that those who accept it "just love novelty." Psychoanalyzing our opponents this way is not only unfair; it is also atrociously arrogant. Sometimes the claim is even more subversive: perhaps, it is suggested, so-and-so just wants to get famous, and this is why they are propagating this position.

Not only is this style of dismissal uncharitable, it is also illogical. Yes, there are some people who are thrilled with novelty. Yes, there are some people who are trying to be somebody and are trying to carve out a theological reputation. But there are also people who love "tradition." There are also people who are set in their ways, who alone have wisdom, and who cannot even imagine that their cherished views are not 100% correct. What about those who have made *their* reputation as tireless defenders and preachers of the Reformation perspective on justification? It would be exceptionally difficult to admit that after decades of preaching one had been wrong about a central doctrine and that many sermons had been based on the misinterpretation of key texts. Let us not allow ourselves to think that one side is only novelty and pride, or that the other is only traditionalism and pride. Such thinking is neither kind nor rational.

Is discovering new truth about Scripture exciting? Of course it is. Even when the theology is wrong, there is an excitement that attends learning something new. Some people have been thrilled to learn the 'truth' about Revelation from Hal Lindsey or the *Left Behind Series*. Others have been thrilled to learn about the doctrines of grace, or believer's baptism, or, for that matter, open theism. In other words, whether the doctrine is right or wrong (lest I be misunderstood, open theism is the latter), it is exciting when

we *think* it is right. I have heard many lovers of the doctrines of grace tell me how excited they were to learn these new truths—for them, gaining a new perspective on something as critical as soteriology was a wonderful, exciting experience.

Gaining new vantage points or new "perspectives" is something that can be thrilling for all. I remember the first time I actually studied the book of Genesis, and the familiar Sunday School stories came alive with depths that I had never imagined existed. This was a very exciting study for me. I had a new appreciation, a new perspective on Genesis. After all, the word *perspective* is quite ambiguous. For my study in Genesis, I could say that I gained a whole new perspective on the book. But, on the other hand, it was only a deeper understanding. I did not, for example, move from being an atheist to a Christian on the basis of the study, or move from thinking Genesis was pure fiction to thinking it was historically accurate. There are changes in perspective which can bring to light a previously obscured facet of a topic, and then there are changes in perspective which are revolutionary and Copernican in nature. Two perspectives may complement each other perfectly, or they may be in total opposition and contradiction.

Lastly, we need more intellectual humility. It can be hard for pastors (myself included) to admit that the limits of our knowledge are actually very small. I remember a friend and colleague remarking that he didn't know "the literature of Second Temple Judaism from a hole in the ground." May we all be willing to admit that, if it happens to be true! Sometimes there is a pressure for pastors to know everything. But before waxing eloquent on the extra-canonical literature of Second Temple Judaism, be honest: have you read any of it? Not just a few quotes here and there, but have you

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read full books? Beyond that, have you studied it well enough to discern the themes and tensions, the points of unity and diversity? The fact that we have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran Community does not mean that we are familiar with the literature, let alone that we are experts. This does not entail an inability to understand justification: after all, the New Testament *is* literature of Second Temple Judaism! But we do need to recognize upfront the areas in which we are not scholars, so that we can be honest with others and ourselves. However, we must also never forget that *anyone with a Bible has the gospel and all the information they need to understand God's plan of salvation.* Nobody needs the Bible plus Carson, or the Bible plus Sanders, to get the

key to justification; all they need is the Bible plus the Spirit of God.

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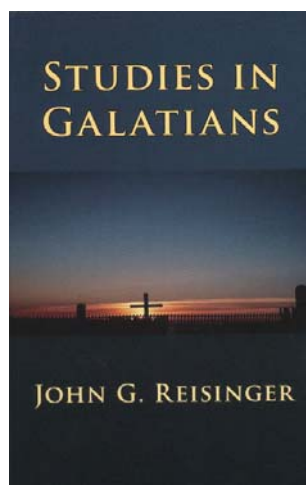
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STUDIES IN GALATIANS

JOHN G. REISINGER



Studies in Galatians is not, nor does it claim to be, a verse-by-verse exegetical commentary even though it does comment on nearly every verse in Galatians. It is not aimed at professional theologians but at "the man in the pew." This in no way means that technical books written by theologians are not just as vital as books like Studies in Galatians. It does mean that books such as this are also vital. This book attempts to bring the message of Galatians into the twenty-first century and show how Paul's message to the Galatians is a great help in dealing with some of the identical questions and problems that Paul faced in the first century.

John Reisinger is an evangelist, theologian, and conference speaker. He is well-known for a unique ability to make profound and deep truths simple and understandable. He likes to say, "God has called us to feed sheep, not giraffes." One has remarked, "John puts the cookies on the lower shelf where all can reach them." Unfortunately, this has a down side. No one will read Studies in Galatians and say, "I do not know what he meant." The reader will clearly understand what the author means and will either love it or strongly disagree.

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for Christ; he never gave money to Christ's cause! But he had faith, and so he was saved.

Have I not a right to say, 'The youngest faith will save a man's soul, if it only be true? Behold the proof of it. This man's faith was only one day old; but it led him to Christ, and preserved him from hell. Why then should any man or woman despair with such a passage as this in the Bible? Jesus is a Physician who can cure hopeless cases. He can quicken dead souls, and call the things which be not as though they were.

Never should any man or woman despair! Jesus is still the same now that He was eighteen hundred years ago. The keys of death and hell are in His hand. When He opens none can shut.

What though your sins be more in number than the hairs of your head? What though your evil habits have grown with your growth, and strengthened with your strength? What though you have hitherto hated good and loved evil all the days of your life? These things are sad indeed, but there is hope, even for you. Christ can heal you, Christ can raise you from your low estate. Heaven is not shut against you. Christ is able to admit you, if you will humbly commit your soul into His hands.

Are your sins forgiven? If not, I set before you this day a full and free salvation. I invite you to follow the steps of the penitent thief; come to Christ and live. I tell you that Jesus is very pitiful [full of pity], and of tender mercy. I tell you He can do everything that your soul requires. Though your sins be as scarlet, He can make them white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Why should you not be saved as well as another? Come unto Christ and live.

Are you a true believer? If you are, you ought to glory in Christ. Glory not in your own faith, your own feel-

ings, your own knowledge, your own prayers, your own amendment, your own diligence. Glory in nothing but Christ. Alas! the best of us know but little of that merciful and mighty Savior. We do not exalt Him and glory in Him enough. Let us pray that we may see more of the fullness there is in Him.

Do you ever try to do good to others? If you do, remember to tell them about Christ. Tell the young, tell the poor, tell the aged, tell the ignorant, tell the sick, tell the dying—tell them all about Christ. Tell them of His power, and tell them of His love; tell them of His doings, and tell them of His feelings; tell them what He has done for the chief of sinners; tell them what He is willing to do to the last day of time; tell them over and over again. Never be tired of speaking of Christ. Say to them broadly and fully, freely and unconditionally, unreservedly and undoubtingly [undoubtedly], 'Come unto Christ, as the penitent thief did; come unto Christ, and you shall be saved.'

II. If some are saved in the very hour of death, others are not

This is a truth that never ought to be passed over, and I dare not leave it unnoticed. It is a truth that stands out plainly in the sad end of the other malefactor, and is only too often forgotten. Men forget that there were 'two thieves.'

What became of the other thief who was crucified? Why did he not turn from his sin, and call upon the Lord? Why did he remain hardened and impenitent? Why was he not saved? It is useless to try to answer such questions. Let us be content to take the fact as we find it, and see what it is meant to teach us.

We have no right whatever to say this thief was a worse man than his companion; there is nothing to prove it. Both plainly were wicked men; both were receiving the due reward of their deeds; both hung by the side

of our Lord Jesus Christ; both heard Him pray for His murderers, both saw Him suffer patiently. But while one repented, the other remained hardened; while one began to pray, the other went on railing; while one was converted in his last hours, the other died a bad man, as he had lived; while one was taken to paradise, the other went to his own place—the place of the devil and his angels.

Now these things are written for our warning. There is warning, as well as comfort in these verses, and that is a very solemn warning, too.

They tell me loudly, that though some may repent and be converted on their deathbeds, it does not at all follow that all will. A deathbed is not always a saving time.

They tell me loudly, that two men may have the same opportunities of getting good for their souls, may be placed in the same position, see the same things and hear the same things, and yet only one of the two shall take advantage of them, repent, believe and be saved.

They tell me, above all, that repentance and faith are the gifts of God and are not in a man's own power; and that if any one flatters himself he can repent at his own time, choose his own season, seek the Lord when he pleases and, like the penitent thief, be saved at the very last, he may find at length he is greatly deceived.

And it is good and profitable to bear this in mind. There is an immense amount of delusion in the world on this very subject. I see many allowing life to slip away, quite unprepared to die. I see many allowing that they ought to repent, but always putting off their own repentance. And I believe one grand reason is, that most men suppose they can turn to God just when they like! They wrest the parable of the laborer in the vineyard, which speaks of the eleventh hour, and use it as it never was meant to be

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used. They dwell on the pleasant part of the verses I am now considering, and forget the rest. They talk of the thief that went to paradise and was saved, and they forget the one who died as he had lived and was lost.

I entreat every man of common sense who reads this message to take heed that he does not fall into this mistake.

Look at the history of men in the Bible, and see how often these notions I have been speaking of are contradicted. Mark well how many proofs there are that two men may have the same light offered them, and only one use it, and that no one has a right to take liberties with God's mercy, and presume he will be able to repent just when he likes.

Look at Saul and David. They lived about the same time; they rose from the same rank in life; they were called to the same position in the world; they enjoyed the ministry of the same prophet, Samuel; they reigned the same number of years! Yet one was saved, and the other lost.

Look at Sergius Paulus and Gallio. They were both Roman governors; they were both wise and prudent men in their generation; they both heard the apostle Paul preach! But one believed and was baptized, the other 'cared for none of those things' (Acts 18:17).

Look at the world around you. See what is going on continually under your eyes. Two sisters will often attend the same ministry, listen to the same truths, hear the same sermons, and yet only one shall be converted unto God, while the other remains totally unmoved. Two friends often read the same religious book; one is so moved by it that he gives up all for Christ, the other sees nothing at all in it, and continues the same as before. Hundreds have read Doddridge's *Rise and Progress* without profit: with Wilberforce it was one of the beginnings of spiritual life. Thousands have read Wilberforce's *Practical View of Christianity* and laid it down again unaltered; from the time Leigh Richmond read it he became another man. No man has any warrant for saying, 'Salvation is in my own power.'

I do not pretend to explain these things. I only put them before you as great facts; and I ask you to consider them well.

You must not misunderstand me. I do not want to discourage you. I say these things in all affection, to give you warning of danger. I do not say them to drive you back from heaven. I say them rather to draw you on, and bring you to Christ, while He can be found.

I want you to beware of presumption. Do not abuse God's mercy and compassion. Do not continue in sin,

I beseech you, and do not think you can repent and believe and be saved, just when you like, when you please, when you will and when you choose. I would always set before you an open door. I would always say, 'While there is life there is hope.' But if you would be wise, put nothing off that concerns your soul.

I want you to beware of letting slip good thoughts and godly convictions, if you have them. Cherish them and nourish them, lest you lose them for ever. Make the most of them, lest they take to themselves wings and flee away. Have you an inclination to begin praying? Put it in practice at once. Have you an idea of beginning really to serve Christ? Set about it at once. Are you enjoying any spiritual light? See that you live up to your light. Trifle not with opportunities, lest the day come when you will want to use them, and not be able. Linger not, lest you become wise too late.

You may say, perhaps, 'It is never too late to repent.' I answer, 'That is right enough; but late repentance is seldom true.' And I say further, you cannot be certain if you put off repenting, you will repent at all.

You may say, 'Why should I be afraid? The penitent thief was saved.' I answer, 'That is true; but look again at the passage which tells you that the other thief was lost.'

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LETTERS

Dear [SGNCM],
REF: Thank You Letter

It is so humbling on my part and yet a joyful moment to write you this letter once again. I acknowledge receipt of the gift of books via Rev. Hakanyanga. The parcel arrived in good condition. My beloved Pastor received the parcel on 10 March 2010. As there is no telecommunication where I stay (482 Km) from Pastor Hakanyanga's I traveled and collected the parcel on 25th May 2010. I am really grateful and feel graciously privileged to have such pastoral tools. I hope to use them to the best of my calling to the glory of God and edification of His church.

May it please the Lord to bless Sovereign Grace New Covenant Ministries and may He further enlarge your territory. Finally I kindly request for a complimentary subscription to the *Sound of Grace* journal, which Pastor Hakanyanga has been sharing to me. I will appreciate some back issues of the same periodical at your discretion.

Once again thank you very much. Your fellow saint brother and co-laborer in the kingdom service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Frank Tambatamba

Dear [SGNCM],

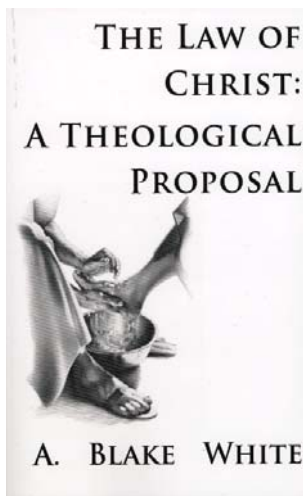
Greetings from the Philippines. I got the parcel of books yesterday, June 7, around 2:30 pm in good condition. I really thank the ministry of New Covenant Media for your kindness and love for me and the ministry here.

The books are the qualities I really like, for my own soul and for my teaching and preaching ministry. Brothers, you are doing such a crucial ministry that is impacting my life and ministry especially as I have been observing the direction of Reformed theology and perspectives even in my own particular context.

New Covenant theology provides for me a deep, solid, engaging, and responsible way of doing theology and building a worldview—even a way of responsible and godly scholarship.

Thank you from my heart,
Leo

THE LAW OF CHRIST: A THEOLOGICAL PROPOSAL A. BLAKE WHITE



“What are Christians to obey? The Bible is the simple answer of course, but upon further investigation, things are not quite that simple. For example, I am sure we have all heard a Christian condemning and calling homosexuality an abomination based upon Leviticus 18:22 or 20:13. However, if one looks on the next page at Leviticus 19:27, should we not also conclude that we should not get haircuts or shave? Why is one normative, but not the other?”

“Christianity, after all, is not simply a code of ethics. It is not just a moral system. Being a Christian is not simply trying to ‘do what Jesus did.’ No, the foundation of the Christian life is the gospel of Jesus Christ. All else flows from the good news of Christ crucified for sinners. As Michael Horton writes, ‘It is the Good News that yields good works. Salvation is not the prize for our obedience but the source.’”

“The law of Christ cannot be reduced to a list of do’s and don’ts. It certainly involves specific things that can be ‘listed’ as right or wrong, but it is far more than a list like the ten words written on stone. The law of Christ is love, but it is also the example of Christ. Everything Christ taught is part of his law, but so is everything his apostles taught a vital part of his law. Christ himself is his law personified. The whole of Scripture, as interpreted through the lens of Christ as the new covenant prophet, priest, and king, is a part of the law of Christ.”

May the Sovereign Lord be pleased to bless you, as you read and contemplate the glory of the new covenant in Christ, to see Christ more fully and more gloriously, as the full and final authori-

tative Word by whom God has spoken in these last days.

Blake White is a graduate of the Master of Divinity program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. He lives in Houston, TX with his wife Alicia and son Josiah. Blake is also the author of *The Newness of the New Covenant*.

Reisinger—Continued from page 4

its status, function, and authority as a covenant have been replaced by a new and better covenant. Remember, God is the author of both the Old and the New Covenants. He gave the Old Covenant to Israel for a specific purpose—to perform a specific job—and when it had accomplished its purpose, he replaced it. The contrast of Old and New is not between good and bad, but between childhood-immaturity and adulthood-maturity.

There is a sense in which the book of Hebrews provides a commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:17. Some Jews may well have taunted Christians by saying, “You people have none of the things it takes to have a religion. You have no covenant, no priesthood, no temple, no law, no altar, and no sacrifice. All of these things are essential to religion, and you have none of them.” The Christian response would have been the truth of Hebrews, “We have all that you have, and ours is better than yours. We have a better covenant, a better High Priest, and the like. In each case, ours is better.” The better things of Hebrews are the better things of the new creation, and there is a complete newness in them.

In the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day, newness was not invested with the same kind of superiority it is in our culture. For Paul’s contemporaries, antiquity was better. Judaism could boast a lineage that predated Plato and even Homer. Given this cultural preference for things ancient, we can easily imagine a second taunt from the Jews. It would address the newness of Christianity: “Christianity is a Johnny-come-lately. You have no history or great leaders. You are nobodies. You have no one like Moses or Abraham.” The writer of Hebrews never explicitly states that Christ is greater Abraham, but he proves it in a subtle manner. Abraham is a key figure in Jewish history. To make his case about the superiority of Chris-

tianity to Judaism, the writer first must prove Christ to be superior to Abraham. In the first four chapters, the writer proves that Christ is greater than the prophets, greater than the angels, greater than Joshua, greater than Moses, and greater than Aaron. In this list, he does not include Abraham by name; however, he proves beyond question that Christ is greater than Abraham. In effect, he argues thusly, “You want antiquity; you want to boast about great leaders with a history; you want to boast about Moses and go back and claim Abraham as your father. Fine, **but don’t stop with Abraham.** We go back farther than Abraham. Don’t you remember that your father Abraham paid tithes to a priest after the same order as our High Priest? Abraham paid tithes to a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and our High Priest is after the same order of priesthood as was Melchizedek. We had a functioning priest before Abraham was born.” What a response!

I repeat; all things are new in the new creation. As we think about continuity and discontinuity within the new creation, we find that Hebrews speaks to both. The content of the letter demonstrates complete discontinuity in relationship to the Old Covenant. However, we must keep in mind that the new creation demonstrates complete continuity in that the New Covenant fulfills the specific types, shadows, and promises recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author makes many comparisons and contrasts between Christianity and Judaism, and not between weak and strong Christians, as some people read it. The nature of the comparisons and contrasts is essential to proper interpretation of the letter. John MacArthur has said it well:

The central theme and message of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, that is, of Christianity to Judaism. Within this theme are the sub-themes of the superiority of the new priesthood to

the old, the new sacrifice to the old ones, the new Mediator to the old ones, and so on. This is the key that unlocks every section of Hebrews, and to use any other key is, I believe, to make forced entry.

In the book of Hebrews the Holy Spirit is not contrasting two kinds of Christianity. He is not contrasting immature Christians and mature ones. He is contrasting Judaism and Christianity, the unsaved Jew in Judaism and the redeemed Jew in Christianity. He is contrasting the substance and the shadow, the pattern and the reality, the visible and the invisible, the facsimile and the real thing, the type and the anti-type, the picture and the actual.

The Old Testament essentially is God’s revelation of pictures and types, which are fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews, therefore, compares and contrasts the two parts of God’s revelation that our division of the Bible reflects.¹

The realities of which the old types and shadows testified are found in Christ.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, is writing about creating a radically new way of being in the world. For the believing Gentiles, this meant abandoning the prevailing cultural predilection for judging according to appearance (status, wealth, and power). For the believing Jews, this meant turning from the Old Covenant to the New. For both groups, this new way of being in the world meant living in the light of being reconciled to God and to each other through Jesus the Messiah.

The second text that is significant for the discussion of continuity and discontinuity is Romans 6:14.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (KJV)

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1983), 129-130.

This is a startling statement, broad in its scope and especially salient for our study. Covenant theologians will agree with much of what I have said about 2 Corinthians 5:17 and the book of Hebrews. They will agree that the Old Covenant is ended, as long as we first excise the Ten Commandments out of the covenant. To accomplish this excision, Covenant Theology defines the Ten Commandments as the law of the Old Covenant. They then claim the Old Covenant is gone (in agreement with 2 Cor. 5:17), but stipulate that the law of the Old Covenant continues into the New Covenant. Their definition is not biblical, however, since the Ten Commandments are, in and of themselves, the words of the Covenant. It is impossible to separate the law of the Old Covenant from the covenant itself.

Covenant Theology, with its view of the continuity of the moral law (they refer to the Ten Commandments as the moral law), faces a challenge when confronted with Paul's statement in Romans 6:14. This verse presents an exegetical problem for anyone who views the Ten Commandments as the universal rule of life and the standard of judgment for all people in all ages. Within the system of Covenant Theology, God has given only one canon of conduct. Paul, in this section of Romans, however, seems clearly to teach that those who are united to Christ have a new life that is characterized as dead to sin (Rom. 6:4-14). In this new life, a Christian is free from the law in a sense that an Old Covenant Jew never could have been. This new life also means that an Old Covenant Jew had been under the law in a sense that a Christian must not be. Within this new life described immediately prior to verse 14, law and grace are antithetical. It would seem as though God has given two canons of conduct. One, the law, belongs to an old age. The other, Christ, belongs to a new age.

Look at the text again:

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

A few paragraphs earlier (Rom. 5:20), Paul had explained the function of the law in terms of trespass, sin, and death. He contrasted it with grace, set forth in terms of righteousness and life:

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. (KJV)

Imagine the shock devout Jews would have felt upon hearing this read. They would have been ready to stone Paul to death for such a statement. To say that God's purpose in giving the law was to "make sin abound" would be bad enough, but to say, *But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*, would be even worse. So Paul, in the next sentence, immediately raises the objection he foresees:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (Rom. 6:1)

It is safe to say that if our preaching of law and grace does not lead to this same conclusion on the part of some of our hearers, then we are not preaching Paul's view of law and grace. The context sets law and grace in opposition. I once heard a Reformed Baptist preacher say, "You will never hear me set law and grace in opposition. Law and gospel, yes, but not law and grace." Strange—Paul does just the opposite!

Romans 6:2-13 is Paul's answer to the objection in 6:1. Whatever those verses mean, that meaning must contribute to answering this objection. Paul's statement in Roman 6:14 is his conclusion to the argument he has constructed as an answer to the objection in 6:1. The verse begins with "for" or "because." Paul is saying that the conclusion in verse 1 ("let's sin more in order to get more grace")

is impossible for a child of God. It is impossible for sin to have dominion over a child of God simply because he is "not under the law but under grace." In Paul's theology, it is (1) impossible to be under the law and not be also under sin, and (2) impossible to be free from the tyranny of sin without being free from the law. Those two things go together.

In Romans 6:15, Paul anticipates another logical implication of his antithesis.

What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?

In verse 1, Paul anticipates the argument that an incentive to sin comes from a corresponding magnification of grace. In verse 15, he anticipates the argument that an incentive to sin comes from no fear of punishment. If it impossible for me ever to come into condemnation because I am eternally secure in Christ and so under his grace that I can never be lost, then does it not follow that I can live like the devil and still go to heaven? Is being free from the law, which is a facet of discontinuity, not a license to sin? Without law, what motivates and informs holy living?

Paul answers that just the opposite is true: true holy living is possible only when the conscience has been set free from the law and has been wedded to a risen Christ. Paul, in Romans 6:14, provides the inspiration for the great hymn, "Free from the Law—O Happy Condition."² I have heard people mock that hymn, changing the words to make them promote licentiousness, and then justifying their censure of the hymn. In a similar fashion, those people mock Romans 6:14. In so doing, however, they mock the gospel of sovereign grace. I challenge anyone to show me one word in that hymn, as Bliss wrote it, which is contrary to

² Philip P. Bliss, 1838-1876. Also published as "Once for All."

Reisinger—Continued from page 17

the gospel. If we understand the words in the hymn to be, like Romans 6:14, referring to justification by faith, then we will see that Bliss is preaching the same thing as was his contemporary, Priscilla Owens, in her hymn, “Jesus Saves, Jesus Saves.”³ Who among believers wants to mock that hymn?

Isn't it amazing that the very thing that a legalist believes will lead to sin is the only thing that gives power to conquer sin! It is the absolute assurance that I can never be condemned (Rom. 8:1) that makes me want to love and serve my Father in heaven.

The one word you will never hear in the New Covenant concerning a child of God is “punishment.” Discipline from the hands of a loving Father, yes, but punishment by a judge, no. No New Covenant believer will ever face God as a judge who decides his eternal destiny; that judgment is past for a child of God. We are in the family of God and are treated accordingly (John 5:24 and Rom. 8:1). We cannot be “unborn.”

Let me illustrate what it means to be “not under the law.” Christians have “diplomatic immunity.” They are free from the law. A diplomat to the United States from France, or from any other country, is not subject to the laws of the United States. American authorities cannot arrest a person with diplomatic immunity. The diplomat may kill someone in front of ten witnesses, and American authorities cannot arrest him. All that the American authorities can do is to make the diplomat leave the country. Of course, the same is true of our diplomats to France. While serving in France, they are not under the law of France, but are under the laws of the United States.

If the premise of the legalist were

correct, we would expect all kinds of unlawful behavior from diplomats. After all, they cannot be punished for anything they do. In actual fact, diplomats rarely break our laws. A true diplomat is deeply concerned with making a good impression on behalf of his country. Good diplomats want the people in the country in which they are serving to think well of the diplomat's native country.

Suppose you were riding in a car with a French diplomat, and you were in a hurry. You ask the diplomat to speed it up. He says, “No, I am already going the speed limit.” You say, “What are you afraid of? You can't get a ticket. You are a diplomat; you have immunity from our law.” His response would be, “I am not afraid of anything. My motive for obeying your laws is not fear of punishment. I am fully aware I cannot be arrested in your country because I am not under your law. It is because I am a diplomat that I will not exceed the speed limit. I do not want your country to think that France is a nation of lawless rebels. I want my behavior to show how much I respect your laws.”

The same principle is at work in a Christian's behavior. He is “an ambassador for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20) and lives in such a way that his “good works may be seen and [the] Father in heaven glorified” (Matt. 5:16).

The doctrine of justification also demonstrates a Christian's freedom from the law. In Romans 8, that glorious chapter on absolute assurance of everlasting life, Paul argues, “*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth*” (Rom. 8:33, KJV). The extent of the authority of the one justifying dictates the extent of the benefit of the pronouncement of justification. I can declare that I justify you, and it does not mean much. When President Gerald Ford pardoned, thus justifying, former President Richard Nixon, it was an act by the highest authority in the land. It

meant that not a single person, authority, law agency, or court, including the Supreme Court, could bring charges against the former president. He was free from all law enforcement individuals and agencies in the United States. He had been justified by the current president, the highest authority in the land. No one has the authority to override the president's pardon. Paul is saying that an even higher authority than the president of a country has declared poor sinners to be justified in his sight, and no one dare question God's authority. When God justifies, every mouth of accusation is stopped.

Let me give one more illustration of the discontinuity of our relationship to the Old Covenant, or to use Paul's words, to be “not under the law but under grace.”

Suppose Faith Baptist Church decides to become Faith Presbyterian Church. The first thing they do is to write a new constitution and doctrinal statement. The new constitution contains much of the content of the old constitution from Faith Baptist Church, but it also contains many significant changes. The new constitution retains the former constitution's statements about the person and work of Christ and incorporates doctrines such as justification by faith, with no change from its formulation in the old constitution. The new constitution drops believers-only baptism by immersion and adds infant baptism by sprinkling. The new constitution eliminates the congregational form of government and replaces it with the presbyterian form of government. The vital point of this illustration for our discussion is this: What is the **legal** relationship of Faith Presbyterian Church to the old Faith Baptist Church constitution? The answer is, “none at all.” The constitution of Faith Baptist Church is invalid as a legally binding document. It has been replaced with a new constitution. No one in Faith Presbyterian Church may use the old constitution

3 Priscilla J. Owens, 1829-1907.

to support a doctrine or practice that was not brought over into the new constitution.

The life and worship of Faith Baptist Church was controlled by the old constitution under which they lived. The life and worship of Faith Presbyterian Church, despite the fact that the congregation comprises the same people, is no longer under the old constitution, but is under the new constitution. The old constitution is invaluable in helping the people at Faith Presbyterian Church to understand why they believe what they do, who they are, how they got to where they are, and especially how and why they now believe differently from what they once believed. The primary change in their relationship to the old constitution is their freedom from it as a legal, binding document.

The two constitutions in our illustration function in the same way as do the two biblical covenants we have been discussing. Just as the Old Covenant ruled the life and worship of the nation of Israel, so the New Covenant rules the life and worship of the true Israel of God, the church. This is precisely what Paul means in Ephesians 2:19-20 by referring to Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as the foundation of the household of God.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. (KJV)

Nearly every commentary on Ephesians written over a hundred years ago would have said something like this: "The phrase *apostles and prophets* is another way of saying, 'the entire Bible.' It means the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles." Then, commentators began to consider the possibility that *prophets* could mean New Testament

prophets. Now, nearly every commentator will say that *prophets* must refer to the New Testament prophets. The identity of these prophets has serious implications for understanding the subject of continuity and discontinuity. Two quotations, one from William Hendricksen and the other from John Stott, demonstrate this significance.

Hendricksen comments:

The position that the term *prophets* as here used refers to the Old Testament bearers of that appellation, such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., (thus Lenski, *op. cit.*, pp. 450-453), is open to serious objections; such as the following: (1) Apostles are mentioned first, then prophets; (2) the designation of 'foundation' of the house, a dwelling shared *equally* by Jew and Gentile, suits the New Testament prophets better than those of the older dispensation; (3) according to 4:8-11, the prophets there mentioned immediately after the apostles, just as here in 2:20, are 'gifts' bestowed on the church by the ascended Christ; hence, prophets of the New Testament era; and (4) 3:5, where the same expression 'apostles and prophets' occurs in a context from which the reference to the prophets of the old dispensation is definitely excluded, would seem to clinch the argument in favor of New Testament prophets.⁴

You may find it hard to believe (as I do) that a committed Covenant theologian would make such statements. His explanation seems inconsistent with his theological system. I admire him for being honest with the text. His comments compellingly demonstrate that Paul refers to New Testament prophets and not to Old Testament prophets. John Stott goes further and points out the implications of this identity, for both further biblical exegesis and theological formulations:

The reference must again be to

a small group of inspired teachers, associated with the apostles, who together bore witness to Christ and whose teaching was derived from revelation (3:5) and was foundational. In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church's foundation documents... The church stands or falls by its loyal dependence on the foundational truths which God revealed to his apostles and prophets, and which are now preserved in the New Testament Scriptures.⁵

As Stott explains, Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:20 means that the coming of Christ has produced a historical shift of authority. Moses and the Old Covenant were authoritative for the life and worship of Israel, but Jesus and the New Covenant are authoritative for the life and worship of the body of Christ. The Law of Moses ruled the conscience of an Old Covenant believer. The Law of Christ rules the conscience of a New Covenant believer. In the conscience of a New Covenant believer, there is a discontinuity of the law as the pedagogue, even while there is a continuity of expectation: "Be ye holy as I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15 quoting Lev. 11 and 19).

If we minimize or ignore Paul's words in Ephesians 2:19 and 20 by making Moses carry authority over the worship and conscience of either the church or the individual Christian, we deny the discontinuity of the Old Covenant and accept an unbiblical continuity that negates a truly New Covenant and its replacement of the Old Covenant. Ultimately, this denial is a denial of the unique and final authority of Christ as Lord over the church.

To be continued next month.

⁴ William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 142.

⁵ John R.W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 107.

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A Twelve Point Cure for Complaining:

1. God commands me never to complain (Phil. 2:14).
2. God commands me to give thanks in every circumstance (1 Thes. 5:18).
3. God commands me to rejoice always, and especially in times of trial (1 Thes. 5:16; Jas. 1:2).
4. I always deserve much worse than what I am suffering now, in fact, I deserve hell (Lam. 3:39; Lk. 13:2-3).
5. In light of the eternal happiness and glory that I will experience in heaven, this present trial is extremely brief and insignificant, even if it were to last a lifetime (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:19).
6. My suffering is far less than that which Christ suffered, and He did not complain (1 Pet. 2:23).
7. To complain is to say God is not just (Gen. 18:25).
8. Faith and prayer exclude complaining (Psm. 34:4).
9. This difficulty is being used by God for my good and it is foolish for me to complain against it (Rom. 8:28).
10. Those more faithful than I have suffered far worse than I, and did so without complaint (Heb. 11:35-39).
11. Complaining denies that God's grace is entirely sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9).
12. The greatest suffering, the worst trial or difficulty, can never rob me of that which is of greatest value to me and my greatest joy, namely the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35-39).

Bill Izard

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