

rebel or heretic in the congregation is not performed, the whole denomination is affected. In time, it will go astray and the entire denomination will be corrupted, for the false doctrine or godless living of one part (I Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

A man or woman or family may claim that he or she or it will remain faithful to the truth, when they leave a faithful church for another congregation less than pure in doctrine. But that family, even if some in the family wish to remain where the truth is preached, is guilty of tolerating false doctrine and will bear the consequences. All are responsible for the false doctrine and all will suffer—as Israel did when Achan stole forbidden things from Jericho (Josh. 7). The family goes the dreary and fatal way of apostasy in its generations, and its children are lost to the church.

I do not know how many times I have dealt with this problem in my own ministry. Parents who depart from a true church or refuse to leave an erring church lose their children and successive generations because of their sin. Even the law says that God visits the “iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate” Him (Ex. 20:5). Parental failure to bring up their children in the ways of God’s covenant often means that they see their children and children’s children leave the church and walk in the world.

In Reformed theology, this is called “corporate responsibility.” How little is this accepted in today’s individualistic world where it is every man for himself. As I have said before, Arminianism, in all its different kinds, is individualistic, having no room for organic relationships and corporate responsibility.

The proponents of the well-meant or gracious offer of the gospel to the reprobate have no understanding of the organic either, as we saw in the last *News*.

God has provided a way to escape corporate responsibility for one in an organism who does not want the sin of the organism. He must make his disagreement known; he must refuse to follow his leaders when they lead into sin; he must leave the organism, if possible.

For example, a member of a family, who does not want to leave a true church with his close relatives, must confess his family’s guilt, as Daniel confessed the sin of Israel as his own (Dan. 9), and he must make his refusal known. In this way, he is pardoned. To give another instance, although the Christian is guilty, for example, of his nation’s sin of abortion, God will forgive him in Jesus, and out of faith he will raise his testimony against the terrible practice of murdering unborn children.

In the next issue, I hope, the Lord willing, to demonstrate from Scripture what these organic relationships mean in the work of salvation and how organic relationships are an integral part of God’s gathering His church.

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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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## **The Idea of the Organic in Scripture (3)**

Scientists are increasingly finding that the creation itself is an organism. Every part of the creation is related to every other part and what happens in one part affects every part. It is becoming more clear that radical changes made in one part of our world affect other parts in sometimes surprising ways. While such unity among all parts of creation is often most apparent in living creatures, the same unity can be found among non-living creatures as well. A forest fire can rejuvenate the entire burned area. Modifications in the weather ultimately affect life in every part of the world. Volcanic eruptions leave behind rock that, over the years, can and does become fertile soil for crops.

Within the larger organism of the creation, individual organisms, such as a tree, a grape vine, a bed of roses or an individual rose, a bird, etc., are composed of many different creatures. What happens to one affects all the other creatures—for good or ill.

To fertilize a rose is to give food to the roots and the entire plant benefits from it. But blight in one part of the rose bush will spread and ultimately destroy the entire plant.

In the vineyards of France, a rose bush is often planted at the end of a row of a particular kind of grapevine. If some deadly disease begins to show itself in the roses, some time later the vines will be struck with the same blight. This early warning system gives the vigneron time to save the vine by spraying some cure.

In the creation as a whole, the curse of God came down when Adam sinned. That curse came from God’s curse upon Adam because he was created head of the creation. The disease of sin entered into Adam and killed him spiritually; it also entered into the creation in which Adam lived and upon which he was dependent.

Do good to a healthy plant, and it will grow and flourish. Do serious harm to it, even one part of it, and it will die.

So it is in all of life. A nation is an organism. When the government declares war, you may be fiercely opposed to it, but your sons are going to have to go to war and perhaps be killed. Your house may be bombed and you will suffer the shortages that war brings. The whole nation is responsible for the war as an organism.

A family is an organism. A father who is a drunk harms himself and the whole family suffers. In a school classroom, 90% of the children may generally be obedient and attentive to the teacher, but one or two or three can be so disruptive that teaching is difficult or even impossible. The whole class suffers by not being able to learn as much as normal, for all in the class bear the consequences of the conduct of a few.

A congregation or a denomination of churches is an organism. If false doctrine or wicked living enters one congregation, and the biblical surgery of the discipline of the

*(continued on p. 4)*

## Christ's Triumph Over the Demonic Powers (2)

In the last issue of the *News*, we rejoiced in the glorious victory over Satan and his fallen angels gained through the cross of Jesus Christ: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:14-15).

However, you may not have gotten this impression from reading only the narratives of our Lord's crucifixion in the four gospel accounts. In the records of Christ's arrest, His trials before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, His scourging and being nailed to the cross, the first three hours of His crucifixion and then the three hours of darkness, where do Matthew, Mark, Luke or John speak of our Saviour's disarming the demonic hosts and triumphing over them openly?

We also have Christ's famous seven words on the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34); “I thirst” (John 19:28); “It is finished” (30); “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46); etc. But none of them explicitly mentions the “principalities and powers,” never mind Christ's making a public spectacle of them.

At the time of the cross, none of the key parties involved understood the truth of Colossians 2:14-15. The Jewish rulers thought that they had disposed of their biggest adversary and threat. Satan believed that he had defeated the Son of God. The eleven disciples saw no victory; all their hopes were dashed! Paul, before his conversion, reckoned Jesus' crucifixion as God's judgment and curse upon Him, as a false Messiah and blasphemer (cf. Gal. 3:13).

The Roman centurion, however, recognized that Jesus was “a righteous man” and even “the Son of God” (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). The penitent thief understood that Christ was entering His heavenly kingdom and so he asked to be remembered by Him (40-42). But we have no indication that either the centurion or the thief saw the cross as Christ's disarming and triumphing over the demonic host.

Here we need to grasp the relationship between the four gospel accounts and the New Testament epistles. By divine inspiration, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John relate the events of the cross and how these were understood by various parties at that time. The God-breathed letters of Paul, Peter, John and others, instead of narrating Jesus' passion week, set forth the true meaning and theological interpretation of the cross.

Thus it is a matter of true faith: faith in God's Word, faith in the Lord Jesus, faith in Christ crucified. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, we believe the four gospel accounts, which contain the events leading up to, and culminating in, the crucifixion, and the New Testament letters, which especially explain the spiritual significance of the cross.

So how did Jesus conquer the principalities and powers of the fallen angels at the cross? Obviously, this was not a physical battle and Christ was in no condition to fight such. His hands were bound at His arrest, He was imprisoned and He was nailed to the cross.

Christ did not physically disarm Satan and his host. What material weapons does the devil, who is a spirit, carry anyway? At the cross, Jesus was stripped of most of His clothes; Satan was stripped of nothing physical.

Christ did not make the demonic principalities and powers a *visible* spectacle at Golgotha. Indeed, Satan thought that he had won a public victory over the Son of God. It was Jesus Himself who was displayed before the masses, for the crowds jeered and mocked Him! Apparently, the false church and the wicked state triumphed over Christ, as if He were a vile criminal, a capital offender.

So how did Jesus Christ defeat, disarm and triumph over the demonic hosts at the cross? The answer involves the law, as Colossians 2:14 states, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

The law issues commands and prohibitions, hundreds and hundreds of them. We have broken that law millions of times. The “handwriting of ordinances” is very badly “against us,” so, of ourselves, we are guilty and condemned.

What did Jesus Christ do with “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us”? The gospel of our salvation is that He “took it out of the way” by “nailing it to his cross.” In other words, there were two entities nailed to that wooden cross: Jesus Christ (physically and according to the wickedness of man) and “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us” (spiritually and according to the grace of God).

We could even say that the handwriting of ordinances against us was nailed to the cross *in that* Jesus Christ our representative was nailed to the cross. There He bore God's punishment due to us for our transgressions as our substitute and sin-bearer!

There is another image dealing with what God did in Christ regarding the handwriting of ordinances that accused and condemned us. Not only did He take it out of the way by nailing it to the cross but He also *blotted it out* (14).

This is good news for every believer. You cannot read the accusations of God's law against you, because this extremely lengthy list has been taken away and nailed to your Saviour's cross. Even if you had that paper in your hand, it would still be illegible, for it has been totally and permanently blotted out by the blood of the cross!

How does this explain Christ's defeating, disarming and triumphing over the demonic powers? Satan uses sin and the law as his weapons to destroy and slay people. Guilty sinners are enslaved by the devil through transgressions and the law. But once the law is satisfied and sin is blotted out, we are free of Satan's bondage.

Thus the defeat of sin and the law at the cross is Jesus' defeat of Satan, disarming of Satan (who uses sin and the law as his weapons) and public triumph over Satan.

Colossians 2 magnifies Christ's atonement—“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (14)—as a glorious victory over the devil and his minions—“having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (15)! Let us be glad in Him!

Rev. Stewart