

A clear understanding and a deep love of the gospel truth of justification is even more necessary in our day than before, because now there are three main views of justification and not just two.

According to (1) Reformation Protestantism, which sets forth the truth of the inspired Scriptures, justification is God's *declaring* someone righteous (through faith alone in the Person and work of Jesus Christ). According to (2) Roman Catholicism, justification is *making* someone righteous. According to (3) the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision (heresies arising in nominally Protestant churches), justification is declaring someone *a member of the covenant community*. The person's good works constitute the grounds for his or her acceptance before God.

You will notice that this third position is a strange amalgam of parts of the first two views. The New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision, like Protestantism, see justification as involving a *declaration* but, unlike Protestantism, it is not a declaration that someone is righteous in the sight of God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ; it is a declaration that someone is a member of the covenant community or church. The New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision are like Rome in that they see justification as involving *making* the person righteous. New Perspectivism, Federal Visionism and Roman Catholicism are also alike in that they preach the false gospel of justification and salvation by man's works.

Though various places in Scripture could have been chosen, especially in Romans or Galatians, Romans 4 is a particularly good chapter on the gospel of justification, over against the heresies of the New Perspective on Paul, the Federal Vision and the Church of Rome.

First, Romans 4 contains many of the key subjects and themes that are so closely related to justification, such as, Abraham and David, faith and the promise, works and the law, circumcision and the covenant, and Jews and Gentiles.

Second, Romans 4 has many references to God's imputation: His counting or reckoning righteousness to believers. Imputation is an accounting term that refers to something being reckoned to a person's account. Perhaps never before has imputation been so viciously attacked, denied and mocked, not only by Rome but also by the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision. Out of the 25 verses in Romans 4, a full 11 of them speak of God's act of imputing, counting or reckoning righteousness (and not sin) to believers. These 11 verses occur in three clusters (3, 4, 5, 6; 8, 9, 10, 11; 22, 23, 24).

Third, Romans 4 especially demonstrates that the five solas of the Reformation are biblical. Justification is (1) by faith alone (*sola fide*), (2) through grace alone (*sola gratia*), (3) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*), (4) according to Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) and (5) to the glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*). "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:8). Blessed be God's great name for His gracious reckoning of Christ's righteousness to us unworthy sinners!

Rev. Stewart

The Idea of the Organic in Scripture (7)

It is time to return to answering questions. More particularly, we shall deal with questions that imply that common grace and the well-meant offer of salvation can be reconciled with the Bible's teaching on the organic unity of the human race.

All ideas connected to the well-meant offer of the gospel run up against this important teaching of Scripture. Arminianism, as I have said before, is individualistic; Scripture's teachings are the opposite of this. According to Arminianism, man must accept God's offer of love so that Christ can enter his heart. However, Scripture teaches that the elect church is the body of Christ. God saves a body, predestined from eternity as Christ's body, by grace alone and through faith alone.

Salvation is of a body. I believe I am saved, that is, part of Christ's body. But I am such only because of fellow saints who are also part of Christ's body. I cannot and will not go to heaven except the whole body is saved. I am a part of the predetermined whole. Only if the whole body is saved can I be saved. The body of Christ, composed of the elect, can only be saved in its entirety—not simply parts of it. The body of Christ is perfect.

The history of the world is the history of God's work of separating the chaff (the reprobate and impenitent wicked) from the wheat (Ps. 1); the bad fish from the good fish (Matt. 13:47-48); the wheat from the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-40).

Jehovah prunes the vine (John 15:1-8). In the broadest sense of the word, one could speak of the whole human race as a vine, many branches of which are pruned off so that the grapes may grow and flourish. The vine in John 15, in the narrow and strict sense, is the Jewish nation and later the visible Christian church with the branches of that vine being cut off, while only those who abide in Christ are saved.

While the tares are left to grow with the wheat in history, the separation begins while men live on earth and is completed at the time of the harvest. A corn plant is one plant with roots, stalk, tassel, pollen, cob and the corn kernels. The whole plant is necessary for the growth of the kernels. When the corn is ripe, the entire plant, except for the kernels, is destroyed. It has served its purpose.

The reprobate are for the purpose of the elect, as scaffolding is necessary for building the temple of God (Eph. 2:20-22). Even Cyrus, ungodly king of Persia, is called God's "shepherd" in Isaiah 44:28. Though he was a reprobate, God used him to bring Judah's captive people back to Canaan at the end of 70 years. There is, in fact, an old tradition that claims that this passage in Isaiah was communicated to King Cyrus by the Jews, which passage prompted him to release the captives for their return.

Question 1: "I heard a sermon on Hosea 9:15 that explains the text as if it teaches

that the immutable God changes.”

The verse reads, “All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers.”

It is important to note that the explanation of this text as referring to a change in God is a heresy that is necessary in order to defend the well-meant offer of the gospel. God loves all men, but, after all, comes to hate them and sends them to hell. That is a massive change!

To deny God’s immutability is a direct repudiation of Scripture: “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). With “the Father of lights,” there “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

The question assumes, of course, that once God loved these wicked people whom God says He hates. There is no proof in the text that this is so.

Nevertheless, the question does bring up an important point that relates directly to our discussion of the organic dealings of God with men.

“Gilgal, Where God Hated Israel,” a sermon on Hosea 9:15, is available free on-line (www.cprc.co.uk/sermons/gilgal-where-god-hated-israel).

The same reader sends in other passages cited by Arminians who appeal to them as if they proved a divine love for all men. Many of the texts are totally irrelevant to our discussion and I cannot use this column to answer the irrelevant ones.

Question 2: “II Corinthians 5:19-20 and 6:1-2 speak of the apostles (and, by extension, the church) being entrusted with the ‘word of reconciliation.’ The passage says that we are to ‘beseech’ men to be ‘reconciled to God.’ Preachers are called ‘ambassadors’ who pray in ‘Christ’s stead,’ pleading for his hearers ‘to receive not the grace of God in vain’ and informing them that ‘now is the day of salvation.’ How are we to understand these verses without referring to a well-meant offer of grace and reconciliation through Christ on the part of God to all who outwardly hear the gospel?”

This question brings us to the heart of the issue, the preaching of the gospel, and must be carefully considered.

The first point that must be made is that the heresy of the well-meant gospel offer confuses a *command* of God to all men to believe in Christ with a *gracious offer* to everybody. The Bible has many commands to all who hear the gospel, for they must forsake sin and believe in Christ.

It seems to me that this distinction is, as my seminary professor was wont to say, as clear as the sun in the heavens. I cannot see why anyone not bent on teaching heresy can possibly confuse God’s command to believe with a loving offer to the reprobate of an available salvation that He will give to him if only he believes. The only sense one can make of it is a denial of total depravity: man can of his own power of will accept the offer Christ makes to them. A denial of total depravity is a fatal error that ultimately destroys the whole truth of sovereign grace.

Wherever we preach the gospel, we are commanded to confront everyone with the

command to believe. We tell them that they are under solemn obligation to trust in Christ or else they will earn for themselves everlasting hell. It is a fact that God is in dead earnest when He tells man that he must trust in Christ crucified and risen.

The reason why God commands all men to believe is this: He created man capable of perfect obedience. Man’s loss of the ability to believe is not God’s fault but man’s own fault. God is just and still requires that men obey Him; His command is that man, even in his fallen state, obey God. God does *not* say, as it were, “Oh, you poor man. You disobeyed me but that’s alright. I still love you and I will save you, if you want to be saved.”

The *Heidelberg Catechism* faces this question already in Lord’s Day 4: “Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform?” The *Catechism* tells us that this is not true for the Most High is just. The sinner must still do what God commands.

In *The Triple Knowledge*, his commentary on the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Herman Hoeksema uses an apt illustration. It goes like this. I contract with a builder to build me a house. He wants his money before starting the project and I give it to him. If he takes this cash, squanders it on an around-the-world cruise with his family and comes back broke, he is still under obligation to build me a house. If he refuses to do the job, pleading a lack of money, I may take him to court so that he fulfils his promise. He may not plead inability, for I made him able to build the house. By his sin, he put himself in a position that he cannot do it. Certainly, that sin of his does not release him from his obligation.

The Synod of Dordt, in its battle against the Arminians of its day, who also taught a well-meant offer of the gospel rooted in an alleged divine love for all men, specifically enjoined upon the Reformed churches the calling to preach the gospel of the cross to all men with two parts to that gospel: (1) everyone who hears the gospel is under solemn obligation to believe in Christ and (2) the promise of salvation is that God will save all who believe.

I am not fond of the word “plead,” which the questioner uses (although the text does not use it) but God is serious when He commands men to believe in Christ. He is not playing games; He is not “teasing” men; He is not playing a joke. It is the will of His command that man do indeed believe in Christ. God, after all, created him in such a way that he was capable of obeying God in all things. God does not ever release him from this solemn obligation. The decisions of the Synod of Dordt make this clear too. They can be found in *Canons III/IV:8-9*.

But what I said in this article in the *News* is not the whole story. The rest of the story is also necessary. But that must wait until next time, DV.

Prof. Hanko

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Website: www.cprc.co.uk
Lord’s Day services (11 AM & 6 PM) live video stream: www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming
Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunnan Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851
pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni • www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC