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Editorial Notes

In the interim class of January, 1992, I gave a course on "Public Prayer." This course dealt particularly with that aspect of the minister's calling to lead the congregation in prayer in the public worship service. This course proved to be interesting and worthwhile. Others, who heard about the subject of the course, suggested that the material presented be prepared for broader use. This has now been done, and this material is available from the Seminary in syllabus form. You can obtain it by writing or calling the Seminary. The price is \$2.50 plus postage.

* * * * *

Prof. Decker concludes his study of the preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in this issue of our *Journal*. Our readers have expressed appreciation for this study and we thank Prof. Decker for making this material on an extremely influential evangelical preacher available for *Journal* readers.

* * * * *

Prof. Engelsma concludes his series on the teaching of I Corinthians 7, which chapter deals with the institution of marriage in all its ramifications, including separation, divorce, and remarriage. This is an extremely important study, because it makes unmistakably clear the Holy Spirit's infallible rule for what has got to be one of the most corrupted relationships and institutions in life. Not only has the world gone mad in its attack against God's holy institution of marriage, but much, if not most, of the church has corrupted Scripture's teachings on the subject of divorce and remarriage. A biblical corrective of the ills which afflict the church and Scripture's solution to the rampant and destructive evils brought about by a disregard for biblical teachings is badly needed. We encourage our readers to make use of the article which appears in this issue as well as the preceding two articles which Prof. Engelsma has written. The faculty does not object to your quoting from these articles, and gives their wholehearted approval of your copying and distributing them. It is our wish that this material receive as wide a distribution as possible, and it is our prayer that these articles may yet serve to rescue the church from a course upon which she has set her feet which can only lead to disaster. At the end of his article, Prof. Engelsma promises an

additional article on the historical positions of the church on the question of divorce and remarriage. Look for it, the Lord willing, in the Spring issue.

* * * * *

Prof. Hanko continues his series on a new look at common grace. In this article, some effort has been made to define particularly what the defenders of common grace have meant by this doctrine. This has been done without as yet entering into the issues themselves and an examination of them. This slow progress may prove to be a disappointment to some who are eager to get on with the discussion. As one correspondent wrote:

Your introductory article read like a menu. I was left drooling (metaphorically of course!). As I cast my eye down the pages at the wonderful dishes that were promised I just wanted to eat the whole lot there and then. But no. The P.R. Seminary is one of those restaurants where you have to wait what seems like hours between each course. Imagine my disappointment when the truth sunk in that I would have to wait until Christmas for the first course! This is going to be an exercise in patience!

Nevertheless, we think it important that the defenders themselves be given abundant opportunity to say what they mean by common grace. ▲

The Preaching Style of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (4)

Robert D. Decker

An Analysis of Selected Sermons

In this chapter we shall analyze several of the many published sermons of Lloyd-Jones. As noted in the previous chapter "the Doctor" distinguished three types of sermons: evangelistic sermons which he called *kerygma*, instructional-experimental sermons which he called *didache*, and purely instructional sermons. It was Lloyd-Jones' custom to preach an instructional-experimental sermon on Sunday mornings and an evangelistic sermon on Sunday evenings. He preached the purely instructional sermons to his Friday Night Bible Classes. We shall examine sermons from each of these three categories.

Evangelistic Sermons

It should be borne in mind that sermons in this category were intended to reach the nominal Christian and the unconverted. The first sermon we examine is an exposition of John 6:66-68. The title of this sermon is: "True Christian Discipleship."¹ This sermon was preached between 1927 and 1935 at Bethlehem Forward Movement Church, in Aberavon. Dr. Lloyd-Jones also preached this sermon on the morning of his first visit to Westminster Chapel, December 29, 1935.²

The question Lloyd-Jones considers in this sermon is: "What is the precise meaning and significance that we attach to our own church membership?"³ He begins the sermon with these words:

I feel it is always an interesting and profitable subject to try to decide which is the more dangerous position for a man to be in — either to state openly and avowedly that he is not at all interested in Christ and religion, or to follow Christ for the wrong and for the false reason.⁴

¹ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 259-268.

² *Ibid.*, pp., viii, 259.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

He acknowledges that ultimately there is no difference between these two. The one who follows Christ for the wrong reason is as much outside of the kingdom as the man who makes no pretense of following Christ at all. Lloyd-Jones sees, however, from a human point of view, an important distinction between these two. The man who follows Christ for the wrong reason deludes both himself and the church. And, from this point of view, "one of the most dangerous places for a man to be in is the church of the living God."⁵

The church, Lloyd-Jones claims, is far too ready to associate church membership with true discipleship. This the Doctor sees as a "real and great danger."⁶ He develops this point by citing several examples of the fact that Jesus was anxious that men and women not follow Him for the wrong reason.⁷ Lloyd-Jones ends the introduction by asserting that it is a good thing that we examine ourselves and ask the same question, "Are we following Jesus for the right or the wrong reason?"⁸ This is the point, the message, of the sermon.

By way of evaluation, it should be noted that this introduction serves to gain the attention of the congregation. It is interesting and stimulating and would certainly set people to thinking about the reason for their being members of the church. Lloyd-Jones uses appropriate language. He certainly possessed a gift for "turning a phrase." In fact, there are many striking phrases and sentences. "Jesus seemed to be acutely anxious ..." is an example. Another is the following sentence: "They thought that everything was all right, and in that day they will discover that everything was all wrong."⁹

The introduction is, however, too lengthy. Surely an introduction which comprises about one third of the entire sermon is too long. As a general rule, introductions to sermons ought to be brief and to the point. In addition, the Doctor fails to make clear in the introduction the context in which the text is found. He does treat the context in the body of the sermon, but it is better to show the connection between the text and context in the introduction. Jesus certainly did not put the very striking question of verse 67 to His disciples "out of the blue." What prompted our Lord to ask this question?

In spite of these two negative observations, the introduction does nicely lead the hearer into the sermon itself.

Lloyd-Jones sees the following division in the text. There are the many who followed Jesus for the wrong reasons. These went back and walked no

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-262.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

more with Him. There are the few who remained with Jesus. These were following Him for the right reason. Lloyd-Jones proceeds with a consideration of some of the "false reasons that men have for following Christ."¹⁰ Some join the church because many others are doing the same thing. These join the crowd. It seems to be the right thing to do. Their parents and grandparents did it; it is a tradition in their town. But these have never asked themselves the question, "Why am I in the church?" These have never faced the question of what true membership in the church involves. Lloyd-Jones applies this point by exclaiming: "May the Lord deliver us from that category."

A second false reason for following Jesus Lloyd-Jones finds in verse 26 of John 6. These people have a purely mercenary and materialistic reason for going after Jesus. They followed Jesus because they got from Him what they wanted: the loaves, food. Lloyd-Jones includes in this category people who join the church because it gives them "position, status, power, influence," or because it helps their business. Also included in this category are people who join the church, not because they love the Lord and desire to serve Him, but because they want to escape the punishment of hell. All of the above, Lloyd-Jones says, "... follow Christ solely to serve their own ends, and not because He is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world."¹¹

Lloyd-Jones sees a third spurious reason for following Christ and joining the church in verse 2 of John 6. He characterizes this group as follows:

These are the people who ... go after Jesus because they see the miracles which He does. Christ's miraculous power appeals to them.... They are attracted by the phenomena of religion rather than by the truth of religion.¹²

Lloyd-Jones makes the point that Jesus performed and still performs miracles, but that Christ did not come to earth merely to perform miracles. "He came primarily to ... reconcile men to God, and to bring us to a knowledge of the truth."¹³ Lloyd-Jones applies this point by telling his hearers that they must beware of following Jesus for this wrong reason.

The fourth wrong reason for following Jesus the Doctor finds in verses 14 and 15 of John 6. These follow Jesus and join the church because they "... completely and entirely misunderstand Him and His message."¹⁴ These had a political conception of the kingdom and saw Jesus as the one who

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

would free them from Rome and rule the whole world. When Jesus repulsed them, they ceased following Him. This Lloyd-Jones applies by stating: "How many there are still who think of Jesus as a political agitator, or as a social reformer."¹⁵ These think one of the main functions of the church is to deal with social issues. Others in this category think of Jesus as a pale Galilean who holds men aloof, or as the great Ascetic or the incomparable Philosopher. Lloyd-Jones applies this rather graphically:

If we took out of the church all these various groups, I wonder how many we would have left. I fear that the "many" would assume an alarming proportion.¹⁶

Lloyd-Jones then confronts the congregation with the great issue. The right reason for following Jesus is found in Peter's confession. In these words of Peter we have "... the irreducible minimum of true Christian discipleship." Peter asks: "To whom shall we go?" because, having stood before God's law, having seen John the Baptist, having looked into the face of Christ, he "...had long since realized his own state before God." Peter realizes two things: "he cannot save himself and no other man can save him."¹⁷ He cannot leave Christ because Christ has the words of eternal life.

Lloyd-Jones concludes the sermon by putting the congregation before the question: "Have you ever taken your stand with Simon Peter..."¹⁸

By way of critique, we note that Lloyd-Jones uses striking, confrontational, challenging language. "I make no apology in asking you: 'Do you follow Christ ... have you stood face to face with these possibilities?'"¹⁹ Application of the truth is woven throughout the sermon. There is unity of thought in the sermon as well.

Negatively, Lloyd-Jones, at least in this sermon, does not meet his own criteria. A sermon, by his own definition, must be an exposition of the text, with application to the lives of God's people. By exposition we take him to mean exegesis. But the exegesis of the text itself (verses 66-68) does not come until Lloyd-Jones is well into the sermon. The exposition occurs in the latter one-third of the sermon.²⁰ Simply put, it takes Lloyd-Jones a long while to get to the text itself. Much, if not all, of what he says before he begins the exposition of the text itself is true, but this material is not gleaned exegetically out of the text itself.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 266-268.

The second sermon we examine in this category is an exposition of II Timothy 1:12. Its title is: "The Problem of Life."²¹ This "evangelistic" (*kerygma*) sermon is the first of a series of no fewer than eleven sermons on this text. Lloyd-Jones preached these sermons in Westminster Chapel on consecutive Sunday evenings, beginning on the twelfth of April in 1964. While the first sermon we examined was preached early in his ministry, this sermon is representative of his evangelistic preaching during his later years.

Lloyd-Jones begins the sermon by saying that "...this statement ... puts before us the great essentials of the Christian faith and what it means to a man who truly believes it."²² The text presents two matters: 1) The great problem of how to live victoriously and 2) The whole gospel. The test of any teaching is: does it work? Does it help? The claim we make for the Christian gospel is that it works; it does help. The gospel enables us to live victoriously.²³

Lloyd-Jones further develops this point by claiming that the gospel alone does this, i.e., the gospel alone enables us to live victoriously. There is only one Saviour, one salvation, and only one teaching which enables one to meet and triumph over all the eventualities of life in this world.²⁴

Lloyd-Jones explains that Paul writes out of his own experience to Timothy, his young disciple, who by nature and by temperament was a man easily discouraged and depressed. The apostle was in the worst of circumstances. He was in prison, facing death. Everything appeared to be against him. Yet Paul triumphs. He is able to say, "I am not ashamed." Paul is saying here: "I suffer all these things because I am a preacher: nevertheless, I am not ashamed." At this point Lloyd-Jones makes this striking statement:

Christianity, in a sense, is in this one word — "nevertheless," this protest, this rising up above it all: "nevertheless I am not ashamed."²⁵

Lloyd-Jones applies the point nicely by asking his hearers:

Are you living your life like that? Is there this "nevertheless" in your life and in your experience? Are you able to look at your circumstances and conditions at their blackest and darkest and starkest, and then say, "Yes, there they are ... nevertheless!" Is that your condition?²⁶

²¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *I Am Not Ashamed: Advice to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), pp. 9-30.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Having thus introduced the sermon, the Doctor in his first point deals with the question: "What was the secret which enabled Paul to say this?" The secret was not that Paul was a born optimist. He was, in fact, just the opposite. The glory of the gospel is that it can enable a man of any type of temperament to speak in this manner and to triumph. Lloyd-Jones concludes the point by asserting:

Now, that, I say, is the special glory of this gospel. It does not matter what your temperament is, it does not matter what your psychology is, nothing matters except the power of the gospel. You see, the gospel does not depend upon us, but upon the power of God. This is the first great principle, therefore, and I emphasize it for this reason.... That is the glory of it! It is a miracle. It gives a man a new birth, it makes a new man of him, and therefore what he is by nature is not the final determining factor.²⁷

Lloyd-Jones says that the "secret" which enabled Paul to make this triumphant statement was not that he was a Stoic. He then presents a lengthy, too lengthy in our opinion, but interesting critique of Stoicism.²⁸

Over against the above, Lloyd-Jones puts the Christian position in the form of a poem. Before giving the poem he tells a story about its author. The poem's author was a wealthy businessman who lived in Chicago. The man lost four lovely daughters when the ship they were aboard sank in the Atlantic. On the same afternoon that this tragic news was told him, the man lost all of his money in a bank crash. He responded to this tragedy by writing this poem or hymn:

When peace like a rive attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.²⁹

This touching story certainly effectively illustrates the point Lloyd-Jones is making, viz., that belief in the gospel enables a man to triumph even in the worst of circumstances.

The second point of the sermon is an answer to the question: "What is the gospel?" Lloyd-Jones defines the gospel in terms of four principles. The gospel is a complete view of life which covers all conceivable eventualities. It is not merely a matter of ethics, morality, or behaviour. The second principle is that the gospel is not merely a vague message of comfort

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

or cheer. It is not merely something which makes us feel happy by forgetting all of our troubles. The Christianity of the Bible is realistic and honest.³⁰ This point is applied with the question: "Does your philosophy of life cover all circumstances, also death?" The gospel does! The third principle is that the gospel does not work automatically, and the fourth is that the gospel has no comfort apart from our belief in its truth.³¹

Lloyd-Jones points out that Paul knows God. What Timothy and all men everywhere need is, therefore, not comfort, first of all, but the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.³²

Lloyd-Jones concludes the sermon by giving the "headings" he intends to cover in the rest of the series. The question he intends to answer is: What is Christianity? The point with which he deals in subsequent sermons are: 1) Christianity is the truth. It is true doctrine which can be defined and it is the truth over against error or heresy. 2) The Christian faith is based on divine authority. 3) The Christian faith is based on facts. It is therefore changeless, and it changes us. What is this truth? It is Christ crucified. Lloyd-Jones ends the sermon with this rather striking sentence: "But here is the beginning of it all: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'" ³³

This sermon has its weaknesses. Again the introduction is too lengthy. Much more serious is the fact that the sermon does not arise out of the text. Lloyd-Jones proceeds from life and its circumstances and then relates these to the text. His approach is not to expound the text as it applies to life's circumstances. The result is that the sermon is more topical than expository.

From a positive point of view, the sermon is characterized by good use of language. It is clear. There is application throughout the sermon. It would certainly arrest and hold the attention of a congregation.

Instructional-Experimental Sermons

The sermons in this category were intended to instruct and edify those who were already believers. Lloyd-Jones preached this kind of sermon on Sunday mornings. An example of this type of sermon is an exposition of Ephesians 5:1, 2. The title of the sermon is: "Imitators of God."³⁴

The introduction to this sermon is much briefer than the introductions to the two evangelistic sermons analyzed above. Lloyd-Jones begins by calling this injunction:

³⁰ It should be noted that Lloyd-Jones is using the terms, "the gospel" and "Christianity," interchangeably as synonyms.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁴ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Darkness and Light: an Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 291-299.

... the highest statement of Christian doctrine that one can conceive of or even imagine. It is really staggering, it is almost incredible, but here it is, "Be ye followers of God!"³⁵

In his second introductory point Lloyd-Jones discusses the question whether the text is a conclusion and a continuation of the thought of chapter 4 or an introduction to the thought of chapter 5. He opts for the latter, saying:

... for here Paul seems to me to be laying down what is after all a principle that governs everything; he is gathering up his message as it were; and then he will proceed to draw his practical deductions in verses 3 to 5. But the point is that the Apostle is here reminding us of something that we must never forget in the whole of our lives, all our thinking, all our conduct and practice and behaviour. "Be ye followers of God as dear children!"³⁶

This rather colorful language would certainly gain the attention of a congregation. The two things Lloyd-Jones does in this introduction is, first, call attention to the striking imperative of verse one: "Be ye followers of God," and, second, correctly explain the relationship in which the text stands to its context. It nicely leads into the sermon itself.

The first point of the sermon deals with the meaning of the command: "Be ye followers of God." Lloyd-Jones informs us that the Greek noun, *mimētai*, is incorrectly translated "followers" in the Authorized Version. The correct translation is "imitators."³⁷ Lloyd-Jones develops the classic distinction between God's incommunicable attributes and his communicable attributes. It is impossible for us to imitate the incommunicable attributes of God. That we are to be imitators of God means that we are to strive to be like God in His communicable attributes. We are to be righteous as God is righteous, merciful as God is merciful, and we are to love as God loves.³⁸

In the second point of the sermon the Doctor asks: "Why are we to be imitators of God?" His answer is "because we are God's children." Not only so, but we are God's dear or beloved children. God loved us and continues to love us. He constantly watches over us. We are very precious to God.³⁹

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ William T. Arndt and T. William Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 524. John Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889), p. 415.

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 292-293.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Our response to God's love, and this is the third point of the sermon, ought to be that we desire to love and please God. This must be the greatest desire of our hearts. If a little boy loves to please his father, how much more should not we love to please God, our heavenly Father? We must understand that the honor of God's family is at stake. Just as people judge our families by observing the behavior of our children, so people judge God's family by observing our behavior. Hence, we ought to become imitators of God. Still more, the privilege of belonging to the Christian family ought to move us to imitate God.⁴⁰

The fourth and last point of the sermon considers the question: "How are we to imitate God?" The answer is by walking in love. In this connection Lloyd-Jones calls attention to Matthew 5:48. We are to walk in love just as Christ loved us. When we live in this way, we are pleasing to God.

The sermon is certainly expository. Lloyd-Jones explains the text and applies the text. From this point of view this sermon is much better than his evangelistic sermons examined in the previous section of this chapter. Lloyd-Jones is much more true to his own criteria for a sermon in that this sermon is "exposition molded into a message." There is good, meaty exegesis here and it is presented clearly and with considerable impact.

The sermon, however, is not without its weakness. Lloyd-Jones could have made more of a point of the fact that this text is an imperative. God's people must become imitators of God as His beloved children. It appears to this writer that the Doctor misses the point of verse two. It is true, as he emphasizes, that our walking in love is pleasing to God. The point of the text is, however, that we are to walk in love just as (*kathoos kai*) Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. We must love others in the same way that Christ loved us, i.e., our love must be self-sacrificing. We must be willing even to die for our fellow believers. This, it appears, is the point the apostle is making.

The next sermon in the series is an exposition of verse two under the title: "The Atoning Work of Christ."⁴¹ We shall not examine the sermon in detail. In general the sermon is a fine exposition of the text. Lloyd-Jones begins by stressing the fact that doctrine (or what one believes) determines one's life and practice. If one's doctrine is correct, his behavior will be correspondingly correct. He then proceeds to expound the text phrase by phrase, beginning with "Christ hath loved us." There is excellent and detailed exegesis of the concepts: "given himself," "offering," "sacrifice," "sweet smelling savour" and "for us."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-297.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 300-312.

Lloyd-Jones concludes the sermon by answering the question: "What is the lesson for us?" The lesson is that we must love others, even our enemies, in the same manner that Christ loved us.

The sermon is an excellent presentation of the doctrine of the atonement of Jesus Christ, but there is something dangerous about handling a passage like this in this fashion. The apostle Paul did not intend to present or to emphasize "the substitutionary and penal doctrine of the atonement"⁴² in this verse. The point Paul is making in this text is that we are to be imitators of God as dear children in the way of walking in love. When we walk in love we imitate God. And we must love as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us. This needs the emphasis if one intends to be true to the text.

Purely Instructional Sermons

Sermons of this type were intended to teach: i.e., the emphasis in these sermons is on instruction. The first sermon we examine has no title. It is an exposition of Romans 5:6-8.⁴³

Lloyd-Jones does two things in the introduction to the sermon. He begins by setting the passage in its context. These verses state the reason why the justified sinner can enjoy the great certainty of his salvation. Next, he divides the passage into two parts. The first part, verses 5-8, is a positive statement about God's love. The second part, verses 9, 10, contains the logical deductions which Paul draws from the statement of verses 6-8. The two sections together are designed to show how final and certain is our salvation.⁴⁴

In the body of the sermon Lloyd-Jones begins by expounding verse 6, calling this verse one of the greatest verses in the Bible. There is, according to Lloyd-Jones, "no greater statement of the love of God." The first principle taught in this verse is that salvation is entirely of God and is the result of God's great and eternal love. This, he contends, is brought out in the words, "in due time," which Lloyd-Jones translates: "at the appointed time, or at the appropriate time." It should be pointed out, however, that it is entirely possible to translate this phrase (*kata kairon*): "Christ died for those who at that time were still godless."⁴⁵ Since we are concerned not with exegesis, but with Lloyd-Jones' preaching style, we will assume his translation is correct. "In due time" means that God planned the salvation of His people

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁴³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), pp. 102-115.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁵ Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, pp. 395-396. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 318.

from eternity. God planned that at the appointed time His Son would come and make atonement.⁴⁶ "In due time" means as well that point in history when it had been proved beyond any doubt that man was incapable of saving himself. Ample time had been allowed to show that "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight." The law could not save. Sufficient time had passed to demonstrate that Graeco-Roman civilization, law, and culture could not save. To substantiate this point, Lloyd-Jones cites I Corinthians 1:21. Thus he concludes, only God's love can save.⁴⁷

God's love is revealed in Christ's death. Christ's death proves God's love, for by His death Christ saves us. This demonstrates the great love of God which alone can save us.

What is more, the character of the people for whom Christ died demonstrates God's love.⁴⁸ Three things are said about those for whom Christ died. The first is that they are without strength. This means, Lloyd-Jones explains, that they are devoid of spiritual strength. They are not able to discern spiritual things. This is the doctrine of man's total inability to save himself. We are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins, and this means we are unable to please or obey God. The text teaches, therefore, man's total inability to save himself.⁴⁹

Lloyd-Jones concludes the sermon (which really treats only verse 6) with a brief application, characteristically put in the form of a question: "Are you trusting to anything whatsoever in yourself?" If so, this is false pride. 'We have nothing of which to boast. Only God's love can save us vile, foul, polluted sinners.'⁵⁰

The next sermon in the series is based on Romans 5:6-11 and is a continuation of the former sermon.⁵¹ After a brief introduction, in which Lloyd-Jones reviews the previous sermon, he treats the second and third characteristics which the text ascribes to those for whom Christ died. The second is that we are ungodly. This means that man is unlike God. The image of God in man is defaced. Man is without love to God and is, in fact, an enemy of God. All men are by nature ungodly. That we are ungodly shows the enormity of our sin. The third thing said about those for whom Christ died is that they are sinners. Christ did not die for righteous or good people, but for sinners. The Saviour died for those who deliberately missed the mark. There is nothing lovable about them. At this point Lloyd-Jones uses very

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-109.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-127.

graphic adjectives to describe these sinners. They are “vile, foul, despicable.” He says, and one can almost hear him preaching:

... hurl your epithets and still you have not said enough. The sinner is an abomination, he is a monstrosity in God’s universe, he is altogether vile and hateful.⁵²

Surely no one could fail to get his point. This too demonstrates the greatness of God’s love, as that love is revealed in the death of Christ for those who were without strength, ungodly, sinners.

That God’s love is the only source of our salvation affords us the assurance of salvation. This is the application of the sermon and its conclusion. If our salvation depended in any sense on us, our position would always be precarious. Have you seen yourself, Lloyd-Jones asks, as “without strength,” “ungodly,” and “a sinner?” Do you know God’s wondrous love?⁵³

A Critique of Lloyd-Jones’ Preaching Style

Observations on Lloyd-Jones’ View of Preaching

We have examined Lloyd-Jones’ view of preaching in chapter three of this paper and do not intend to repeat what was written in that chapter. Nevertheless, by way of introduction to our critique of his style of preaching, a few observations are necessary. We heartily agree both with Lloyd-Jones’ definition of expository preaching, and with his emphasis on the necessity of that preaching.⁵⁴ There can be no doubt about the fact that the Scriptures teach that preaching must be the proclamation of the message of the text as it applies to the lives of God’s people. To do that properly the preacher must explain the meaning of the text in its immediate context as well as in the context of the whole of Scripture.

In our opinion, Lloyd-Jones’ view of preaching is deficient in two important areas. He devotes an entire chapter in his book on preaching to “The Preacher.”⁵⁵ In this chapter he is critical of lay preaching, contending that such preaching has its roots in Arminianism. The minister, Lloyd-Jones stresses, must be called to the ministry. To be called, one must be a Christian who possesses both natural and spiritual gifts. One must be educated as well in preparation for the ministry. One needs both general knowledge and

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-127.

⁵⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), pp. 70-79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-120.

special training. This latter includes training in the knowledge of the Bible, the original languages of the Scriptures, Theology, Church History, and "...lastly and only lastly in Homiletics."⁵⁶ Lloyd-Jones is very critical of preaching classes because he believes that preachers are born, not made. The first deficiency in his view of preaching lies precisely at this point. It is true that preachers are born, not made. This, however, does not preclude formal theological education also in the discipline of Homiletics. One who aspires to the ministry needs certain natural and spiritual gifts. But those gifts need to be developed, shaped, and disciplined. Good instruction in Homiletics provides this. This is precisely why churches in the Reformed tradition have always insisted on the necessity of a thorough formal training for the ministry. Formal theological education is an essential part of the "lawful call" to the ministry in the Reformed tradition.⁵⁷

Lloyd-Jones also devotes a chapter to what he calls "The Primacy of Preaching." While he has many good and true things to say on this subject, Lloyd-Jones fails to present a clear, well-defined presentation of the doctrine of preaching as the chief means of grace, the means by which the voice of Christ is heard. This could have and should have been done in connection with Romans 10:11-15 and related passages of the Scriptures.

We mention these deficiencies at this point in our discussion because we believe that especially the former, but also the latter, directly affect Lloyd-Jones' style or method of preaching. His own lack of a formal theological education and his minimizing of the necessity of this (especially in Homiletics), as well as his lack of a clearly defined concept of preaching as the chief means of grace, resulted in a rather undisciplined style of preaching.

***Lectio Continua* (Analytical) Style**

Lloyd-Jones follows the *lectio continua* method, or what has otherwise been called the analytical method, in most of his preaching. He does this not in the sense that his sermons are mere running commentaries which explain a given passage verse by verse or phrase by phrase. Thus this method has often been explained. The late Prof. W. Heyns, for example, describes the analytical style as follows:

The analytical method is then the method which holds itself most closely to the exegesis of the text. It follows the text step by step, word for word, as the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-119.

⁵⁷ Articles 2, 3, 4, 8, *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids: Published by the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1983), pp. 5-8, 10.

elements of the text follow upon each other, and according to the measure that each part requires for a clear conception of the text.⁵⁸

Similar definitions of the analytical style may be found in the writings of other Reformed theologians.⁵⁹ Lloyd-Jones' sermons are not analytical in this sense. As noted in chapter III, Lloyd-Jones himself warns strongly against doing this:

They take a passage verse by verse; and they make their comments on the first, then they go on to the next verse, and do the same thing with that, then the next, and so on. When they have gone through the passage in this way they imagine they have preached a sermon. But they have not; all they have done is to make a series of comments on a passage. I would suggest that far from having preached a sermon such preachers have only preached the introduction to a sermon!⁶⁰

Lloyd-Jones follows the *lectio continua* method in the sense that most of his preaching consists of long series of sermons on an entire book of the Bible. Typically he begins with chapter 1:1 and proceeds to preach through the entire book, taking the verses either singly or in groups, but always preaching on all the verses in the order in which they appear. In this fashion, Lloyd-Jones took his congregation through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, preaching between two and three hundred sermons.⁶¹ He did the same with his Friday Night Bible Class, preaching several hundred sermons on the book of Romans.⁶²

Lloyd-Jones uses this method to preach on sections of a book of the Bible as well. He preached eleven sermons on Psalm 73.⁶³ The text for the first sermon is verses 1 and 2, and the text for the second sermon is verse 15.

⁵⁸ W. Heyns, *Homiletiek* (Grand Rapids: Theologische School der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Amerika, 1910), p. 115.

⁵⁹ Herman Hoeksema, *Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1975), pp. 68-69. T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde Homiletiek* (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning's Uitgeversmaatschappij, n.d.), pp. 389-391. J.J. VanOosterzee, *Practical Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1849), p. 313. Samuel Volbeda, *Homiletical Technique: Of the Art of Sermon Making* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 21.

⁶⁰ *Op. Cit.*, p. 72.

⁶¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1-23 v. I-VIII* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

⁶² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, v. I-VI (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985).

⁶³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith On Trial: Studies in Psalm 73* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976).

The material of verses 3-14, however, is covered in the first sermon and touched on again in the second and third sermons of the series.⁶⁴ Another example of this is the fact that the Doctor preached a total of sixty sermons on Matthew, chapters five, six, and seven.⁶⁵

There are exceptions to this. Lloyd-Jones upon occasion would preach a topical series. For example, he preached a series of twenty-one sermons on the subject of spiritual depression.⁶⁶ The question with which he deals in his series is: why are Christians unhappy? In the introductory sermon, based on Psalm 42:5, Lloyd-Jones says that the ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief, and the cure is to take oneself in hand and hope in God. This motif or theme is then developed in the sermons which follow. For example, in a sermon based on Romans 3:28 Lloyd-Jones develops the idea that the true foundation for the cure of spiritual depression is the assurance of justification. He concludes the series with an exposition of Philippians 4:14 under the theme: "The Final Cure." This sermon, therefore, and the whole series end on a triumphant note:

That, then, is the prescription. Do not agonize in prayer beseeching Him for power. Do what He has told you to do. Live the Christian life. Pray, and meditate upon Him. Spend time with Him and ask Him to manifest Himself to you. And as long as you do that you can leave the rest to Him. He will give you strength — "as thy days so shall thy strength be." He knows us better than we know ourselves, and according to our need so will be our supply. Do that and you will be able to say with the apostle: "I am able (made strong) for all things through the One who is constantly infusing strength into me."⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that sixteen of these sermons are based on texts from the epistles, one from the Psalms, and four from the gospels. Lloyd-Jones did most of his preaching from the New Testament epistles, and that was true even of his topical series.

There are other examples of topical series. Lloyd-Jones preached a series of eleven evangelistic sermons on II Timothy 1:12.⁶⁸ He preached two

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-42.

⁶⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, v. I-II (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967).

⁶⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁶⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *I Am Not Ashamed: Advice to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).

series of sermons on the subject of the necessity of revival in the church.⁶⁹ He also preached a series on the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ These latter three volumes have sparked no little controversy among admirers of Lloyd-Jones on the question of whether he was charismatic.

Finally, in this connection, we note little *essential* difference between Lloyd-Jones' three types of sermons. The evangelistic (*kerygma*) tend to be more topical and "need, or problem"-oriented. In these sermons the recurring theme is man's problem defined in terms of sin and total depravity, and the only cure is defined in terms of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is the message which the gospel proclaims. The instructional-experiential (*didache*) sermons are more expository than the evangelistic sermons, but the decided emphasis is on the Christian's experience. The purely instructional sermons contain more exegesis, often in great detail. These sermons too are more in the *lectio continua* or analytical style than are the other two types.

The Strengths of this Style

Most of Lloyd-Jones' preaching was done in series of expository sermons either on books of the Bible or on a subject. This has certain advantages. Samuel Volbeda points out that this method:

minimizes the dangers of preaching out of context and of isolating a text from the whole organism of Scripture and ... puts the preacher in the way of all the riches, beauty and benefits wrapped up in the Bible.⁷¹

Herman Hoeksema adds to this two more advantages to series preaching: 1) It makes the selection of texts much easier and much more systematic for the preacher. 2) Series preaching also enables the minister to develop a given subject systematically, and this is enriching both for the preacher and the congregation.⁷² We agree with these observations and would encourage preachers to preach in series. This ought not to be done exclusively. To stay fresh and to achieve variety the preacher ought not preach one series after another.

Expository preaching which follows the *lectio continua* or analytical style has at least one strength. By following this method, both the preacher

⁶⁹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1987). Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984).

⁷⁰ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning His Gifts* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1985).

⁷¹ Volbeda, *Homiletical Technique*, pp. 4-5.

⁷² Hoeksema, *Homiletics*, pp. 30, 31.

and his congregation are taken directly to the text. The content of the sermon is taken directly from the text or passage itself. Even those who caution against using this style acknowledge this.⁷³ It is when Lloyd-Jones is busy translating and explaining the meanings of the words, concepts, statements, clauses, and phrases of the text that he is at his best. If one has the patience to persevere in reading through Lloyd-Jones' lengthy sermons, one will find keen exegetical points and profound insights into the meaning of the text. One can read at random among the many volumes of his published sermons and find this to be true.

Because so much preaching in our day fails to adhere to the text and fails to proceed exegetically, one is almost inclined to advocate this style of preaching. But, as we shall see, this style has serious weaknesses.

Weaknesses of this Style

Sermons preached in the *lectio continua* or analytical style almost inevitably and invariably fail to convey the message of the text in its immediate context and in the context of the book of Scripture in which it appears. One finds, for example, many profound exegetical insights in Lloyd-Jones' series on II Peter, but the theme of that letter is lost. The apostle is concerned in this letter that his readers remember what he has taught them. They must grow in the knowledge of Christ in order to grow in the grace of their Savior. The source of this knowledge is inspired Scripture. The antithesis to this knowledge is the heresy of the false teachers (chapter 2) and the mocking of the scoffers (chapter 3). These main motifs are not clearly presented. What Volbeda had to say about this style is certainly true:

... it points out the trees, but does not show us the forest ... it lacks balance ... it treats the text as an aggregation of thoughts, rather than an organism of thought.⁷⁴

We heartily concur with James Daane:

There is at least one basic rule to which any type of sermon structure must yield tribute. *Every sermon must say one thing only; and this one thing must be capable of statement in a single sentence.* This rule governs what we shall here designate "the basic sermon." To the degree that a sermon of whatever

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde Homiletiek*, pp. 385-389. Heyns, *Homiletiek*, p. 115. VanOosterzee, *Practical Theology*, p. 313. Volbeda, *Homiletical Technique*, pp. 20-21.

⁷⁴ Volbeda, *Homiletical Technique*, p. 21.

structure fails to meet this requirement, it fails in its purpose. The more points a sermon tries to drive home, the less it drives home.⁷⁵

One weakness of the analytical style is precisely this: that it does not convey the message, the one main point of the text.

Our main criticism of Lloyd-Jones' style of preaching is that, for all of his emphasis on the necessity of expository preaching, he fails to meet his own criteria. As we explained in chapter III, Lloyd-Jones stresses that a sermon must expound the text and express the message of the text. A sermon must answer the questions: what is the doctrine of this text? and, what is its relevance for the people? The answer to these questions must be stated in the form of a theme which is to be logically divided into headings which in turn progress to a conclusion. In a word, a sermon is to be exposition molded into a message. Always Lloyd-Jones emphasizes that sermons must be expository, i.e., they must explain the text. In a lecture on Puritan preaching he said:

The Puritan idea on the other hand was most concerned about the exact exegesis of a text. You start with a word, with a verse or paragraph, and your first business is to discover its exact meaning. Then, having discovered the exact meaning of your text, you find the doctrine in that text.... You do not impose doctrine on the Word. You do not start with doctrine and then find a text to fit it. You start with the Word and then find the doctrine in the text.... Having thus stated it and established it, you went on to the "use" or the application.⁷⁶

What the Doctor is saying, if we understand him correctly, is that the sermon must explain the text, and in this sense flow out of the text. It is precisely this that Lloyd-Jones often fails to do. No one put it better than John Bolt, who in the course of a review of Lloyd-Jones' book, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home, and Work*, makes these comments:

While Dr. Lloyd-Jones' homiletic style is usually referred to as expository, it is in fact more topical than expository. This is not to say that there is little or no exposition in these sermons. On the contrary! His handling of the material indicates a thorough knowledge of the Greek text of Ephesians and one can find many keen exegetical insights in these sermons. However, the

⁷⁵ James Daane, *Preaching With Confidence: a Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 58-59.

⁷⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Preaching," in *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), pp. 381-382.

sermons are not structured textually. Dr. Lloyd-Jones' method is to lift an idea or concept from the passage and then deal with it topically relating it to other passages of Scripture. There is a danger in this method of sermon construction that the preacher becomes sidetracked on peripheral matters in the text. A good illustration of this can be found in the second section of the book dealing with marriage, where we find eight sermons devoted to Christ and His bride the church (including two excellent sermons on sanctification, one on the marriage supper of the Lamb, and a long section on the church as the second Eve) and only three sermons dealing with the duties of husbands and wives. Not only does this reverse the Pauline order where the Christ-church relationship illumines the husband-wife relationship rather than vice-versa, but also draws unwarranted assumptions from the text. One of the reasons for this is surely the fact that it is difficult to preach twenty-six sermons on such a section without treating it topically.... Since he treats topics and themes arising out of the passage in a more or less haphazard way and does not structure his message in direct relation to the text, he often imports ideas and concepts which, while related, do not arise out of the text itself.⁷⁷

Bolt's comment that the sermons are not structured textually and that, therefore, Lloyd-Jones deals with the text topically is exactly correct. This, we believe, is a serious weakness in Lloyd-Jones' preaching style. This weakness is by no means unique to this particular series of sermons. One finds it manifest in all of Lloyd-Jones' published sermons.

In addition to the danger of the preacher becoming sidetracked on peripheral matters, there is another danger in Lloyd-Jones' method, which is perhaps more serious. The danger of following this method is that one wittingly or unwittingly falls into the trap of preaching the text out of its context. When this is done, the preacher loses sight of the message the text intends to convey and/or he makes the text say something it in fact does not say. And this latter is serious indeed. Ironically, it is this danger of preaching out of context that was of great concern to Lloyd-Jones' predecessor at Westminster Chapel, G. Campbell Morgan. Morgan warned against this in no uncertain terms in his book on preaching.⁷⁸

A clear illustration of this may be found in a sermon based on Ephesians 5:3-5.⁷⁹ The title of the sermon is: "The Distinct Functions of Church and State." This is precisely what Lloyd-Jones preaches in the

⁷⁷ John Bolt, "Book Review of *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 11 (1976), pp. 274-275.

⁷⁸ G. Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937), pp. 54-55.

⁷⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Darkness and Light...*, pp. 313-328.

sermon. By no stretch of the imagination can this sermon be called an exposition of Ephesians 5:3-5. It deals with the subject of the relationship between and the separation of church and state. This is certainly not what the Holy Spirit had in mind with these verses. Another illustration of this weakness is evident in a sermon based on I Corinthians 1:23.⁸⁰ Actually Lloyd-Jones takes for his text only the first clause of the verse: "... we preach Christ crucified...." The burden of the sermon is to demonstrate that God saves only through the cross of Jesus Christ. The points of the sermon are: "The Teaching of the Bible," "The Cross in the Gospels," and "The Witness of Sin." While Lloyd-Jones certainly proves his point with many references to other passages, he does not expound this text in the sermon. There is no exegesis of the concepts "preach" and "Christ crucified." Lloyd-Jones omits from his text the conjunction, *de*. The result is that while he has many good and true things to say about his subject, namely that God saves only through Jesus' cross, he does not expound the text in the context in which it is found. He makes it say what it does not say. Examples similar to these can be multiplied.

Summary

In this chapter we have pointed to two deficiencies in Lloyd-Jones' conception of preaching. The first, no doubt arising out of his own lack of formal theological education, is his lack of appreciation for good instruction in the discipline, Homiletics. The second is his lack of a clear statement of preaching as the chief means of grace. These we believe result in a rather undisciplined style of preaching. Lloyd-Jones takes liberties with the text that no preacher, no matter how talented he may be, ought to take.

We have indicated that the Doctor follows the *lectio continua* or analytical style of preaching in the sense that most of his preaching was done in long series of sermons on a book of the Bible.

The strength of this style is that it takes both preacher and congregation to the text.

The weaknesses of this style, at least in the hands of Lloyd-Jones, are twofold. One weakness is that it fails to convey the message, the main point of the text. The more serious weakness is that Lloyd-Jones does not structure his sermons textually. This results in the preacher becoming sidetracked on peripheral matters and, more seriously, in the preacher's preaching the text out of context, making it say what it does not say.

⁸⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Miracle of Grace and Other Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), pp. 81-86.

Epilogue

In spite of the criticisms of Lloyd-Jones' style of preaching offered in the previous chapter we wish to close this study by calling attention to the contributions he made by the grace of God to the church of his day. From these contributions the church of our own day can learn much and profit greatly. These contributions are in three main areas: exegesis, his doctrine of the Scriptures, and the science and art of preaching.

Exegesis

Lloyd-Jones was a competent exegete of the Scriptures and adept at applying the truths of God's Word to the needs and circumstances of his congregations. Throughout his published sermons one will find many deep, profound exegetical insights. These are skillfully and often powerfully applied to the needs of his hearers.

While we do not recommend his printed sermons as models for others to attempt to emulate in their own sermon construction, we do highly advise that the sermons of Lloyd-Jones be read for devotional purposes. They can be used most profitably, too, as commentaries. Those preachers who will take the time and spend the effort to read these sermons will find their preaching enriched.

His Doctrine of Scripture

Lloyd-Jones called the church to a correct understanding of the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Scripture, he insisted, is the inspired Word of God. It did not have its origin in man. The Scriptures came from God Himself through the miracle of the inspiration of holy men of God by the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit inspired or moved men to write the Word of God, Scripture is inerrant or infallible. Repeatedly Lloyd-Jones insisted that the Bible is without error. Because the Bible is inspired and without error, Lloyd-Jones asserted that Scripture is the only and absolute authority for the faith and practice or life of the Christian. Scripture and only Scripture reveals to man his deepest need or problem or plight. That need is man's sin and total depravity. Scripture and only Scripture points man to the only solution to his plight. That solution is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Characteristically he said:

There is but one message that can include the whole world, in spite of all divisions and distinctions. There is but one power that can bring all men together and unite them and bring them to true brotherhood. There is but one solution to the problem of individual man and of the whole world. It is "the

gospel of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."⁸¹

This one message, this one solution, he believed, had to be preached. What we have said critically of his style does not detract from the fact that Lloyd-Jones never wearied of preaching this great truth of the gospel.

Preaching

Whatever else he may have been and whatever weaknesses there may have been in his style of preaching, Lloyd-Jones was a great preacher who believed with all his heart in what he was doing. Some consider him to be one of the greatest preachers in the history of God's church. Whether or not that is true, certainly he must be ranked among the greatest preachers of the twentieth century. A certain Ron Clarke describes what he observed the first time he heard Lloyd-Jones preach:

The sermon commenced, and immediately I was conscious that this preacher was intent upon making known to the congregation what the Bible had to say. There was no reference to himself. No "stories" entered in. As he proceeded it became more and more evident that every hearer was being presented with what the Word said, and that the preacher was "hiding behind" the Word.⁸²

Lloyd-Jones insisted on the necessity and the primacy of preaching. He believed in the power and efficacy of preaching and urged the church of his day to believe in this too. The church does not need gimmicks to attract members. The church, he believed, erred when it attempted to find substitutes for preaching. He would have no elaborate liturgy and he warned people not to come to church in order to be entertained. What the church needs is expository preaching. The church need never be apologetic about this.

Thus Lloyd-Jones called the church to its chief task, the preaching of the Word. He believed that if the church were to be faithful to that task, God would surely give the increase.

Those of us in the Reformed tradition would have significant differences with Lloyd-Jones on several doctrinal issues: his views of the Holy Spirit and his view of the sacrament of baptism, to name just two. In spite of these differences, we ought to be grateful to God for what he gave to his church in the person and work of his servant, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. ▲

⁸¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Plight of Man and the Power of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 93.

⁸² Ron Clarke, "A First Visit to Westminster Chapel," *The Banner of Truth* 212 (May 1981), pp. 8-10.

Holiness in Marriage and Single Life: Interpretation and Application of I Corinthians 7

David J. Engelsma

3. Desertion, Divorce, and Remarriage

(This is the third and concluding article in a series on the will of the Lord Christ in I Corinthians 7 for church and saint regarding marriage and single life. The first article, "Sex for the Saints without and within Marriage," appeared in the November 1991 issue of the PRTJ. The second, "Honorable Single Life and Holy Marriage," appeared in the April 1992 issue of this journal.)

The questions raised by the subject of this article put us to the test, whether we meant what we confessed about sex and marriage, on the basis of the apostle's teaching in I Corinthians 7, in the two preceding articles. These are such questions as, "May Christians desert their mates?"; "May Christians ever divorce?"; "If Christians divorce, may they remarry?"; "Is remarriage ever permitted for Christians?"

These questions confront not only the individual believer but also the church. What must the church's stand be on these vital issues? What must be her teaching as she carries out that aspect of the "great commission" of Matthew 28:18-20 that is often overlooked and sorely neglected: "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"? What must be her discipline as she works to bring the erring and disobedient to repentance, thus keeping the congregation pure from the leaven of unfaithfulness and adultery and thus honoring the name of her faithful, covenant

God? Much depends upon the church's stand, since the instituted church is the pillar and ground of the truth of marriage and family, as she is the pillar and ground of all truth (I Tim. 3:15).

In light of the clear teaching of the apostle of Christ in I Corinthians 7 concerning the essence of marriage, considered by us in the preceding article, it is not difficult to answer these questions about desertion, divorce, and remarriage. It is sometimes painful to answer them, but it is not difficult. If marriage is a lifelong bond formed by God Himself between one man and one woman, as the apostle teaches in verse 39, desertion, divorce, and remarriage are forbidden to Christians and are outlawed from the church. Desertion and divorce are also ruled out by the teaching in verses 2-5 that sex is a debt owed by the husband to his wife and by the wife to her husband, for desertion and divorce are non-payment of the debt. Remarriage is prohibited by the teaching of the apostle in chapter 6:13-20 and in chapter 7:2, 5 that a sexual relationship with any other besides one's wife or husband is fornication, since remarriage while the original mate is still living does establish a sexual relationship with another. But did we mean what we said about the marriage relation's being a permanent bond and what we said about sex outside the bond being fornication? Or was that merely pious talk? There is a great deal of pious talk today about marriage and about the family both on the part of theologians and on the part of the instituted church. In their speeches and writings or in their synodical reports, they carry on at great length, saying the nicest things about marriage and the family — how important the family is, that marriage is ideally for life, that marriage must be defended and promoted by believers and church.

The bottom line, or last page, however, is that Christians are allowed to forsake and divorce their wives or husbands for more than one reason, if not for any reason, and to remarry. Not only the "innocent party" but also the "guilty party" in the breakup of the marriage is permitted to remarry. All may consider themselves good Christians. All may remain members in good standing in the congregation, including those who have remarried each other's husbands or wives. All may come to the table of the Lord.¹

¹ In the opening chapters of his book, *Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), Jay E. Adams has good things to say about marriage as an institution of God, including that it is "a formal (covenantal) arrangement between two persons to become each other's loving companions for life" (p. 13). In the concluding chapters, however, he tells us that "remarriage (after divorce — DJE), in general, is not only allowed but in some cases encouraged and commanded. It is looked upon favorably in the NT" (p. 86). Adams approves the remarriage of the "guilty party" as well as of the "innocent party" in a divorce and indeed calls all who unbiblically divorce their mates. The counsel of Adams to those seeking to know the will of God

And as the ministers and synods engage in this pious talk, the tidal wave of abandonment, divorce, and remarriage rolls over their congregations, so that by their own admission the rate of divorce and remarriage in evangelical churches in the United States is exactly that in the world about them.

concerning marriage and remarriage is that “remarriage, in general, is desirable” (p. 97). This is the book on marriage, divorce, and remarriage that conservatives recommend!

The guidelines in matters of marriage, divorce, and remarriage adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1980 are typical of the public pronouncements on these matters by Reformed and Presbyterian churches in reaction to the appalling number of divorces and remarriages in these churches. They begin well, very well, creating hope that finally a Reformed church will take a stand on the basis of the Word of God against the wicked, destructive, scandalous attack on the fundamental ordinance of marriage and family in our day.

The church has a special interest in marriage and the family, for the Christian family is an important witness to the unity Christ creates.... Instruction is especially important in an age when the Christian view of marriage is not understood and often under attack. Therefore, the church must proclaim and teach the biblical doctrine of marriage.... To achieve this, the church must: Stress the God-willed permanence of marriage and counsel against violation of the marriage bond.... The permanence of the marriage relationship lies at the heart of the biblical teaching on marriage. God wills a lifelong unity of husband and wife in marriage. Consequently, the basic declaration of Scripture is that divorce and remarriage while one's spouse is alive constitutes adultery.

But the hope that the Church will have the courage of these convictions, that is, that she means what she says by these fine words, is soon dashed. For at once the guidelines go on to affirm the right of the married person whose mate has been guilty of “unchastity” to remarry. They then venture the judgment that Scripture does not clearly forbid other remarriages. The conclusion is:

The church should neither issue a clear prohibition of remarriage in those cases where Scripture is unclear, nor should it attempt to list with legal precision the circumstances under which any particular remarriage does not conflict with biblical teaching.... Therefore, the church must ... deal pastorally with those who have failed to keep the biblical principle by ... refraining from a strictly legal approach to remarriage that tries to provide a basis for judgment that certain categories of remarriage are always compatible or incompatible with the teachings of Scripture (quoted in William P. Brink and Richard R. De Ridder, *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (1980), Grand Rapids, MI: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1980, pp. 269-274).

The apostle of Christ is not guilty of pious talk in I Corinthians 7. Uncompromisingly, he applies the truth about marriage and the truth about sex to the issues of desertion, divorce, and remarriage. These were pressing problems to some Christians at Corinth, even as they are to some Christians today. Among the questions on marriage matters that the Corinthians put to the apostle according to verse 1 were questions concerning leaving their mates and remarrying. Paul answers these questions in verses 10-17. But he does not answer these questions by contradicting or undermining everything that he has taught about sex and marriage in the preceding verses or by negating what he will teach about the essential nature of marriage as a lifelong bond in verse 39.

Commands

What the apostle teaches about desertion, divorce, and remarriage is authoritative for all Christians and all churches in all times and places. He prefaces his instruction on these matters with the words, "And unto the married I command ..." (v. 10). Indeed, what he says to married Christians about desertion, divorce, and remarriage in verses 10 and 11 is not his own command but the command of Jesus Christ Himself Who is, Paul reminds us, the Lord of church and Christian: "... yet not I, but the Lord" (v. 10).

Nor is the authoritative character of the instruction weakened in verse 12, where the apostle says that with regard to what follows it is not the Lord but Paul who speaks. In verses 12ff., Paul gives command concerning mixed marriages, the marriages of believers with unbelievers. Jesus had not

The effect of the policy set forth in the guidelines, despite their clear recognition and confession of the lifelong, permanent nature of the marriage-bond, is to throw the door of the Church wide open to divorces and remarriages for every reason. The door of heaven will not be thrown open as wide.

Yet one more instance of the "pious talk" about marriage is the article on the "Theology of Marriage" in the recently published *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 235, 236. Shirley C. Guthrie opens beautifully: "Reformed Christians have typically agreed that marriage is a life partnership analogous to the covenant relationship between God and God's people in Scripture." She ends miserably:

Most Reformed Christians today acknowledge that divorce can be the legitimate recognition that human error and/or sin may prevent a marriage from becoming a true life partnership. When a marriage ends in divorce — as when it begins and continues — Christians count on the grace of God that both forgives sinful people and enables them to make fresh starts (including the possibility of new marriage for divorced persons).

addressed this situation during His earthly ministry. Therefore, Paul cannot appeal to any teaching of Jesus now recorded in the gospels as he could in the matter of the divorcing and remarrying of two who belong to the covenant community.

But what Paul himself teaches is fully as binding as that which Jesus taught and which the apostle merely quotes. For Paul is Christ's commissioned apostle whose word is inspired. At the end of all this practical teaching on marriage, Paul says, "I think also that I have the Spirit of God" (v. 40). At the end of this particular section, in which he treats of desertion, divorce, and remarriage, he says, "And so ordain I in all churches" (v. 17).

The instruction on desertion, divorce, and remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-17 is apostolic command and ordinance and, therefore, the rule for all churches and for all Christians until the world's end.

The question for churches and Christians at the end of the 20th century is simply this, "Will we obey the Word of Christ as written by His apostle or not?" "Is Christ or culture going to determine our doctrine and practice in the vital area of the Christian life that consists of fidelity in marriage?" Culture, that is, the ungodly world, has decided marriage-doctrine and marriage-practice for much of the nominally Christian church and for many professing Christians in our day. The result is scandal, confusion, and woe. For the faithful church and for the true believer, Christ rules in the matters of desertion, divorce, and remarriage. He rules by holy Scripture, His Word. He rules by His Word in I Corinthians 7:10-17.

Desertion and Divorce

The Lord commands all married Christians not to desert, put away, or divorce their husbands or wives. In verses 10 and 11, He applies this prohibition to married believers whose husbands or wives are also Christians and members of the church. The wife may not depart; the husband may not put away. This refers to every form of separation, or breakup, of the two, whether simple separation, legal separation, or full, legal divorce. Marriage is a one-flesh bond requiring that the two dwell together, as the apostle expresses it in verses 12 and 13. Literally, he speaks of their 'housing with each other.' Marriage is a bond of bed and board. Therefore, every such kind of physical separation is violation of the deepest nature of marriage.

This is Christ's command even though He knows very well the trouble, the distress, that this may mean for some Christians. As the promise of "trouble in the flesh" in verse 28 and the mention of the apostle's desire that the saints be "without carefulness" (literally: 'free from cares') in verse 32 make plain, Scripture has a realistic view of the marriages of Christians. Every marriage has its burdens and hardships. For some Christians the burdens are especially heavy and the hardships are especially severe. There

are harsh, tyrannical husbands in the church. To live with these men is miserable for the wife. There are also women who are described in Proverbs as brawling and contentious, so that the poor husbands feel that they would rather dwell in the wilderness alone than to live with these wives (cf. Proverbs 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15).

"Let not the wife depart!" "Let not the husband put away!"

Marriage is living together until death, "for better, for worse."

This does not imply that Christ, or His church, simply preaches to the married in the congregation, "Do not separate," and nothing more. In Ephesians 5:22-33, the Word beseeches wives to live with their husbands as the church lives with Christ, that is, in the obedience of love, and husbands to live with their wives as Christ lives with the church, that is, in the headship of love. In I Corinthians 7:33, 34, Christian husbands and wives are taught that they must make it their goal to please each other. The marriages of Christians need not be miserable on account of the harshness of husbands or the nagging of wives. The marriages of Christians *may* not be miserable for these reasons. It is sin for a husband to be a brute or for a wife to be a shrew. But even if a marriage is bedeviled by trouble of this kind, separation or divorce is not the solution to the problem.

The Mixed Marriage

How insistent and comprehensive this prohibition against separation really is comes out when the apostle applies it to Christians married to unbelievers. This, he does in verses 12 and 13:

... If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

Paul addresses believers in a mixed marriage. The explanation for the mixed marriage is not that these believers had disobeyed the injunction expressed in verse 39, that believers marry only in the Lord. Rather, they had married when both they and their mates were in their original paganism. Then the gospel came, and only they were converted. Their mates were left in unbelief. Now these Christians found themselves in the most miserable marriage-situation of all: yoked together with unbelievers. Righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, the temple of God and an idol shared bed and board. It is no wonder that they anxiously asked their apostle whether they should separate. Their motive was the fear that the very close fellowship of marriage would pollute them, the believers, thus destroying them spiritually and eternally.

Commands the apostle, "Let not the wife leave the unbelieving husband!" "Let not the husband put away the unbelieving wife." There may be no separation, not even in this, the most difficult, strained, distressing, trouble-filled marriage of all. For the two are validly married. God has bound them in the one-flesh union. Marriage is a creation ordinance, not a sacrament. And married persons must honor the ordinance of God by living with each other.

Obedience to this command is motivated in several respects. First, the believer may trust that God will work upon the marriage in a special way so that the relationship itself will be sanctified by the holiness of the believer rather than being corrupted by the unholiness of the unbeliever. This is what is meant in verse 14 by the unbeliever's being sanctified by his believing wife or by her believing husband. The reference is not to a spiritual cleansing of the heart, for in the case under consideration the sanctified husband or wife is and remains an unbeliever. But the unbeliever is sanctified as regards her or his position in the marriage relationship so that the believer will not be corrupted even though she or he constantly "touch(es) ... the unclean" (II Cor. 6:17). This is an extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit, and one that indicates how important it is to God that His people maintain even the most difficult marriage, for every other friendship of believer and unbeliever corrupts the believer.

A second motivation of the believer for maintaining a mixed marriage is that his or her godly conduct in the marriage may be a means to save the unbeliever. This is held out to the believer in verse 16: "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Peter encourages believing women with unbelieving husbands similarly in I Peter 3:1, calling attention to the power of the wives' behavior in the winning of their unconverted husbands. In an environment controlled by the holiness of the believer, when that relationship is involved which God Himself wills to honor, and where children are found whom the Word calls holy, it is a real possibility that God will work regeneration in the unbelieving marriage partner. Then there is a personal sanctification where formerly there was merely positional sanctification.

It is noteworthy that, as regards the decision to live with the unbeliever or to separate from him, the believer must be motivated by consideration of the welfare of the other, not by consideration of her own interests. The question is not, "What would be easier and more pleasant for you?" But the question is, "What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?" This is the uniquely Christian viewpoint: Self is sacrificed to the love of the neighbor for God's sake.

Holy Children

The third motivation is the children produced by the mixed marriage: "... else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (v. 14b). Like the children of two believing parents, the children of only one believing parent are holy, covenant children, although not apart from the believer's baptizing them and rearing them in the fear of the Lord. This is a powerful proof in the New Testament for the doctrine of the inclusion of the children of believers in the new covenant and infant baptism. The children of a believer, as children, as children newly born, are cleansed from sin and consecrated to God. Possessing the reality, namely, renewal by the Holy Spirit, they may not be denied the sign, namely, baptism. Clearly implied is the truth of the covenant, that God is pleased to gather His church in the line of the generations of believers.

The argument against this explanation of the apostle's description of the children of the believer as holy by the opponents of the covenant and infant baptism has some appearance of soundness. The anti-covenantal argument is that just as the first part of verse 14 speaks of a holiness of the unbelieving wife or husband that has to do merely with external position and that certainly does not require baptism, so also with regard to the holiness of the children mentioned in the latter part of the verse. But this argument fails to observe that the assertion of the holiness of the children functions in the text as the basis of the declaration that in a mixed marriage the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer. If the apostle had written, "The unbeliever is sanctified by his believing wife *and* your children are holy," the argument that in both instances holiness refers merely to outward position would hold. But in fact the apostle wrote, "The unbeliever is sanctified by the believer, *as is evident from the holiness of the children produced by this union.*" If the holiness of the children is merely the same as that of the unbelieving parent, the holiness of the children cannot serve as the ground for the declaration that the unbelieving parent is sanctified. Only if the holiness of the children is genuine, covenantal holiness consisting of fellowship with God by the inward work of the Spirit of Christ does it prove that the marriage relationship of believer and unbeliever is controlled by the holiness of the believer.

The children of only one believing parent are born again and holy. No more than in the case of the children of two believing parents is this true of every child. When Scripture speaks of the saved children of believers it has the elect children in view (cf. Rom. 9:6ff.). Nor is it true of all elect children without exception that they are regenerated and sanctified in childhood. But this is the rule according to Scripture, as is implied by the fifth commandment of the law and as is indicated by the examples of Jacob and John the Baptist when yet in their mothers' wombs (cf. Gen. 25:21-26; Luke 1:15, 41, 44).

In this way, there is brought into the treatment of marriage in I Corinthians 7 one of the most important purposes of God with the marriages of His people. Usually, God wills the bringing forth of children who are members of His church by His covenant mercy.

But this is additional reason why the believing parent should stay in a difficult marriage and make the best of it. A strong motivation should be the welfare of the children. Desertion and divorce are destructive of the children. Even the world laments this evil. School psychologists tell us that the main mental health problem of school-age children is the turmoil of living through the divorce of their parents. Allan Bloom has written that divorce is "surely America's most urgent social problem" because of the devastating effects that divorce has upon the children.² In Malachi 2:11-16, the prophet inveighs against the evil of divorce in Judah. The attitude

² *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 119. Bloom decries the deleterious effect that divorce has on university students. "When these students arrive at the university, they are not only reeling from the destructive effects of the overturning of faith and the ambiguity of loyalty that result from divorce, but deafened by self-serving lies and hypocrisies expressed in a pseudoscientific jargon" p. 121). The "pseudoscientific jargon" is the glib talk of the psychologists brought in by the divorcing parents to justify the divorce to the children. In a remarkable passage, Bloom, an unbeliever, writes:

The important lesson that the family taught was the existence of the only unbreakable bond, for better or for worse, between human beings. The decomposition of this bond is surely America's most urgent social problem. But nobody even tries to do anything about it. The tide seems to be irresistible. Among the many items on the agenda of those promoting America's moral regeneration, I never find marriage and divorce" (p. 119).

This man from the University of Chicago shall rise up in the judgment with this generation of evangelicals and "conservatives," and shall condemn it.

Members in the churches opened wide to divorce and remarriage do sometimes cry out for deliverance from their misery by reformation of the churches' doctrine and practice of marriage. I have never forgotten the haunting (anonymous) article that appeared in *The Banner* (December 9, 1977) under the title, "Where are We? Where are We Going?" It was the cry of a broken heart. It pleaded with the church fathers to

take a firm and decided stand against divorce.... Convince me, if you can, that those who, in the name of love, smash to bits the happinesses of father, mother, sister, brother, child, pastor, and church are keeping the law of love! Convince me that a denomination which baptizes such actions by silence or by a subdued reprimand is acting out of love!

of Jehovah God toward divorce is that He "hateth putting away." The people of the covenant are reminded that in the beginning God made the man and the woman one in marriage. And the reason was that "He might seek a godly seed." For the sake of a godly seed among our children, we may not desert or divorce.

If natural love for one's physical offspring ought to move a man or a woman to endure an "unhappy marriage," how much more, love for children who are not only one's own flesh and blood but also dear children of God by virtue of His covenant. Desertion and divorce of their wives or husbands by professing Christians when the marriage has produced children is the modern form of the practice of Old Testament Israel of offering God's children to Molech.

One of the most vehement condemnations in all of Scripture is reserved for husbands and wives who abandon their families, thus neglecting to supply the basic physical needs of wife or husband and of children. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8).

The forbidding of divorce even in the case of a mixed marriage and the demand that believers maintain even this, the most difficult of marriages indicate the strength of the biblical prohibition against desertion and divorce and the rigor of the biblical insistence that believers maintain their marriages.

The contempt for God's hatred of divorce by the multitudes of professing Christians who desert and divorce and the churches' tolerance of divorce in the face of the express prohibition of desertion and divorce in I Corinthians 7 plainly show that the religion of these people and churches is not the Christianity of the apostle of Christ.

An Exception

There is an exception to the prohibition against a wife's leaving her husband. Having said, "Let not the wife depart," in verse 10, the apostle immediately adds, "But and if she depart." He then goes on to instruct the departing wife as to her calling in this case. There is a lawful separation from her husband by a Christian wife. There is a separation that God does not condemn and that the church may not censure.

Separation is not the rule. The rule is, "No separation!" Separation is an exception. It is always a rare thing in the church.

Nevertheless, separation is a possibility. Wives are sometimes permitted to leave their husbands: "But and if she depart"

The reason for the lawful separation is clearly implied in the apostle's words in verses 10 and 11. Paul tells us that he is here only repeating the command of the Lord Jesus concerning divorce: "I command, yet not I, but

the Lord.” When the Lord gave command concerning divorce in Matthew 5:31, 32, Matthew 19:3-12, and Mark 10:2-12, the one exception to His prohibition against divorce was the fornication of one’s mate. Fornication was the one ground for separation, or divorce. Since Paul is reminding believers of Jesus’ own teaching on divorce, the possibility of the wife’s leaving her husband must be that permitted by Jesus, namely, her husband’s sexual relationship with another than herself.

It is implied in verse 11 that it is also permissible under certain circumstances for the husband to put away his wife. The circumstances are the fornication of his wife.

Whether a temporary or even legal separation, in distinction from a legal divorce, is ever permitted a Christian for some reason other than the sexual sin of her husband or his wife is a difficult question. Scripture gives no other ground for leaving or putting away than fornication. The weight of Scripture’s teaching on marriage falls on calling the believer to live with her husband or his wife even though doing so means suffering. In such a case, wife or husband should accept the difficult marriage, with all its difficulties, as a calling from the Lord, bearing the suffering for the sake of Christ. The word of the apostle in verse 29 is encouragement to wives with a husband like Nabal and to husbands who must dwell with brawling women: “The time is short: it remaineth, that ... they that have wives be as though they had none.”

It is spiritually hazardous in the extreme for a wife to leave her husband, or a husband to put away his wife, and for a church to approve separation. For as the apostle points out in verses 2-5 of this chapter and as Jesus warns in Matthew 5:31, 32, the likelihood is that both the one who leaves and the one who is left will take other lovers, thus falling into the sin of adultery. The one who left her or his mate will be responsible, therefore, for the perishing of the other. And the church that approves these goings-on will be responsible for the perdition of all involved. If a wife must leave her husband for some reason other than fornication, perhaps because the man becomes drunken and beats her and the children, this leaving may only take place with the knowledge and approval of the elders of the church. Before the wife leaves, the elders will have worked with these two members of the church (and it is two members of the church that the apostle has in view in verses 10 and 11) in order to remove the sin that threatens the marriage. After the wife leaves, the elders will continue to work with the sinning husband to bring him to repentance so that the wife can quickly return.

No wife (or husband as the case may be) may simply take matters into her own hands, deciding on her own to leave and washing her hands of her husband. For the command of Christ in Matthew 18:15ff. applies to wives and husbands in the church: If your brother (husband) sin against you, tell

him his fault; if he will not listen, call in witnesses; and if he neglects to hear them, tell the church (the elders).

In such cases, as in the case of a wife's leaving her husband because of his fornication, there may be no remarriage.

Remarriage

With express appeal to the Lord Himself, the apostle forbids remarriage after separation. He forbids remarriage in so many words in verse 11 where he entertains the possibility of a believing wife's lawful separation (divorce) from her husband on the ground of his fornication: "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband."

The wife who leaves her husband has two options, and two only. Marrying another is not an option.

This, the apostle reminds us, is the command of the Lord Jesus Himself: "I command, yet not I, but the Lord" (v. 10). During His earthly ministry, Christ not only forbade wives to leave their husbands but also commanded wives who did lawfully leave their husbands to remain unmarried.

The Remarriage of the "Innocent Party"

This authoritative explanation of the teaching of Jesus on divorce and remarriage by His apostle makes plain that in Matthew 19:9 Jesus was not giving the "innocent party" the right to remarry after divorce. Elsewhere in the gospels where Jesus treated of divorce and remarriage, He unconditionally forbade all remarriage after divorce as adultery (cf. Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18). In Matthew 19:9, the Lord might seem to have granted one exception to His prohibition against remarriage, namely, in the instance that one's wife is sexually unfaithful.

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

On the basis of this passage, it is widely held in Protestant churches that the "innocent party" in a divorce may remarry. By the "innocent party" is meant the married person whose wife or husband has been sexually unfaithful but who has himself or herself been faithful. The right of the "innocent party" to remarry rests squarely on the interpretation of Matthew 19:9 that regards the exception clause as qualifying not only the prohibition against divorce but also the prohibition against remarrying after divorce. On this interpretation, not only may a man divorce his unfaithful wife but he may

also then marry another.³

Paul's inspired commentary on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:9 conclusively proves this interpretation to be mistaken. With specific reference exactly to Jesus' doctrine on divorce and remarriage in the gospels ("I command, yet not I, but the Lord," v. 10), the apostle forbids the wife who has left her husband (because of his fornication) to remarry: "Let her remain unmarried" (v. 11).

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus was giving a ground only for divorce. He was not giving a ground for remarrying after the lawful divorce. This was in keeping with the question that He was answering, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matt. 19:3). The question concerned putting away, or divorce. That the exception clause was intended to qualify only the prohibition against divorce is indicated by its position in the text. It immediately follows the words, "Whosoever shall put away his wife," and precedes the words, "and shall marry another." If Christ had meant to teach that fornication is a ground of remarriage as well as of divorce, the exception clause would follow the words, "and shall marry another." The text would then read, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and shall marry another, except it be for fornication"

That in Matthew 19:9 which puts it beyond doubt that Christ was not giving a ground for remarriage is the second half of the text. The second part of the text is invariably ignored by those who think to find a ground for the remarriage of the "innocent party" in the first part. With reference to the wife who has unjustly been divorced by her husband and whose husband has then wickedly remarried, Christ said, "... and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Even though she is the "innocent party," her remarriage will be an adulterous marriage.⁴ Not even the "innocent party"

³ One of the most influential works in Presbyterian and Reformed circles advocating this interpretation of Matthew 19:9 is Presbyterian theologian John Murray's *Divorce* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 33-43. Murray concludes his exegetical study of the passage thus:

The considerations preponderate rather in favour of the conclusion that when a man puts away his wife for the cause of fornication this putting away has the effect of dissolving the bond of marriage with the result that he is free to remarry without thereby incurring the guilt of adultery. In simple terms it means that divorce in such a case dissolves the marriage and that the parties are no longer man and wife (p. 43).

⁴ For a treatment of this passage and for a doctrine of marriage as an unbreakable bond that symbolizes the marriage-covenant between Christ and His church, see my *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1975, reprint 1983).

may remarry. In the church of Christ it has been ordained that the husband may not put away his wife and that the wife may not leave her husband. If the wife does leave, because her husband is a fornicator, she must remain unmarried. The same holds for the husband who justly puts his fornicating wife away.

One thing is indisputable. If the "innocent party" may remarry, so also may the "guilty party" remarry. The stand of some churches and theologians that only the "innocent party" may remarry, although it commends itself to sentiment, is in fact untenable. For if indeed the "innocent party" is free to remarry, this can only be because the original marriage bond has been dissolved. Obviously, one who is yet married may not remarry. But if the bond is dissolved for the "innocent party," it is dissolved for the "guilty party" as well. In the nature of the case, marriage cannot be dissolved only for one partner in the marriage. And if the bond is dissolved for the "guilty party," he is free to marry again. God Himself gives him the right to marry again. All unmarried persons are at liberty to marry. Paul teaches this very thing in the wider context of I Corinthians 7: "Art thou loosed from a wife?.... But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned" (vv. 27, 28).

Underlying the error of the position that the "innocent party" may remarry is the notion that sexual sin has the power to dissolve a marriage. Fornication has the power to loose what God has bound. Men and women themselves have the power to loose what God has bound. The apostle refutes this notion in verse 39 of I Corinthians 7 where he explicitly states that only death dissolves a marriage: "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married" Only God can loose what He has bound.⁵

⁵ The same truth is taught in Romans 7:2, 3: "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Strangely, some try to escape the force of the passage by arguing that the apostle is not here treating of earthly marriage but of the marriage of the justified and sanctified believer to Christ. As though the only authoritative teaching of Scripture occurs when a certain truth is the main subject under consideration! In fact, the apostle's doctrine in Romans 7:2, 3 of marriage as a lifelong bond, of the freedom of a married woman to marry another only when her first husband is dead, and of the adultery of all remarriage while an original mate is still living is extraordinarily forceful exactly because it is not the doctrine under consideration. It appears here as a truth that is presupposed and that will be acknowledged by all, so that it can serve as the reality in earthly life to which loosing from the law and marriage to Christ is analogous. If what

Paul's mention in I Corinthians 7:10, 11 of the option of reconciliation in case a wife does leave her husband points out an important reason why the "innocent party" should not remarry. She should be ready to forgive her husband if he repents of his fornication, and to return to him. Fornication does not require divorce but merely allows for it.

Remarriage in the Case of Desertion

But does not the apostle give a ground for remarriage in verse 15? "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

It is widely accepted among evangelicals and Presbyterians, and increasingly in Reformed churches, that this text is biblical warrant for divorcing and remarrying. A believer married to an unbeliever should stay with the unbeliever as long as the unbeliever is pleased to dwell with the believer. But if the unbeliever deserts the believer, the abandoned believer may both divorce the unbeliever and marry someone else. Desertion is a ground for remarriage.⁶

This interpretation is complete misunderstanding of verse 15. If it is understandable that men might misinterpret the exception clause in Matthew 19:9, it is a mystery that men find in I Corinthians 7:15 a ground for remarriage. For one thing, the subject is not at all the issue of remarriage. This issue is raised in verse 39. For another thing, the language itself of the text has nothing to do with remarriage. The text does not speak of a believer's being loosed from his or her mate but of the believer's not being under bondage. It does not talk of a legal right to remarry but of a condition of peace.

The apostle addresses Christians who are married to unbelievers. Having commanded the Christian not to separate from the unbeliever if the unbeliever is willing to dwell with the Christian, the apostle must take into account the very real possibility that the unbeliever is unwilling to dwell with his now converted wife or her now converted husband and leaves. It is the unbeliever who departs. The believer does not depart. He may not depart. Verses 12-14 forbid him to depart. Nor does the believer cause the unbeliever to depart by his or her ungodly behavior. If the unbelieving wife

the apostle says about marriage and remarriage in verses 2 and 3 is altogether false, as is the vehement testimony of many evangelicals and conservatives today in confession and practice, what happens to the teaching about being dead to the law in order to be married to Christ that is based on and analogous to the truth of marriage set forth in verses 2 and 3?

⁶ See Murray, *Divorce*, pp. 55-78. Murray is far more cautious and restrained in finding in I Corinthians 7:15 a ground for divorce and remarriage than are most of his supposed disciples.

leaves because her professing Christian husband treats her brutally or if the unbelieving husband leaves because his Christian wife never ceases to preach to him, it is not really a case of the unbeliever departing but of the believer driving the unbeliever out. But the unbeliever leaves. He takes action. And he leaves exactly because he hates Christ, the life of Christ, and his wife as one of Christ's.

The deserted believer simply lets him go: "Let him depart." The believer is not to try to force her unbelieving and departing husband to live with her. She need not pursue him to the ends of the earth forever pleading with him to return. She certainly does not offer to compromise her faith in order to keep her husband.

After the unbeliever has left, the believer is without any burden of guilt, shame, and spiritual anxiety, even though she is not living with her husband. She is not responsible before God for the gross evil of the breakup of the marriage.

This is what Paul means when he writes, "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." Not being under bondage refers to one's spiritual state. It describes one's standing before God, as this is reflected in one's own experience: without guilt! without shame! without terror!

Accordingly, the apostle adds, as the exact opposite of being under bondage, "but God hath called us to peace." The deserted wife consciously enjoys peace of heart and mind. Although she is living apart from her husband, she is conscious of living in harmony with the will of God and of God's favor resting upon her. This is peace.

Being at peace, rather than being under bondage, is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the right to divorce the unbelieving husband or wife.⁷

⁷ Compelling is the comment on I Corinthians 7:15 by C. Caverno in his article on "Divorce in NT," in the unrevised edition of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr, Volume II (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 865, 866:

If Paul has treated of divorce at all it is in I Cor 7. But even a careless reading of that chapter will disclose the fact that Paul is not discussing the question for what causes marriage might be disrupted, but the question of manners and morals in the relation. Paul has not modified Christ in any respect. It has been supposed that in verse 15 Paul has allowed divorce to a believing partner who has been deserted by one unbelieving, and so he has been sometimes understood as adding desertion to the exception Christ made as cause for divorce. But Paul has not said in that verse or anywhere else that a Christian partner deserted by a heathen may be married to someone else. All he said is: "If the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage ... in such cases: but God hath called us in peace." To say that a deserted partner "*hath not been enslaved*" is not to say that he or she may be *remarried*. What is

Nor does “not being under bondage” have anything to do with “not being bound” any longer to the deserting unbeliever. Those who find here a ground for remarriage read the text as though the apostle said, “A brother or a sister is not *bound* in such cases.” They imply that “being under bondage” is the same as “being bound.” Usually, this is not stated, much less argued, but merely assumed. But “being under bondage” and “being bound” are two different words in the Greek language, as they are in the English language. Indeed, they are two different words in I Corinthians 7. To be “under bondage” — the word used in verse 15 — is the Greek word, *doulooo*. To be “bound” — the word used in verse 39 — is the Greek word, *deoo*. It is perfectly apparent even to one who is completely ignorant of the Greek language that these are two, distinct words. When the Holy Spirit inspires “*doulooo*” in verse 15, therefore, we may not translate or interpret as though He had moved the apostle to write “*deoo*.”⁸

These two distinct words express two sharply different ideas. To be under bondage is to be a slave. In Scripture, this slavery may be spiritual,

meant is easily inferred from the spirit that dominates the whole chapter, and that is that everyone shall accept the situation in which God has called him just as he is. “Be quiet” is a direction that hovers over every situation. If you are married, so remain. If unmarried, so remain. If an unbelieving partner deserts, let him or her desert. So remain. “God hath called us in peace.” Nothing can be more beautiful in the morals of the marriage relation than the direction given by Paul in this chapter for the conduct of all parties in marriage in all trials.... That neither Paul nor anyone else ever put such construction upon his language (namely, the right to divorce and remarry — DJE), is evidenced by the fact that there is no record in history of a single case where it was attempted for 400 years after Paul was in his grave, and the Roman Empire had for a century been Christian. Then we wait 400 years more before we find the suggestion repeated. That no use was ever made of such construction of Paul in the whole era of the adjustment of Christianity with heathenism is good evidence that it was never there to begin with. So we shall pass Paul as having in no respect modified the doctrine of divorce laid down by Christ in Mt 19.

⁸ With characteristic disregard for the very words themselves of Scripture, the New International Version translates I Corinthians 7:15 thus: “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not *bound* (sic!) in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” By one stroke of some translator’s pen, the marriage bond is dissolved by the leaving of one’s mate and Christians are freely permitted to remarry while the original mate is still living. “A believing man or woman *is not bound*.” But the pen of the translator has falsified Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture does not say, “is not bound,” but rather, “is not under bondage.” Holy Scripture will stand.

as in Galatians 4:3, or physical, as in Acts 7:6 and in I Corinthians 7:21. To be bound to someone is to be joined to her in a close relationship in which also there are obligations. I am bound to my wife; I am not under bondage to her (nor, since ours is a Christian marriage, is she under bondage to me). When the apostle speaks of the relationship between a wife and her husband in verse 39, he does not use the word, "*doulooo*" ("The wife is under bondage ... as long as her husband liveth") but the word, "*deoo*" ("The wife is bound ... as long as her husband liveth").

Desertion by an unbeliever, although it leaves the abandoned believer in spiritual freedom, does not dissolve the bond of marriage so as to give the believer the earthly liberty to remarry. Though not under bondage, the deserted believer is still bound.

This is driven home in verse 39: Only death dissolves the bond! Only God dissolves the bond by means of death! Treating the issue of remarriage expressly, answering the question, "When may the believer marry another than her original husband?," the Word of God declares: "if her husband be *dead*"; "*only* if her husband be *dead*"; "if her husband be *dead in actual fact*." Only when one's husband or wife is dead is one "loosed," as the apostle expresses it in verse 27, so that there is no sin in marrying again.

Marriage is a lifelong, one-flesh bond established by God as earthly symbol of the unbreakable covenant of grace between Himself in Christ and His wife, the church. This determines all marriage-thinking and marriage-practice in the church.

Summary of the Teaching

Summing up, the apostle ordains in all the churches:

- 1) that Christians are to live faithfully with their mates, no matter how difficult this may be;
- 2) that Christians are not to desert, separate, leave, put away, divorce;
- 3) that there is, however, an exception to the forbidding of leaving or putting away, namely, the fornication of one's mate, as was taught by the Lord Himself;
- 4) that even in this case remarriage is forbidden;
- 5) and that one important reason for not remarrying is to leave open the way for reconciliation. This is always the Christian option since reconciliation is the way of God in Christ with His wife, the church, and with each member of the church personally.

Practical Implications

We conclude this study by briefly taking note of several practical implications of the teaching of I Corinthians 7 on desertion, divorce, and remarriage.

First, obedience to the ordinances laid down in the passage will mean suffering and loss for some Christians. There is nothing particularly surprising about this, since all the commands of the gospel mean hardship for some disciples of Christ. The life of discipleship in this present world is a life of self-denial along a narrow way.

Second, the preaching of these ordinances by the church will spare the saints the guilt and heartache of divorce. It will preserve many marriages and homes. It will guard the people of God against their eternal destruction. These commands are good, healthy, beneficial. It is sheer folly that pastors fail to preach them and that elders neglect to make them their admonition.

Third, the stand of a church that accords with these ordinances will serve well the children of the church, the holy, covenant children. The children will rise up and call their mother, the church, blessed for her protection of them through these ordinances.

Fourth, this stand brings the church into conflict with the deserting, divorcing, remarrying, fornicating world. But it also brings down upon the church that is obedient to her Lord the ridicule and rage of the unfaithful, departing churches, which always have a good word for deserting, divorcing, and remarrying.

Fifth, taking and maintaining this stand against desertion, divorce, and remarriage is not a matter of being unsympathetic to the afflictions of the people. Rather, it is a matter of being submissive to God's ordinance of marriage. A monogamous, permanent bond between one man and one woman is what marriage is by divine appointment. The church did not decide this. God did. The church cannot change this any more than she can change the law of gravity. The church does not make the laws governing the lives of the saints. She merely explains and applies them.

Sixth, for those who have already broken God's law concerning marriage, whether by fornication, by an unbiblical divorce, or by remarriage, there is a way of escape from condemnation. This way is repentance. Repentance finds forgiveness in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. There is abundant mercy in the Savior to blot out the guilt of fornication, desertion, divorce, and remarriage. But repentance breaks with the sin and walks henceforth in obedience to the ordinances of God, regardless of the cost.

If someone says, "But Jesus would never require someone to live a lonely life or to forego the pleasures of marriage and family," I respond, "You do not yet know either Jesus or the reality of discipleship." Jesus' apostle raises the very real possibility of a life of loneliness as the result of his doctrine of marriage in verse 11 of I Corinthians 7: "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried" In the context of His rigorous prohibition of divorce and His absolute prohibition of remarriage, Jesus Himself said, "There be some who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom's sake"

(Matt. 19:12).

To every one of us who proposes to follow Him as a believer, the Lord says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children . . . yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26ff.).

Those who are happily married should honor their marriage for Christ's sake, enjoying it and using it to the glory of God.

But if marriage would prevent someone from following Christ now and from enjoying the Real Marriage hereafter, let him or her despise marriage, also for Christ's sake.

For the time is short. Let those who have wives and husbands be as though they had none, and let those who have no husband or wife be as though they had a Friend Who is better than a husband or a wife. For the fashion of this world, including earthly marriage, passes away. Then those who have obeyed the Lord, suffering loss, forsaking houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, and lands for Jesus' sake shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matt. 19:29).

An Afterword

Regrettably, the forbidding of remarriage to the "innocent party" is not the Reformed tradition. To some extent, this is also true of the prohibition of remarriage to the one deserted by an unbelieving husband or wife. This is something that a Reformed church and a Reformed man will reckon with in their thinking on marriage, but it is not conclusive. For it is the confession of the Reformed faith that Scripture is the "infallible rule" by which all doctrine must be tested.

Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all (Belgic Confession, Art. 7).

The "problem" of the Reformed tradition regarding remarriage raises the question of the history of the church's thinking on remarriage after divorce. Since this history sheds important light on the issue of remarriage and since it refutes the notion that the forbidding of remarriage by the Protestant Reformed Churches is a novelty on the ecclesiastical scene, I intend to look at the history of the church's doctrine concerning remarriage in the next issue of this journal. ▲

Another Look At Common Grace (2)

Herman C. Hanko

Definitions

Definitions Of Common Grace

Before we can examine various questions which are related to the idea of common grace¹ it is quite important to examine what precisely is meant by the concept.

In an effort to get at the meaning of common grace, we refer to various writers who have, over the years, supported the doctrine of common grace.

Herman Bavinck, in his pamphlet, "Common Grace,"² does not define common grace, but teaches that common grace is the explanation for the continued existence of the wicked and the preservation of the nations outside Israel during the Old Testament with a view to the salvation of a catholic church. He speaks of common grace as important because it prepares the way in the whole creation and in the human race for special grace by which the whole cosmos is saved.

In his book, *Our Reasonable Faith*,³ Bavinck connects common grace with general revelation and special grace with special revelation. He writes:

It is common grace which makes special grace possible, prepares the way for it, and later supports it; and special grace, in its turn, leads common grace up to its own level and puts it into its service.⁴

¹ The questions which we propose to treat in these articles were briefly listed in our first introductory article which appeared in the April, 1992 issue of *The Journal*.

² Herman Bavinck, *De Algemeene Genade* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Sevensma Co., [no date]). This pamphlet was translated by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen and appeared in *Calvin Theological Journal*, Volume 24, number 1, April, 1989. We use Van Leeuwen's translation.

³ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956). See especially page 38.

⁴ William Masselink does the same thing and devotes an entire book to the relation between common grace and general revelation. See, William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953).

Berkhof deals extensively with common grace.⁵ He speaks first of all of three heads under which common grace can be treated: 1) universal common grace which is shown to all creatures; 2) general common grace which is shown to all men; 3) covenantal common grace which is shown to all who live in the sphere of the covenant.⁶

Attempting a more formal definition of common grace, Berkhof speaks of a grace that is common in the sense of ordinary.

The ordinary, in distinction from the special, operations of the Holy Spirit are called common. His natural and usual operations are contrasted with those which are unusual and supernatural.⁷

It is important to note in this connection that Berkhof, in speaking of common grace, is emphatically referring to God's attribute of grace. God's attribute of grace

appears also in the natural blessings which God showers upon man in the present life.... It is seen in all that God does to restrain the devastating influences and development of sin in the world, and to maintain and enrich and develop the natural life of mankind.... It should be borne in mind, however, that the term *gratia communis*, though generally designating a grace that is common to the whole of mankind is also used to denote a grace that is common to the elect and the non-elect that are living under the gospel, such as the external gospel call that comes to both alike.⁸

In summarizing common grace he writes:

(a) Those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted; or, (b) those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good to Him.⁹

In discussing the means by which common grace operates, Berkhof lists general revelation, governments, public opinion, divine punishments

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 434, 435.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 436.

and rewards.¹⁰ And the fruits of common grace are said to be a postponement of the sentence of death; a restraint of sin; the preservation of truth, morality, and religion; the performance of outward good and civil righteousness; and many natural blessings.¹¹

Bratt calls attention to an interesting and significant aspect of common grace when he refers to the views of Johannes Groen, an example of one strain of thought within Dutch Calvinism in this country.

Johannes Groen opted for ... the principle of common grace rather than antithesis. The laws of social development came from Creation, he argued, not Redemption; the antithesis was spiritual and need not be reflected in all temporal activity; the redeemed might operate in 'the social sphere' according to natural law. Thus Christians could—indeed, *should*—cooperate with unbelievers on a 'neutral terrain,' the better to establish justice in society. Since in Groen's estimation the activities of most American labor unions did precisely that (by promoting equity and solidarity), the Reformed should join them.¹²

James Daane speaks of common grace particularly in connection with the distinction between total and absolute depravity; and while he does not clearly define what he means, it seems that his idea is that common grace is a mitigation of depravity which leaves the depraved nature capable of doing some good. In this connection he speaks of the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

The traditional manner in which Reformed theology accounted for this difference between total and absolute depravity was by reference to a general, gracious operation of the Holy Spirit upon unregenerate human hearts.¹³

He sums up the matter with a reference to the decisions of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924.

Thus it is evident that 1924 teaches in harmony with traditional Reformed thought that there is a restraint of sin in the life of the unregenerate and an emergence of civic righteousness, and that these two features of unregenerate life are the result of a positive operation of God's Spirit.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 440-441.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 441-444.

¹² James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), p. 76.

¹³ James Daane, *A Theology of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 88.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 88, 89.

In a series of sermons which, according to the author, were preached expressly to explain and defend the decisions on common grace by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, Rev. H. J. Kuyper defines common grace.

It is the grace or favor which God, for the sake of Christ and His Church, shows to those who do not possess saving grace and through which He (negative)

1. postpones their merited judgment (outward).
2. restrains them from sin (inward) (positive).
3. bestows temporal blessings upon them and offers the gospel even to non-elect among them (outward).
4. and enables them to perform civic righteousness, to entertain some regard for virtue and to enjoy some of the blessings of the gospel (inward).¹⁵

Kuiper also goes on to define common grace in terms of earthly blessings sent to the wicked as fruits of God's kindness and as efforts to convince the wicked of God's sincere willingness to give them the greater gift of salvation,¹⁶ as proof of God's love for all,¹⁷ as an inward restraint of sin,¹⁸ and as the ability to do good in the sight of God.¹⁹

Dr. Abraham Kuyper concentrates especially on the restraint of sin and the consequent good which the ungodly are able to perform. Since the magistrate is instituted because of sin, it "is an instrument of 'common grace.'"²⁰ Mocking Augustine's view that the superlative accomplishments of the heathen are nothing but "splendid vices,"²¹ Kuyper calls this idea "a subterfuge, which lacks earnestness."²² Common grace, Kuyper says, "does not kill the core of sin, nor does it save unto life eternal, but it arrests the complete effectuation of sin."²³

God by His "common grace" restrains the operation of sin in man, partly

¹⁵ H. J. Kuiper, *Sermons Delivered in Broadway Christian Reformed Church*, 1925, p. 14. Interestingly, this definition appears in a footnote. One wonders whether it was actually in the sermon preached.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-36.

²⁰ Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943), pp. 80-82. See also pp. 92, 96.

²¹ Although Kuyper does not mention Augustine by name.

²² *Ibid.*, 122.

²³ *Ibid.*, 123, 124.

by breaking its power, partly by taming his evil spirit, and partly by domesticating his nation or his family.²⁴

The result is that the unregenerate man is capable of doing good.

It is now understood that it was the 'common grace' of God, which had produced in ancient Greece and Rome the treasures of philosophical light, and disclosed to us treasures of art and justice.²⁵

Masselink takes the same position. Discussing the relation between general revelation and common grace, Masselink says:

[General revelation and common grace] are related, however, because in common grace God uses the truths of general revelation to restrain sin. The two results of general revelation are: God-consciousness and moral consciousness. By means of these two results, through God's common grace, sin is curbed in the natural man.²⁶

Masselink claims that Reformed theology all but went into eclipse for 200 years after the Reformation because "the great fact of the Christian's relation to the world was neglected."²⁷ Kuyper and Hodge were the men responsible for reviving this important notion.

While the negative element of the restraint of sin is important, says Masselink, the positive must also be emphasized: "The constant operation of the Holy Spirit upon all mankind by which civil righteousness is promoted."²⁸ Connecting common grace with God's attributes, Masselink opines that common grace prevents chaos and preserves the creation; it gives power to man, order in creation and produces science, government, art, etc.²⁹

K. Sietsma, in his work on the office discusses common grace. He writes:

Of course, satan did not succeed in destroying man completely. Man is not a devil, full of conscious and deliberate hate for God. We believe, according to what we designate "common grace," that there are active in the world and in man many energies or powers of the Word and Spirit of God

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 122-125.

²⁶ William Masselink, *General Revelation And Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 188, 192, 193.

which prevent the transformation of all that God once created good into its very opposite. The Lord sees to it that the thoughts of the human mind, the affections of the human heart, and the works of the human hand still manifest His glory and the rich qualities of His creation. There remains a rich form of human life, even where there is no regeneration of the heart and even where the grace of salvation has not been bestowed.³⁰

It is striking that Sietsma does not find this common grace rooted in the cross of Christ, but rather in some original goodness preserved from the beginning and preserved partially in the office. It is, however, related to Christ — although Sietsma never explains the nature of this relationship.³¹

Henry R. VanTil discusses common grace at length. One of the values of his book is its extensive treatment of Abraham Kuyper's massive three-volume work on common grace.³² After discussing Kuyper's view at some length, VanTil summarizes it as follows:

Creation would have returned to the void unless God in his common grace intervened to sustain it; thus the creative will is now achieved through common grace. Common grace does not merely have a restraining or negative influence but it is also positive and progressive in motivating cultural activity. Culture is a gift of common grace since through it the original powers deposited in nature were brought to fruition. The very antithesis between light and darkness is possible only on the basis of common grace.³³

VanTil does not agree with Kuyper entirely. He does not believe that the world would have reverted to chaos without the intervention of common grace; and he also parts ways with Kuyper's view that man would have become a beast apart from common grace. The fall, VanTil says, did not rob man of his rationality and morality.³⁴

³⁰ K. Sietsma, *The Idea Of Office*, tr. by Henry Vander Goot (Toronto: Paideia Press, 1985), p. 27.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33, 34.

³² Entitled, *Gemeene Gratie*. Kuyper called common grace "gratie" in distinction from the ordinary Dutch word for grace, "genade." He did this because he wanted to distinguish his common grace from the view of common grace which included the general offer of the gospel, a doctrine which Kuyper condemned. Kuyper's *Gemeene Gratie* is not available in English, and takes a great deal of fortitude to read even if one can read Dutch.

³³ Henry R. VanTil, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 229.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 230-232.

In defining common grace, VanTil uses a definition of his uncle, Cornelius VanTil, found in C. VanTil's *A Letter on Common Grace*.

[Common grace is an] ethical attitude on the part of God to mankind by which man is restrained from fully expressing his enmity toward his Creator or his fellow man, and whereby he is enabled to perform certain moral actions. These may be denominated 'good' in the relative sense in which Scripture applies that term to the approved actions of unregenerate men.³⁵

Van Til also points out in this same connection that common grace is indeed *grace* because the gifts which are given to men are given without merit.³⁶

Van Til also gives some attention to the meaning of "common" in the term common grace and the difficulties of its use.

It would seem that one of the chief causes of this difficulty is the fact that the term "common" has not been carefully defined. It makes a great deal of difference whether one applies the qualitative or quantitative connotation. If the latter connotation is applied to grace, it would mean that God gives his favor to all indiscriminately in the sending of sunshine and rain upon the evil and the good, that the preaching of the Gospel is proof that God's favor is promiscuous, and that the restraint of sin and the power to perform civil good is also due to common grace in both regenerate and unregenerate. However, when grace is used in the qualitative sense it refers to the ordinary, the natural and usual as compared with the extraordinary. Hence the grace we call common dispenses the ordinary gifts of life and health, sunshine and rain to those who are unthankful, since God is kind to his enemies. But he gives himself in love and fellowship to his children

However, there are those who have a different conception of commonality. By it they mean that all men share alike under the common grace of God in the natural blessings of sunshine and rain; they have everything in common up to a certain point. The ordinary things of life together with human nature with its gifts of reason, appreciation of beauty, etc., are universally received and given without discrimination. For God loves men promiscuously, and we must follow his example by not drawing a line between saints and sinners in the common things of life. We must learn to enjoy and appreciate the common cultures, without dragging the antithesis into the picture. An illustration at this point may not be amiss. Think of a Wyoming rancher who runs his riding horses together with his cattle. But in one corner of that open ranch there is a corral specially designed for feeding his horses a ration of protein and a vitamin fortified diet, to keep them in condition for hard service. This is horse heaven. They have the range in common with all the other

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

livestock, but here is "special grace." Some such concept seems to be prevalent in many circles. As a result, there is a certain level of existence at which the army of the Lord is immobilized, where it does not function as an army, but suddenly takes on the appearance of crowds of vacationers, or the motley multitude at a fair and pushing one another for a better position to see. Thus there is established between the church and the world a grey, colorless area, a kind of no man's land, where an armistice obtains and one can hobnob with the enemy with impunity in a relaxed Christmas spirit, smoking the common weed.³⁷

We have quoted quite at length from Van Til because he very carefully defines what he means by common grace and takes exception to many current views. In addition to his rejection of these views, he also denies that common grace is God's general love, a love which becomes the basis for mission work. This view was promoted by Leonard Verduin and was widely held in the Christian Reformed Church in the '60s.³⁸

The views of common grace which we have discussed to this point have been propounded chiefly in the tradition of continental Dutch Reformed theology. It is time to take a look at some leading Presbyterian thinkers. While many within the Presbyterian tradition have written on and defended common grace, we refer to some representative theologians.

A. A. Hodge offers a definition of common grace:

"Common grace" is the restraining and persuading influences of the Holy Spirit acting only through the truth revealed in the gospel, or through the natural light of reason and of conscience, heightening the natural moral effect of such truth upon the understanding, conscience and heart. It involves no change of heart, but simply an enhancement of the natural powers of the truth, a restraint of the evil passions, and an increase of the natural emotions in view of sin, duty, and self-interest.³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 239, 240.

³⁸ The view was propounded by Verduin in "Does Our Theology Hamper Missions," *The Reformed Journal*, (June, 1958), pp. 3ff. It resulted in a flurry of controversy, which controversy centered in a series of articles written by Harold Decker in *The Reformed Journal*, articles which promoted the idea that mission work could be effectively performed only when the gospel proclaimed that God loves all men. The case reached the Synod, the highest judicatory in the Christian Reformed Church; but the Synod refused to condemn Decker's views. An interesting feature of the Synod's discussion of these issues was the fact that appeal was made to common grace in support of Decker's position.

³⁹ A. A. Hodge, *Outline of Theology* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878), pp. 449, 450.

Hodge finds proof "that God so operates upon the hearts of the unregenerate ... 1st, from Scripture, Gen. 6:3, Acts 7:51, Hebrews 10:29; 2nd, from universal experience and observation."⁴⁰

Just as A. A. Hodge, Charles Hodge treats common grace under "Vocation," i.e., "Calling." He offers the following definitions of grace:

By common grace, therefore, is meant that influence of the Spirit, which in a greater or less measure, is granted to all who hear the truth. By sufficient grace is meant such kind and degree of the Spirit's influence, as is sufficient to lead men to repentance, faith, and a holy life. By efficacious grace is meant such an influence of the Spirit as is certainly effectual in producing regeneration and conversion. By preventing grace is intended that operation of the Spirit on the mind which precedes and excites its efforts to return to God. By the *gratia gratum faciens* is meant the influence of the Spirit which renews and renders gracious. Cooperating grace is that influence of the Spirit which aids the people of God in all the exercises of the divine life. By habitual grace is meant the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers; or that permanent, immanent state of mind due to his abiding presence and power.⁴¹

In his many distinctions of grace, Hodge finds that they all apply to the elect except for a certain influence of the Spirit granted to all who hear the truth. While Hodge speaks of an influence of the Spirit apart from the Word necessary to prepare the minds of men for the reception of the truth, it is not clear if this is a reference also to common grace, for there is no specific mention of common grace.⁴²

But then Hodge does speak emphatically of common grace and writes:

The Bible therefore teaches that the Holy Spirit of truth, of holiness, and of life in all its forms, is present with every human mind, enforcing truth, restraining from evil, exciting to good, and imparting wisdom or strength, when, where, and in what measure seemeth to Him good This is what in theology is called common grace.⁴³

In examining the Scriptures on this question, Hodge finds in Genesis 6:3 a reference to the Holy Spirit Who exerts an influence in the government of men.⁴⁴ Common grace is also found, according to Hodge, in Acts 7:51: God is "everywhere present with the minds of men, as the Spirit of truth and

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), Vol. II, pp. 654, 655.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II, 660-664.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, 667.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 668.

goodness, operating on them according to the laws of their free moral agency, inclining them to good and restraining them from evil.”⁴⁵ When Romans 1:25 speaks of God giving the wicked up, Hodge says that this implies some restraint of the wicked prior to the giving up.⁴⁶

The fruits of this common grace are the presence of virtue in the world, a religious feeling among all men, and a diversity of religious experiences which include a conviction of the truths of Scripture, an experience of their power and of external religious life.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most articulate defender of common grace is John Murray.

In Volume I of his collected writings appears an article entitled, “The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel.” In this article Murray discusses what he means by common grace.

Emphatically he speaks of the fact that the “unrestricted overture of grace is rooted in the atonement.”⁴⁸ Pursuing this line of thought, Murray writes: “Many benefits accrue to the non-elect from the redemptive work of Christ.”⁴⁹ After explaining this in some detail, Murray concludes the paragraph with the startling words: “... It would not be improper to say that, in respect of what is entailed for the non-elect, Christ died for them.”⁵⁰

These benefits are, Murray goes on to say, expressions of God’s kindness, mercy, and love.⁵¹ Finding proof for God’s love for all men in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27, 35, Murray writes:

There is a love in God that goes forth to lost men and is manifested in the manifold blessings which all men without distinction enjoy, a love in which non-elect persons are embraced, and a love that comes to its highest expression in the entreaties, overtures and demands of gospel proclamation.⁵²

Some of these benefits Murray finds mentioned in Hebrews 6:4, 5; 10:29; II Peter 2:20, 21.

But Murray makes some careful, though difficult to understand, distinctions in an effort to escape the charge of universalizing the atonement

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 608.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 669.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. I, “The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel” (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 65, 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I, 68.

of Christ. He writes: "The non-elect enjoy many benefits that accrue *from* the atonement but they do not partake of the *atonement*."⁵³ The same distinction must be made in the love of God.⁵⁴ While the love of benevolence is a love which saves, the love of complacency is a love which is conditioned by a response to our love.⁵⁵ This love, rooted in the cross, is expressed in the gospel offer.⁵⁶

In another article, Murray discusses common grace in more detail. Taking his starting point with the noble examples of heathenism and how they are to be explained, and disagreeing with what Murray considers to be a very narrow definition of common grace in Charles Hodge and A. A. Hodge, he offers a broader definition:

[Common grace is] any gift or favor bestowed upon, and enjoyed by creatures Gifts bestowed upon other creatures as well as upon men Every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.⁵⁷

In defining these gifts further, Murray uses a classification found in Herman Kuiper. Universal common grace is "grace which is common to all the creatures who make up this sin-cursed world ... a grace which touches creatures as creatures." General common grace is "grace common to all human beings in distinction from the rest of God's creatures ... a grace which pertains to men as men." Covenant common grace is "grace common to all who live in the covenant sphere ... to all elect and non-elect covenant members."⁵⁸

Murray has an elaborate classification of the elements of common grace. There is first of all restraint "upon the expressions and consequences of human depravity and of unholy passion."⁵⁹ This restraint is further divided into a restraint of sin which is a "restraint upon the workings of human depravity" by which God "prevents the unholy affections and principles of men from manifesting all the potentialities inherent in them."⁶⁰ The proof of this is found in Genesis 3:22, 23; 4:15 because "a halo of sanctity was

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I, 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 69, 70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 70-72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 73.

⁵⁷ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. II, "Common Grace" (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), pp. 93-96.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 96, 97. See Berkhof, above, for the same idea.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 98.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 98.

placed around [Cain's] life;"⁶¹ Genesis 20:6 where the assumption is that Abimelech was an unbeliever;⁶² II Kings 19:27, 28, which contains God's Word of judgment against Sennacherib, king of Assyria.⁶³

That restraint includes, secondly, a restraint upon the divine wrath and a postponement of judgment. This is interpreted as longsuffering and forbearance.

Thirdly, God restrains evil by means of "correcting and preserving influences so that the ravages of sin might not be allowed to work out the full measure of their destructive power."⁶⁴

Secondly, the bestowal of good and the excitation to good is an element in common grace.⁶⁵ This also includes various elements.

First of all, creation is the recipient of divine bounty.⁶⁶

Secondly, unregenerate men are recipients of divine favour and goodness. The proof that is given includes God's blessing on Potiphar; Acts 14:16, 17; 17:30; Matthew 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36; 16:25.⁶⁷

Thirdly, good is attributed to unregenerate man. Faced with the paradox or seeming contradiction between the good of the unregenerate man and the testimony of Scripture that the wicked do only wickedness, Murray, in a footnote, resolves the paradox by an appeal to the "relative good" of the wicked. His proof is found in II Kings 10:30; 12:2; Matthew 5:46; Luke 6:33; Romans 2:14, 15.⁶⁸

Fourthly, another element of common grace is the operations and influences of the Spirit which the unregenerate receive through the preaching and which "result in experience of the power and glory of the gospel...."⁶⁹ The proof for this element is found in the parable of the sower; Hebrews 6:4-8, which Murray calls "non-saving grace at its very apex;" II Peter 2:20-22, Romans 1:18ff.⁷⁰

Finally, an element of common grace is civil government which restrains sin and promotes good.⁷¹

Finally, Murray discusses the purpose of common grace as serving special grace, although the salvation of the church is "not the only purpose

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, II, 99.

⁶² *Ibid.*, II, 100.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, II, 100.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 101.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 101.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 103.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 104ff.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 106, 107.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 109.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 110.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, II, 111.

being fulfilled in history and not ... the one purpose to which all others may be subordinated.”⁷² Nevertheless, the pre-conversion works of the Spirit belong to common grace.

Furthermore, when we come to the point of actual conversion, the faith and repentance involved in conversion do not receive their genesis apart from the knowledge of the truth of the gospel. There must be conveyed to the mind of the man who believes and repents to the saving of his soul the truth-content of law and gospel, law as convicting him of sin and gospel as conveying the information which becomes the material of faith. To some extent at least there must be the cognition and apprehension of the import of law and gospel prior to the exercise of saving faith and repentance. ‘Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God’ (Rom. 10:17). But this apprehension of the truth of the gospel that is prior to faith and repentance, and therefore prior to the regeneration of which faith and repentance are the immediate effects in our consciousness, cannot strictly belong to the saving operations of the Spirit. They are preparatory to these saving operations and in the gracious design of God place the person concerned in the psychological condition that is the prerequisite of the intelligent exercise of faith and repentance. In other words, they place in his mind the apperceptive content that makes the gospel meaningful to his consciousness. But since they are not the saving acts of faith and repentance they must belong to a different category from that of saving grace and therefore to the category of non-saving or common grace.

We may thus say that in the operations of common grace we have what we may call the vestibule of faith.⁷³

In an unpublished paper, which actually deals with the hypostatic union in Christ, David Silversides treats also common grace.⁷⁴ He says that common grace is God showing favor, love, and mercy toward the reprobate. Such common grace includes the restraint of sin, the restraint of divine wrath, material blessings, civil government, and the preaching of the gospel: “...God enjoins his ministers to present a genuine and benevolent invitation to sinners to come to Christ expressive of his love and favour to them.”⁷⁵ Thus common grace emphatically means God’s love for all men.⁷⁶

⁷² *Ibid.*, II, 113.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, 115.

⁷⁴ Silversides is a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. It is not too clear how the common grace issue enters his discussion of the hypostatic union, but he takes the time to take to task the views on common grace held by Herman Hoeksema.

⁷⁵ Pp. 35ff. in this paper.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

John H. Gerstner also makes a distinction in the love of God which allows room for something approaching common grace. He says that God loves all men with a benevolent love, i.e., a love "which consists in doing some good for another being whether that being is excellent and deserving of that good or not." It is distinct from the "love of complacency" which is "based on the excellency of another moral being." Still, even benevolent love is both "the benevolent love of common grace (sunshine and rain)" and the "benevolent love" which is "salvific," which is intended "to bestow eternal life."⁷⁷

In an important book, Donald Macleod writes extensively on the subject of common grace and takes the time to criticize (sometimes rather severely) the view of the Protestant Reformed Churches.⁷⁸ He speaks of the fact that common grace includes blessings enjoyed by the reprobate; the laudable qualities to be found in the lives of the wicked; and the cultural achievements of the natural man.⁷⁹ The effects of common grace, according to Macleod, are God's exercise of forbearance and longsuffering towards the world, the blessings of divine benevolence, God's restraint of sin in men's lives, God's preservation of some sense of morality and religion in human society, man's capability of civil good and domestic affection, and man's cultural and technological achievement.⁸⁰ The instruments of common grace are defined as God's general revelation, the presence of the church to restrain sin and postpone judgment, the ordinances of law and government which restrain sin and create a favorable climate in which men can live, God's judgments which remove wickedness and restrain sin, and the eternal call of the gospel.⁸¹

Macleod, in explaining God's favor and love towards the unregenerate, points out that God does not always hate the wicked any more than he always loves the elect: "His attitude to them (the elect, HH) is not simply one of love."⁸² And in explaining the good which the unregenerate are capable of performing, he falls back on the widely accepted distinction between total depravity and absolute depravity.⁸³

⁷⁷ John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing The Word Of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), pp. 130, 131.

⁷⁸ Donald Macleod, *Behold Your God* (Ross-shire, Christian Focus Publications, 1991).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-120.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 121-123.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸³ This distinction is interpreted in different ways by defenders of common grace. Macleod seems to make the distinction apply to the *deeds* of men and holds that

Having concluded our survey of the views of various *thinkers* on the subject of common grace, it would probably be beneficial to summarize all these views so that the issues are more clearly before us.

Although one finds in the literature very little effort to define precisely what common grace is, two points especially emerge. The first is that by "common" is meant "universal." That is, grace which is common is grace which is shown universally; not only to all humans, but also to all God's creation, to what the first point of 1924 called "God's creatures in general."⁸⁴ Some even speak of a common grace within the covenant which is shared by the elect and non-elect who are born within the sphere of the covenant.

And, secondly, "grace" is indeed defined as grace in the full sense of that word — even if common grace is carefully distinguished from saving grace. Common grace is a grace which is a revelation of God's own attribute of grace. It is a grace that is unmerited favor. It is a grace that is synonymous with, or includes in it, love, favor, kindness, mercy, longsuffering, forbearance, and benevolence. In fact, common grace is also said by some⁸⁵ to be rooted in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Some emphasize in this connection that this common favor of God can indeed be called "grace" because it is unmerited; and that which is unmerited is always grace.

Most of the proponents of common grace agree that it includes the following elements: the natural blessings which come to all such as rain and sunshine; the maintenance of order in society in general; the postponement of judgment on the wicked; the preservation of truth, morality, and religion among men; the enrichment and development of natural life; the experience of the power and glory of the gospel to those who come under the preaching of the gospel but are not saved; and the restraint of sin in the lives of men, with the result that the unregenerate are capable of doing good in an outward or relative sense of the word.

Some are inclined to stress various aspects of these fruits of common grace. The question quite naturally arises, *viz.*, how it is possible for the unregenerate to do good in the sight of God, even if that good is natural, civil,

man does not do all the wickedness he would be capable of doing if it were not for common grace. Others have made the distinction apply to the *nature* of man and have said that, although man is depraved in all parts of his nature (total depravity), he is not completely depraved in any part of his nature (absolute depravity). We shall discuss this at some future date.

⁸⁴ Some disagreement exists over the question whether common grace is shared by the elect and non-elect, or whether it is God's grace only to the non-elect, while the elect are the heirs of special grace.

⁸⁵ Notably, John Murray. See also, R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1959), pp. 81-95.

and relative. Some answer this question by speaking of a certain mitigation of the depravity of the human nature, which mitigation is sometimes explained in terms of a distinction between total depravity and absolute depravity.⁸⁶ Some speak of the fact that, if it had not been for common grace which God showed to the world immediately after the fall, the creation would have returned to a void, and man would have become a beast or a devil.⁸⁷

John Murray adds one other aspect to common grace, an idea that was common among the later Puritans. Common grace, where the gospel is preached, gives some understanding of the law and the gospel which results in a conviction of sin and an understanding of the attractiveness of Christ proclaimed in the gospel. Apparently, this comes to all who hear the preaching and is preparatory to the work of regeneration, conversion, repentance, and faith. Murray calls it the "vestibule" of saving grace. Bavinck goes further and speaks of this aspect of common grace as found in all men, not now through the preaching of the gospel, but through general revelation, and as having the effect of showing men the hopelessness of idolatry as well as stirring up in them a desire for something better and different.

Common grace is bestowed upon man in different ways, according to the defenders of this doctrine. It seems, however, as if proper distinctions are not always made in this connection. Almost all agree that common grace comes from God through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all men. But, in addition to this inward work of the Holy Spirit, common grace comes through many other means.⁸⁸ Most importantly, it comes through the general revelation of God in creation and in the conscience by means of which men retain some knowledge of God, some sense of morality, and some ability to do good in God's sight. Other ways, however, in which common grace is bestowed on men are through the institution of government, through public opinion, and through divine punishments and rewards. Whether these means by which common grace becomes operative are also the fruit of the Spirit is not made clear.

There is one other aspect of common grace, not generally held in the men whose writings we have surveyed, but nevertheless of considerable importance. It is the view of Johannes Groen, described by James Bratt, to which we referred earlier in this article. Groen spoke of common grace creating a sphere of life rooted in the creation ordinance, where, therefore,

⁸⁶ See our earlier remarks on this subject.

⁸⁷ Others, however, disagree with this. See, e.g., Henry VanTil, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ Whether these other means are worked by the Holy Spirit is not often discussed.

the antithesis does not apply, and where elect and non-elect can cooperate in various activities in life.

So these are the main ideas to be found in the doctrine of common grace. Included in all this is, of course, the relation between common grace and the free offer of the gospel. But we have decided not to include in our discussion this latter aspect of the question.

We will, the Lord willing, begin an analysis of these ideas in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*. ▲

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Book Reviews

John Calvin's Sermons on II Samuel: Chapters 1 - 13, Translated by Douglas Kelly. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992. pp. xvii - 677. \$46.95. (cloth) [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

Prof. Kelly (Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi) and The Banner of Truth Trust are to be commended for translating and publishing this important work of John Calvin.

Concerning his work Kelly writes, "I began this translation from the original French some twelve years ago with the encouragement of the late Professor Ford Lewis Battles, then of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, and of Professor John H. Leith of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. I finished it approximately eight or nine years

ago, but with the help of my good wife and many others, have revised it three or four times since then. Throughout, my desire has been constant: first to be absolutely faithful to what Calvin actually said, and secondly to turn it into as normal and non-stilted, 'non-translationese' English as is consistent with strict fidelity to the original text. When faced with the choice of either being literally correct but awkward, or on the other hand, attractive but only loosely connected to the original text, I have consistently chosen the former, although not without struggling as hard as I could to 'make the crooked straight and the rough places plain'. Others will have to judge how successful I have been" (p. xiii).

If the translation is indeed an accurate reflection of what Calvin actually said, Prof. Kelly has suc-

ceeded admirably. These sermons read smoothly and easily.

These sermons are expository. Certain themes (e.g., the total depravity and utter worthlessness of man and the absolute sovereignty and glory of God) run through all of them. There is application of the truth to the lives of the people of God which is remarkably *apropos* to the life of the Christian in the twentieth century. And, Calvin never tires of leading his listeners to the cross of Jesus.

The sermons were preached in Geneva on weekdays, Monday through Saturday, every other week from May 23, 1562 to September 8, 1562. They are about half of the series which Calvin preached on II Samuel. We are promised the other half in an upcoming second volume.

The book can be profitably used for devotional reading by lay or clergy. Preachers will find the volume to be an excellent commentary on the text, and their failure to consult it will be to the detriment of their preaching on II Samuel. The book belongs in seminary libraries and ought to be used by professors of Homiletics and their students. The value of the book is greatly enhanced by two detailed indices: the first of name and subject and the second of Scripture.

Calvin remains, in the opinion of this reviewer, *the* prince of exegetes. This book is just that much more evidence that his opinion is correct. ♦

The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992. 324 pp., \$44.95, cloth. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

This book is an important and valuable book filled with much worthwhile material which Old has dug out of the writings of the Reformers in his research. To give a general overview of the book, we quote from the appended note.

This meticulously researched book recounts how the early sixteenth-century Reformers, steering a course between the old Latin rites on the one hand and the Anabaptist movement on the other, developed a baptismal service that they understood to be reformed according to Scripture. Old believes that the Reformers' debates over infant versus adult baptism, immersion versus sprinkling, the covenant, baptismal names, and other theological and liturgical reforms are part of the rich diversity that continues to shape contemporary dialogue about baptism.

After taking an in-depth look at the rite of baptism from a historical perspective, the book turns to a more systematic study, investigating four parts of the celebration: catechetical instruction, the baptismal vows, the baptismal invocation, and the sign of washing. Old's study shows the Reformed baptismal rite to be well thought out, pastorally sensitive, and theologically profound.

Hughes Oliphant Old is a member of the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey.

Perhaps the most interesting section of the book for this reviewer was the section on Anabaptism. Old's analysis of Anabaptism is incisive. He points out that only by spiritualizing Scripture could Muntzer negate the necessity of infant baptism. Old writes that Hubmaier "rejects both Medieval Scholastic exegesis with its great respect for tradition and the classical Protestant method of exegesis. In its place he puts a very private sort of personal illumination" (p. 97). This is an important insight, for it was the spiritualizing of the Anabaptists that played such a major role in the controversy between the Reformers and this radical wing.

Old also makes clear that the Anabaptists did not, in fact, stand in the line of the Reformation. They constituted a radical diversion in theology, exegesis, and on the rite and doctrine of baptism. He writes:

Muntzer is not a radical Protestant. His call for the reform of baptism is not a radical application of the basic principles of Protestantism, nor is he to be explained as one who simply applied the basic principles of Protestantism more consistently than the classical Protestant Reformers. Thomas Muntzer was indeed an amazingly creative thinker, but he is not to be numbered among the Reformers of classical Prot-

estantism. He was the prophet of an entirely different approach to church reform. It was his combination of radical social revolution, ecstatic personal religious experience, illuministic exegesis, and Joachite millenarianism which was the furnace of religious power which ignited kindred spirits from all over Europe and from which eventually came a unique type of Christianity (p. 83).

That Anabaptist theology was markedly different from that of the Reformers is explained in detail. Old writes in connection with the mystical tendencies of Anabaptism:

While it may be true that the Saxons tend toward spiritualism and that Grebel (an Anabaptist theologian and leader, HH) has been influenced by Zwinglian sacramentarianism, it is also true that they both have common roots in the *imitatio Christi* mysticism of the Middle Ages. This is the most important thing to be noticed in a comparison between Grebel and Muntzer: in both there is a rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith and an acceptance of an *imitatio Christi* soteriology strongly influenced by medieval mysticism. Muntzer and Grebel were both heirs of Thomas a Kempis and William of Occam (p. 92).

Writing about the doctrinal divergence of Hans Denck (another Anabaptist theologian), Old says: "More and more he developed a

thoroughgoing voluntarist understanding of salvation. His denial of predestination and his espousal of free will were perhaps influenced by the humanist, Erasmus. One thing is clear, his tract 'Whether God Is the Author of Evil' shows very little interest in the revival of Augustinianism. He was obviously not treading the same path as Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Bucer" (p. 106).

There are many other gems in the book.

Old gives an accurate assessment of the relation between the Reformation and Renaissance, something which is almost impossible to find in other writings.

The Christian Humanism of Erasmus was much more influenced by Italian Humanism. The Protestant Reformers of Basel were a long way from making their reform into the religion of the Renaissance. They accepted the Christian Humanism of their teachers as a literary method that put great emphasis on returning to the source documents of Christian antiquity. It was above all the recovery of biblical Greek and Hebrew. It was the exercising of grammatical-historical exegesis in an attempt to better understand the text of Holy Scripture. To put it very simply, the coming of the Reformation to Basel drove a wedge through the school of Christian Humanism, dividing it into those who were going more in the direction of the humanism of the Italian Renaissance and those who were going in the direction of a

more biblical and more Augustinian renewal of Christianity (p. 67).

Old, in his discussion of the relation between baptism and the doctrine of the covenant, also has some interesting and important things to say. He points out that in Reformed theology the covenant was more than a contract (p. 124). It was a gracious promise (p. 126). It was the Anabaptists particularly who insisted on the contractual idea of the covenant (p. 126). This view of the covenant held by the Reformers emphasized also that children were to be baptized because the Holy Spirit sovereignly works faith in elect children (pp. 133ff., 150). This too is important for the present controversy which continues in the church over the ground for the baptism of infants.

It was also in connection with this idea of the covenant held by the Reformers that catechetical instruction was considered so important. Especially Calvin emphasized the crucial significance of the church's official instruction of the covenant seed.

One more delightful insight will give an idea of the value of the book. In connection with the baptismal invocation, i.e., the prayer accompanying the sacrament, Old quotes the prayer used by Luther. Although Old does not make the connection himself, it is obvious that anyone reading this prayer will find in it a remarkable similarity to the prayer found in our own Baptism

Form which is made prior to the administration of the sacrament and which is found in our *Psalter*. Not only are the thoughts similar, but the very wording is so much the same that one can only conclude that the author of our present form borrowed extensively from Luther's prayer. I had no idea that this was the case, but it can hardly be denied. Luther's prayer goes like this.

Almighty eternal God, who according to thy righteous judgment didst condemn the unbelieving world through the flood and in thy great mercy didst preserve believing Noah and his family, and who didst drown hardhearted Pharaoh with all his host in the Red Sea and didst lead thy people Israel through the same on dry ground, thereby prefiguring this bath of thy baptism, and who through the baptism of thy dear Child, our Lord Jesus Christ, hast consecrated and set apart the Jordan and all water as a salutary flood and a rich and full washing away of sins: We pray through thy same groundless mercy that thou wilt graciously behold this N. and bless him with true faith in the spirit so that by means of this saving flood all that has been born in him from Adam and which he himself has added thereto may be drowned in him and engulfed, and that he may be sundered from the number of the unbelieving, preserved dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom, serve thy name and at all times fervent in spirit and joyful in hope, so that with all believers he may be made

worthy to attain eternal life according to thy promise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

While Old admits that it is almost impossible to determine whether Luther used any old prayers as a basis for this prayer, he points out that Leo Jud (a Swiss Reformer) made some changes in the prayer, as did Zwingli. Its resemblance to the prayer in use among us is striking.

This book has much more in it of value and significance. It ought to be read by all ministers and theological teachers. It can be read with profit by all who are interested in church history in general, and by those who are concerned, in particular, with the subject of baptism. Its price may be a bit steep, but one ought not to forget that it is a hardcover book and that its price is not at all out of line with the high cost of books today. ♦

Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith, ed. Donald K. McKim. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press and Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1992. 414 pages. Hardcover. \$37. (Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.)

"This *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* provides a picture of major events, persons, and theological understandings of the Reformed faith. It is 'encyclopedic' not in the sense that it can exhaustively treat all aspects of the Reformed faith in a

comprehensive manner.... Rather, it seeks to provide a circle of knowledge (from 'Accommodation' to 'Zwingli') indicating how events, persons, and concepts have been particularly significant in the Reformed heritage. This orientation sets the following work apart from other general dictionaries and encyclopedias of church history and theology" ("Preface," p. vii). Such is the editor's own description of this unique resource on the Reformed faith.

The work is a valuable source of information on many aspects of the Reformed faith — persons; events; doctrines; creeds; books; and more. Of particular value is the contemporary nature of the work. Included are not only articles on John Calvin and the Geneva Catechism of 1536 but also on Karl Barth and the Barmen Declaration of 1934. The articles are thorough, but brief.

The contributors are recognized Reformed scholars. Indeed, the list of contributors reads like a "who's who" of the worldwide Reformed community.

Overall the information is accurate. Robert Letham's description of Arminianism, for example, observes that

Arminianism proposed a substantial revision of the Reformed doctrines of predestination and grace.... Election is thus conditional on God's foreknowledge of a person's response. Moreover,

the fallen will remains free. Humans can believe or resist grace. Thus, saving grace is sufficient but not irresistible. Humans cooperate.

He notes correctly that the Synod of Dort condemned Arminianism because it "introduced a semi-Pelagian doctrine of grace and a conditional gospel."

The analysis of Reformed doctrines, however, is often another story. Generally, the *Encyclopedia* reflects the rejection by contemporary Reformed theology of the creedal presentation of fundamental Reformed doctrines and a recasting of these doctrines to suit the modern mind. In the article on "Scripture," editor McKim asserts that Calvin, the Reformed confessions, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck taught infallibility only in the sense that Scripture "will not lie or deceive about what Scripture is intended to focus upon: God's salvation in Jesus Christ."

Dewey A. Wallace, Jr. suggests that one does justice to the Reformed doctrine of predestination if he merely affirms "God's gracious favor bestowed upon the undeserving," setting "aside its negative implications as unbiblical." These "negative implications" include the eternal decree of reprobation. In this connection, writing on "Bolsec, Jerome," Philip C. Holtrop makes the intriguing admission that "perhaps the majority of Reformed theologians today would be closer to

Bolsec's views on predestination than to Calvin's."

There is no entry for "Hoeksema, Herman." Holtrop does refer to Hoeksema (as a supralapsarian) in his article on the "Decree(s) of God" and lists his *Reformed Dogmatics* in the bibliography.

Of special interest to Protestant Reformed readers is English theologian Peter Toon's contribution on "Hyper-Calvinism." This "exaggerated, rationalist form of the Reformed faith" has a modern representative, we are informed, in "Herman Hoeksema, whose *Reformed Dogmatics* (1966) places excessive emphasis on the sovereign grace of God." To this a Reformed man or woman has only one response: "It is impossible to place excessive stress on the sovereign grace of God. The strongest stress ever placed on God's sovereign grace comes short of doing justice to the unfathomable sovereignty and infinite grace by which a sinner is saved." The charge that a theologian is "guilty" of stressing excessively God's sovereign grace is, in fact, the highest commendation of that theologian's teaching.

The book is worth the price. ♦

Gospels and Tradition: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels, by Robert H. Stein. Baker Book House, 1991. 204 pp., \$12.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The author of this book is professor of New Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary, a strongly evangelical school. He is also, by his own statement, one who believes in the divine inspiration of Scripture. But he is unabashedly a higher critic of Scripture, and he devotes his book to a higher critical analysis of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which higher criticism, he claims, is necessary to understand "the divinely inspired purpose for writing" Scripture, and which the church will "always be interested in ... because the church will always be interested in hearing the divine word brought to her by God's ordained spokesmen — the Evangelists" (pp. 19, 47).

Most of the author's attention is concentrated on a study of Mark. To this gospel is applied the vagaries of form criticism and redaction criticism. Form criticism deals with two *sitze im leben*: the history of Jesus itself; and the theology and tradition of the church in the period of oral tradition. Redaction criticism deals with the theology of the evangelists, here particularly Mark.

To understand the gospel, various exercises are necessary. One must determine what in the gospel narrative are "pre-Markan sources," whether written or oral. Only in this way will one be able to know Mark's editorial work and thus his theology. The pre-Markan sources are the written and oral traditions which are called "pericopes." Mark's editorial work is what writing Mark did as,

engaging in what the author himself admits to be, at least in part, "a scissors and paste" process, he wove the various pericopes together by means of insertions, summaries, modifications of the pericopes, and appropriate explanations. The truly Marcan materials are called "seams," because these "sew together" the pericopes which Mark received from oral and written tradition and which he was weaving into a smoothly flowing account.

Once having determined what is truly "Marcan," one can then proceed to analyze what Mark actually wrote and thus determine what Mark's "theology" in fact was. The "seams," therefore, are the important elements in the gospel.

All of this leads to some rather strange conclusions.

There are times when the "seams" do not fit properly with the pericopes, but this is itself proof that they are actually "seams," and, therefore, Marcan (p. 78).

This same process leads to asking some very strange questions, questions which one who believed in the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit would never ask.

For example, one is faced with the problem of determining whether the transfiguration account in Mark 8 is a misplaced account of Christ's resurrection; whether Mark 14:28 ("But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.") and 16:7 ("But ... tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee....") are references to Christ's

second coming; and whether Marcan theology proves that Jesus was a teacher.

To determine the meaning of the cleansing of the temple, one must 1) determine the Pre-Marcan tradition; 2) Determine the Marcan account; 3) Compare the two; 4) Learn how Mark "modified, arranged and introduced the pericope" (pp. 121, 122). The conclusion is stated.

When we bring together the results of our investigation we discover the following: the cleansing of the temple is purposely sandwiched into a pericope dealing with the judgment that comes upon an unfruitful tree; verse 13c may be a Marcan insertion stressing that the cursing of the fig tree is an acted parable; immediately following the pericope on Jesus' authority, which was connected to the cleansing pericope (sic) in the pre-Marcan tradition, the Evangelist has placed the parable of the vineyard and the tenants that portrays the judgment of God upon Israel; Mark 12:9b may be a Marcan insertion and clearly speaks of the judgment that must fall upon the evil tenants of the parable; and the little apocalypse is built around the destruction and judgment that are coming upon Israel as represented by the temple. From this it appears quite probably that the cleansing of the temple is seen by the Evangelist as a judgment and condemnation of Israel rather than as a reformation of the temple worship (p. 132).

Such work with Scripture is full of assumptions which can be neither proved nor disproved, and which are simply not pertinent to understanding a Scripture which is the Word of God. Who knows, e.g., whether the evangelists used bodies of tradition, whether oral or written? Appeal is made to Luke 1:1-3 in support of this contention; but whatever the verses may mean, they certainly constitute no proof that the work of the evangelists was limited to weaving together these pericopes into a smoothly flowing narrative. Even if one would grant that in some instances the evangelists made use of various stories, it is impossible to tell from the narratives themselves what parts constitute the stories and what parts are the evangelists. But, in any case, it makes not a particle of difference, for the Holy Spirit inspired every single word which the evangelists wrote, so that their narratives were in fact "God-breathed" in every part of them.

It is clear from the book itself that such work as Stein does leads exactly nowhere. In some instances Stein claims that an understanding of form and redaction criticism is essential to an understanding of the Word of God in Mark. But, in spite of this bold claim, the book is filled with language that indicates uncertainty, tentative conclusions, hesitancy, clear efforts to leave loopholes through which one can escape if someone comes up with some other theory. Language such as this abounds: "... might tend to indi-

cate..., " ... some claim ..., " ... it does not appear to be ..., " "If this is true, then that ..., " "It is quite possible that" Every important conclusion is modified in some such way. The "assured results of modern scholarship" turn out to be, in the hands of modern scholars, exceedingly unsure. Here is one such conclusion:

The pursuit of a Marcan redaction history is a difficult task, but it is not an impossible one. In the past errors have been made because a proper methodology was not followed. By using a proper methodology, such as we have outlined above, *it is hoped* (emphasis is ours) that some of these errors may be avoided in the future (p. 67).

Sometimes there is such preoccupation with trivia or strange questions that things get a bit humorous.

Notice this:

When we observe the freedom with which Matthew and Luke alter the titles Mark gave to Jesus, it would appear that Mark also probably changed the titles he found in his sources. This being so, the titles used of Jesus both in the pericopes and in the seams will reveal the Christological preference of Mark, and this preference will be a theological preference and not merely an aesthetic one. The investigation of the Christology titles used by Mark will therefore be a helpful means

for ascertaining a Marcan redaction history (pp. 66, 67).

It is only after many, many pages of discussion concerning Marcan "seams" that the author had the courage to conclude, somewhat tentatively, that Mark believed that Jesus was a teacher.

I have said it before on the pages of this *Journal*, and I will say it again: If such methods are necessary to understand Scripture, Scripture is effectively wrestled from the hands of the people of God who are totally unable to understand it.

But I also insist that all the problem lies in the fact that such higher critics merely tip their hats to divine and infallible inspiration, but in practice ignore it completely. And such a serious error arises out of the teaching that Scripture is the product of divine inspiration and human authorship — although one does wonder why these same men write hundreds of books on the human authorship and nary a paragraph about the divine authorship.

Nobody, so far as I know, who is in any way a credible scholar, makes the authors of any books other than Scripture, ancient or modern, little more than scissors-and-paste men who do nothing but editorial work on writings of others. It is not done to Homer, nor to Cicero, nor to Augustine, nor to Luther, nor to Shakespeare. Why is this done to Scripture? What can possibly be the motivation which prompts men to do to God's Word what they will not

and dare not do to any other book?

Is it a thirst for appearing scholarly which prompts this sort of thing? If spinning strange theories is scholarly, may God preserve His church from scholarship. Or is it, after all, nothing else but a subtle attack on Scripture as the Word of God? If it is, then it remains a part of the age-old battle between faith and unbelief, and the believer must repudiate all this stuff with his whole being. ♦

Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, by George W. Knight III. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992. 514pp., \$39.95. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

This major and excellent work by George W. Knight III is a part of The New International Greek Testament Commentary. As the series itself suggests, this commentary is intended primarily for Seminary students and ministers of the gospel who use the Greek New Testament in their sermon preparation. The "Foreword" defines the purpose:

The purpose of the series is to cater to the needs of students who want something less technical than a full-scale critical commentary. At the same time, the commentaries are intended to interact with modern scholarship and to make their own scholarly contribution to the study of the New Testament.

The Commentary begins with an introduction to the pastoral epistles

(I & II Timothy and Titus). In this introduction the usual questions of introduction are discussed: authorship, time of writing, historical circumstances of the epistles, and personalities and circumstances of the recipients of the letters. Knight deals at length with higher critical denials of Pauline authorship, but handles all the material in the Introduction in a solidly biblical way. By this latter I mean that Knight does not take a higher critical approach to these questions, even though he discusses higher criticism; he takes the approach of faith in the Scriptures as the Word of God. This is refreshing and much needed.

The commentary itself concentrates on the Greek text and expounds the text from the viewpoint of the Greek. It wrestles with the meaning of the words; it develops carefully the concepts; it bends backwards to define the relationships between the phrases and clauses of the text; and, most importantly, it is always solid exegesis—not given to speculation in those places where Scripture itself does not provide us with information, but content with the text itself and what the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal. It is especially in the development of the concepts of the text that Knight provides many interesting and helpful insights.

One who is considering the purchase of this book will surely want to know how Knight handles those passages in I Timothy which are especially at issue today. One

cannot help but be pleased in this respect too. Two examples will suffice.

Knight correctly interprets the words "all men" in I Timothy 2:4 as referring to "all *kinds* of people, all sorts of people, including civil authorities." And, in connection with verse 6: " 'All' continues and concludes the emphasis of the passage on 'all' kinds of people The term ... points not to an absolute universalism ... but to a universalism including Gentile and Jews, etc..." (pp. 119, 122).

In connection with the role of women in the church, the passage in I Timothy 2:9-15, Knight is also sound. After a lengthy discussion concerning the meaning of the text, he writes: "Both there (I Corinthians 14:34, 35, HH) and here Paul's prohibition of women teaching would prevent them from serving as elders or ministers.... Here he prohibits women from publicly teaching men, and thus teaching the church" (p. 141).

In keeping with the purpose of the commentary, one will find very little practical application in Knight's work; that will have to come from the minister's (or student's) own study of the text.

I urge students and ministers alike to invest in this excellent book. Those who purchase it will find in it a storehouse of material; and it might even inspire some to preach a series of sermons on these important parts of Holy Writ. ♦

God, Creation, & Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology, by Paul K. Jewett. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991. 535 pages. Paper. \$29.95. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is the first volume of Paul K. Jewett's systematic theology. Jewett was professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California until his death earlier this year.

The first volume covers introduction to dogmatics, revelation, the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of creation. Although Jewett shows originality within this format, his method of treating the doctrines is basically that of traditional Protestant dogmatics.

Jewett is learned, master of his material, thorough, and clear.

One interesting, helpful feature of the work is Jewett's knowledgeable relating of theology to contemporary philosophical, psychological, and scientific thought. An instance is his treatment of the development in modern thought of the assault on the Christian doctrine of God's transcendence (cf. pp. 198ff.).

The sin of the book is that it is, as the title announces, truly "a neo-evangelical theology." As regards revelation, Jewett holds that Scripture is a book both human and divine. Because it is human, Scripture contains errors. Jewett rejects the doctrine of verbal inspiration on the ground that "it turns the Bible into a

book that fell from heaven rather than a book that, like other books, is the result of historical process" (p. 138). Since it is the result of historical process, Scripture is legitimately subject to higher criticism (pp. 130ff.).

The human, fallible nature of Scripture permits Jewett to change the biblical revelation of God as Father into a presentation of God as "Mother." Throughout the entire section on the attributes of God (pp. 336-433), Jewett adopts the policy of referring to God exclusively as feminine: "She"; "Mother"; etc. In carrying out this policy, he rigorously makes the required changes in all his quotations. Theologians, creeds, and Scripture itself are made to speak of God as "She" and "Mother." At one point in his discussion of God's attribute of power, e.g., Jewett refers to the first article of the Apostles' Creed: "The first article of the Creed begins appropriately with the words, 'I believe in God the Mother Almighty'" (p. 349).

This is disconcerting to a Christian reader. It is disconcerting because the god being explained, and served by the explanation, is a goddess. But a goddess is not the God of Scripture and Christianity. She is some pagan deity.

The section on the attributes is idolatry.

As regards creation, Jewett affirms that the world had a beginning. This is the extent of his agreement with the Christian doctrine of creation. The world is 20 billion

years old. The present form of the world is the product of evolutionary processes. Death was in the world from the very beginning. Genesis 1 is not history, even though Jewett acknowledges that it purports to be history.

All of this is not only the theology of Jewett and Fuller Theological Seminary but also the theology of neo-evangelicalism. Neo-evangelicalism is wide open to the ungodly world. Its theological thinking is not governed by the Word of God, Holy Scripture, but by modern culture: higher criticism; feminism; and scientific thought.

The book's own advertisement of the Fuller Seminary professor's theology as "a distinctively ... Reformed viewpoint" is puzzling. Jewett explicitly denies the sovereignty of God, taking issue in this connection with Luther's *Bondage of the Will* (p. 356); criticizes predestination (p. 244); and rejects irresistible grace (p. 388). ♦

Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism, by John H. Gerstner. Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991. 274 pages. \$15.95 (hardcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Dispensationalism will never be the same. Presbyterian theologian John H. Gerstner has written the definitive, Reformed critique of this popular heresy. It is devastating. The recent (19th century) product of

disreputable origins (John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren), centering on the bizarre notion of a "premillennial, pretribulation rapture," dispensationalism is "spurious Calvinism," "dubious evangelicalism," and "deviation from essential historical Christianity" (p. 68). Gerstner demonstrates that "dispensationalism is a cult and not a branch of the Christian church" (p. 150). His conclusion is that "dispensationalism is another gospel" (p. 259).

The book is timely. Popular radio evangelist John MacArthur, Jr.'s book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, has occasioned the "Lordship controversy." MacArthur condemned dispensationalism's teaching that one can have Jesus as Savior without having Him as Lord of his life. Leading dispensationalists have responded, defending this Nicolaitan doctrine and striking out at the truth that the faith that justifies is always a working faith as "legalism." Also, at the present time men are working to reconcile dispensational theology and covenant theology. Leading Presbyterian theologians leave the impression that covenant theology can make peace with dispensationalism, if dispensationalism will only modify its theology. Contemporary dispensational theologians are, in fact, furiously backing away from positions once proclaimed as basic to dispensational theology (cf. *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L.

Bock, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). Nevertheless, no peace is possible between genuine covenant theology and dispensationalism. Dispensationalism must not merely modify its expressions and positions. It must confess that dispensational theology is false doctrine, and convert to covenant theology. This, Gerstner insists on and demonstrates.

Wrongly Dividing consists of three main parts. The first is an informative account of dispensationalism's origins and development. Of particular interest is Gerstner's tracing of the influence of dispensationalism within the Reformed churches from the late 19th century on. One instance was the dissemination of dispensational doctrines within the Christian Reformed Church by Harry Bultema.

In the second main section, Dr. Gerstner examines dispensationalism's vaunted hermeneutics of literalism. He convincingly demonstrates, as others have done before him, that dispensationalism does not carry through its program of a strictly literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. But he argues also that, contrary to its boast that its (literalist) hermeneutic determines its theology, the theology of dispensationalism determines its hermeneutic.

The third section on the theology of dispensationalism is by far the largest, as it is also the most important. In it Gerstner does what has rarely, if ever, been attempted: he

examines the theology of dispensationalism according to the standard of the Reformed faith. Gerstner's main concern is to expose dispensational theology as heretical by virtue of its antinomism. Dispensationalism denies that the law of God, that is, the decalogue, is the rule of life for New Testament believers. It opposes this doctrine as Jewish legalism. As the present "Lordship controversy" has brought to light, dispensationalism teaches that one can be saved through faith in Jesus, even though he goes on living in flagrant, impenitent disobedience to the law to the very end of his life. Gerstner is correct when he describes this teaching, basic to dispensationalism, as not only un-Reformed but also "another gospel."

To avoid misunderstanding, however, Gerstner should not describe the believer's position relative to the law as that of being "under the law." In Romans 6:14, 15, "under the law" refers to the law's being decisive for justification. What Gerstner means is that the believer, under grace, is yet required to keep the law as the authoritative guide for a thankful life. To express this as the believer's being "under law" both contradicts the apostle's teaching in Romans 6:14, 15 and plays into the hands of the dispensationalists who seize on the expression to charge the Reformed theologian with legalism. (I note that in I Corinthians 9:21, where the King James Version translates "under the law to Christ," the original has "*ennomois*," which trans-

lates as "bound to the law" or "in the law." A believer is bound to the law, or is in the law. He is not under the law.)

Antinomism is an aspect of dispensationalism's central and non-negotiable doctrine of the essential difference between Israel and the church. The law is for Israel, not for the church. The other side of this heresy is that the gospel is for the church, not for Israel. Inherent in dispensationalism's denial of the unity of Israel and the church is the teaching that Old Testament Israel was saved in some other way than by faith in Jesus Christ. Gerstner presses this charge against dispensationalism, showing that even those contemporary theologians who try to distance themselves from Scofield's teaching that the Jews were to be saved by the law deny that the object of faith in the Old Testament was Jesus Christ. Gerstner's conclusion is

that the charge that Dispensationalism teaches more than one way of possible salvation is well founded. Not only did the early dispensationalists teach this heresy, but more recent dispensationalists have failed to exonerate their predecessors and have, in more subtle ways, fallen into the same error. The problem here, as we have seen, is the understanding of a *dispensation* as a "period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience" which is central to the dispensational system. As we have seen, dispensa-

tional adherence to this definition results in a denial of the gospel. More recent dispensational attempts to correct their theological system at this point are only another pathetic instance of putting on a band-aid to heal a fatal internal wound (p. 169).

But dispensationalism withholds the gospel even from the New Testament church. For in spite of the protestations of some dispensationalists that they are "four-point Calvinists" (they openly admit to denying the doctrine of limited atonement), dispensational theology is "five-point Arminianism" (p. 149). It rejects and opposes every one of the five points of Calvinism, that is, the gospel of salvation by free, sovereign grace. The only one of the five points of Calvinism that dispensationalism makes any substantial pretense of holding is the fifth, the perseverance of saints. But this is thoroughly corrupted by dispensationalism's antinomian doctrine of the "eternal security" of those who live impenitently in wickedness. Gerstner demonstrates that dispensationalism is "five-point Arminianism" in the hard-hitting, critically important chapter entitled, "Spurious Calvinism" (pp. 105-147). The gravity of this criticism of dispensational theology, Gerstner indicates when he remarks that "Calvinism is just another name for Christianity" (p. 107).

The chapter, "Spurious Calvinism," is of special interest to the

Protestant Reformed since in it Gerstner condemns the doctrine of the "well-meant offer of the gospel." Because of Gerstner's stature as a Reformed theologian, and in view of the almost universal acceptance of the "well-meant offer" by Calvinistic churches, this repudiation of the "well-meant offer" as un-Reformed has sent a tremor throughout the Reformed world. The passage deserves to be quoted in its entirety. In the context of his treatment of dispensationalism's denial of limited atonement, Gerstner notes that also some Reformed theologians display weakness regarding this doctrine. He then takes up the issue of the "well-meant offer of the gospel":

We must also sadly admit that the majority of Reformed theologians today seriously err concerning the nature of the love of God for reprobates. We mention this here only because this defect in contemporary Reformed theology makes it all the easier for the dispensationalists to continue in their abyssmal error.

Most Reformed theologians also include, as a by-product of the Atonement, the well-meant offer of the gospel by which all men can be saved. Some Reformed theologians take a further step still and say that God even intends that they should be saved by this Atonement which nevertheless was made only for the elect. For example, John Murray and Ned Stonehouse write: "Our Lord ... says expressly that he willed the bestowal of his saving

and protecting grace upon those whom neither the Father nor he decreed thus to save and protect." One may sadly say that Westminster Theological Seminary stands for this misunderstanding of the Reformed doctrine since not only John Murray and Ned Stonehouse but also Cornelius Van Til, R.B. Kuiper, John Frame, and, so far as we know, all of the faculty, have favored it. The Christian Reformed Church had already in 1920 taken this sad step away from Reformed orthodoxy and has been declining ever since. The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. had even earlier, though somewhat ambiguously, departed and the present mainline Presbyterian church affirms that "The risen Christ is the savior for all men."

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (now part of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) is not far behind, and the separatist Presbyterians such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America are following in this train. Only the Protestant Reformed Church seems willing to hold to the whole counsel of God on this doctrine (pp. 127, 128).

Gerstner's style makes for delightful reading. He gets off some memorable lines. With reference to dispensationalism's teaching that the supposedly dead sinner must and can do something to bring about his own regeneration, Gerstner writes:

So, dispensational corpses come

alive. This is the classical theological case of *vigor mortis*. The dead live of themselves. The dead spontaneously generate their own life. Out of nothing living something comes alive (p. 139).

Taking note of dispensationalism's objection to the teaching of covenant theology that Israel is fulfilled in the church, because this does not allow the Jews to look forward to inheriting Palestine, Gerstner observes:

This certainly does make it hard on the Jews! When they might have had a glorious piece of real estate on the Mediterranean, all they end up with under this interpretation is Christ, of whom it was said that "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Colossians 1:19) (p. 44).

Wrongly Dividing takes its place with O.T. Allis's *Prophecy and the Church* as outstanding Reformed critiques of dispensationalism and outstanding defenses of covenantal theology against dispensationalism.

The book will serve one very practical purpose: Put it into the hands of the man or woman who professes to be Reformed but who is contemplating leaving the Reformed church for a dispensational church.

* * * * *

Two significant reviews of John H. Gerstner's *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* have appeared recently. Tom Wells re-

views it in the Calvinist Baptist magazine, *Reformation Today* (January-February 1992). Wells does not merely hedge on the basic issue of the disjunction that dispensationalism makes between Israel and the church. He aligns himself with dispensationalism on this basic issue.

But while Gerstner rightly faults dispensationalism for its radical disjunction between the Church and Israel, he shows no recognition of the problem with which they are wrestling.... Gerstner is surely simplistic when he says, "Paul teaches that Israel and the Church constitute an organic unity. They are the same olive tree with the Gentiles of the Church being grafted into the tree that was Israel." ...there never was a time when OT Israel and Paul's tree were the same. The nation called "the Church" is a new nation of which Israel is a type... (p. 30).

The reason for the Calvinist Baptist's opting for dispensational theology's disjunction between Israel and the church by rejecting covenant theology's affirmation of the "organic unity" is his denial of the identity of circumcision and baptism. The rejection of infant baptism is necessarily dispensationalism in principle.

The other review, as might be expected, appears in Dallas Theological Seminary's *Bibliotheca Sacra*. The review is in two lengthy

parts. The first appears in the April-June 1992 issue of the Dallas journal; the second, in the July-September 1992 issue. John A. Witmer does not so much review Gerstner's book as offer an angry counter-attack. What especially angers the Dallas theologian is that Gerstner declines to participate in the current irenic "covenant-dispensational dialogue," as other Presbyterian theologians are doing. In the course of the two-part review, Witmer admits every charge that Gerstner levels against dispensationalism, ancient and modern. Dispensationalism is antinomian; dispensationalism *does* hold that Israel and the church are two, different, separate peoples; dispensationalism is Arminian.

One intriguing passage is Witmer's attack on Gerstner's theology as "a rigid and extreme form of Reformed theology." Witmer is seizing on Gerstner's criticism of many of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches for compromising Calvinism by their doctrine of the "well-meant offer."

On pages 127-28 Gerstner details how one Reformed group after another has departed from what he calls "Reformed orthodoxy" (p. 127) — his position — until "only the Protestant Reformed Church seems willing to hold to the whole counsel of God on this doctrine" (p. 128). According to the latest statistics available this denomination had 21 churches, 4,544 members, and 31 ordained ministers. The Reformed tradi-

tion embraces a broad spectrum of views, and yet Gerstner presents his restricted position as representative of the entire Reformed tradition, which in turn he considers "essential historical Christianity."

Apparently, at Dallas Theological Seminary they do statistical theology: the correctness of a doctrine is determined by the number of souls holding it. Since the Protestant Reformed Churches are numerically small, the doctrine of particular grace in the preaching, held by them and defended by Gerstner, cannot be true. This is truly a new theology. It has interesting implications. The doctrine of the Deity of Christ that Athanasius defended "*contra mundum*" must have been wrong. Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone cannot have been right, since it was confessed by one monk against all of Christendom. And since theology is now done by the numbers, Protestants should pay careful attention to the size of the Roman Catholic Church. ♦

The Gospel According to Jesus (A New Translation and Guide to his essential teachings for believers and unbelievers) by Stephen Mitchell; Harper Collins, publishers, 1991. 310 pp., \$23.00 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Edward W. Sager.]

Increasingly the Bible has become the target of blatant, frontal assaults from various quarters. This

one in particular is touted to be "The Gospel According to Jesus," when in reality it is nothing more than another gospel sent to trouble the church, a perversion of the gospel of Christ. This is but another example of the perversion of language employed by theological liberalism for many years in order to masquerade their unbelief under the guise of a return to "the authentic Jesus," whom they have never discovered. It is a shame that only when such frontal assaults appear in media other than print do they arouse the ire of evangelical Christians. Although it is an unpleasant task to attend to such matters, it is evident that for too long the mighty weapons of God's arguments have lain dormant, while the enemies of the gospel have busily engaged themselves in an ongoing effort to destroy the Word of God.

Against a backdrop littered with the failed remains of his predecessors, Mr. Mitchell claims to be able to pick his way through the extant manuscript evidence of the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ, and give us Jesus' essential teachings that are for both believers and unbelievers.

Let's consider Mr. Mitchell's methodology: what is his methodology; what is the basis for this methodology; what this methodology produces. By way of examining his methodology, let's pay particular attention to Mr. Mitchell's epistemological foundations, i.e., how does he know these things?

First, what is his methodol-

ogy? Mr. Mitchell begins by asserting that his method is similar to that employed by Thomas Jefferson, who took scissors and cut from the King James Version of the English Bible what he believed to be the authentic gospel and pasted it into a notebook.

Mr. Mitchell does distinguish between what he wishes to do, and what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did, when he states that, while these "are to a large extent teachings about Jesus, I wanted to compile a Gospel that would be the teaching of Jesus: what he proclaimed about the presence of God...." This differentiation from the account of the biblical writers ensures that Mr. Mitchell's product will be quite different indeed than what we have in the Bible. This, then, is his method: to distinguish the authentic teaching of Jesus from the inauthentic accretions, thus compiling what purports to be "The Gospel According to Jesus." How Mr. Mitchell defines what the "essential" teachings are remains a mystery.

Second, let us see what the basis is for achieving this goal. We do well to consider Mr. Jefferson's approach. The method of determining what went into his "authentic" gospel notebook he declared, "In the New Testament there is internal evidence that parts of it have proceeded from an extraordinary man; and that other parts are of the fabric of very inferior minds. It is as easy to separate those parts, as to pick out diamonds from dunghills" (p. 4). What this internal evidence is, is never

mentioned, that I can find. Then Mr. Mitchell states that he selected and translated "only those passages that seem to me authentic accounts and sayings of Jesus." What it is that makes certain passages seem to him to be authentic we are not told. He goes on to state, "I have always taken seriously the strictly scholarly criteria. But there are no scholarly criteria for spiritual value. Ultimately my decisions were based on what Jefferson called 'internal evidence': the evidence provided by the words themselves." Exactly how the words themselves provide this criteria, again, we are not told. For example, how do we know the word, *logos*, in John 1:1, is, or is not authentic? What about this word tells us that it is authentic? Of course, this same question can be raised with any word found in the Greek New Testament. These "strictly scholarly criteria" are said to be found in "Sanders and Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 301ff." I haven't looked at this publication yet, so I still don't know what Mr. Mitchell's criteria are. The issue of what are and what are not authentic sayings and accounts of Jesus is then left up to Mr. Mitchell's decisions, just as the determination as to what constitutes "essential" from non-essential teachings.

Mr. Mitchell finds the account of Mark the most trustworthy of the synoptic gospels "in certain ways," when there are three accounts of the same incident. What the basis is for thinking Mark more reliable, and in

what ways, again, we are not told.

What then is the process of selection to be employed by Mr. Mitchell in determining what seems like a later theological or polemical or legendary accretion? For this, Mr. Mitchell has far better tools than a pair of scissors, or so he thinks. "The scholarship of the past seventy-five years is an indispensable help in distinguishing the authentic Jesus from the inauthentic. No good scholar, for example, would call the Christmas stories anything but legends, or the accounts of Jesus' trial anything but polemical fiction. And even about the sayings of Jesus, scholars show a remarkable degree of consensus" (p. 6). So it is modern scholarship, of a carefully selected kind, which is to be Mr. Mitchell's criteria for making these determinations; he knows because of the findings of certain modern scholars. It is apparent that all conservative scholarship within the past seventy-five years has been denied any consideration at all, even as a form of scholarship. I find this to be appalling, when I consider the contribution to scholarship made by someone like J. Gresham Machen, for example (see his "The Virgin Birth," "The Origin of Paul's Religion," and "Liberalism and Christianity"). He, and some others of a decidedly conservative position, have to be accorded at least the recognition of good scholars. Mr. Mitchell's statement is patently absurd, but this is indicative of his methodology.

Yet another absurdity is his

finding a remarkable degree of consensus about the sayings of Jesus. This just is not so. Scholars are notorious for their diversity of opinion on just this question. "But on the other hand, methods change, new methods are constantly introduced, the conclusions of all methods are constantly being altered. 'The assured results of modern scholarship' is a figment of the imagination — in critical studies of Scripture as in the natural sciences" (Herman Hoeksema — *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, April 1992, p. 72, review of *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. by David Black & David Dockery). Do all of the colored beads gathered by the members of the Jesus Seminar agree? Mr. Mitchell acknowledges this diversity in his account of how they have determined that the second highest ranking parable, the parable of the good Samaritan, received an average of 81%. I think this illustrates that this method is a return to the Dark Ages, when the common man was not allowed to read the Bible, for it was considered to be the exclusive domain of scholarship. Thus this man would have the church presided over by a scholarly elite, who will tell us what Jesus said and did, in distinction from what the church has believed Jesus said and did for almost two millennia. Instead of recognizing that these things are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes, Mr. Mitchell and his ilk turn this statement on its head. These blind schol-

ars don't even know what is the Bible, and yet they are to be blindly followed, with the result that they and their followers fall into the ditch. Such an empirical basis, if this can be construed to be one, inevitably leads to a result that is skewed by the observer.

Third, let us examine where Mr. Mitchell is leading us with the application of these methods of his. The Jesus Mr. Mitchell presents us with as a result of his "strictly scholarly criteria," is first of all a man that grew up as an illegitimate child (p. 19). He grew up to be a man that violated the 5th commandment, i.e., he was a sinner (p. 43). Mr. Mitchell's Jesus had an enlightenment experience like that of other mystical religious leaders (p. 31). This Jesus doesn't teach that there is such a place as hell, for hell is only a psychological metaphor (p. 68). Like all the great spiritual Masters, Mr. Mitchell's Jesus taught only one thing: presence (p. 10). He has no ideas to teach, only presence. He has no doctrines to give, only the gift of his own freedom. All we need to know about him are his teachings (p. 16). Is it surprising that Mr. Mitchell's Jesus takes on the appearance of the Zen Buddhist Master under whom he has been studying? Zen is noted for its repudiation of reason and logic.

The foregoing assertions about Jesus are presented in a most definite manner, as well as the following statements that indicate we are being led by Mr. Mitchell from the solid

rock of biblical truth to the sinking sand of fallen human opinions. Mr. Mitchell likewise asserts in a most definitive manner, "(We know nothing ... we know nothing.... Even when I don't say it explicitly, this phrase will be a kind of silent ground bass that accompanies everything I try to intuit about Jesus' life.)" "...when I use the word *authentic*, I don't mean that a saying or incident can be proved to originate from the historical Jesus of Nazareth. *There are no such proofs*; there are only probabilities. And any selection is, by its nature, tentative" (p. 7). So, when all is said and done, we can't know on the basis of Mr. Mitchell's methodology, who Jesus is, or what he really said. It sounds strangely like the position arrived at by modern physics after the quantum revolution, with its attendant uncertainty.

For myself, I can have nothing whatever to do with such an exercise, except to expose it for what it is: an intellectual exercise in suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). I am in absolute agreement with the traditional acceptance of the 66 books of the Bible, the Old Testament in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek, were inspired by God, and have been providentially preserved by the Holy Spirit

(see Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647 ed., Article I, as well as 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, Article I). Since the Bible alone is the Word of God written, it is not the product of human opinion about Jesus, and is not to be handled like any other book. Rather it is to be received as the Word of God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and this warning is especially pertinent to Mr. Mitchell and all who would add to or detract from the Word of God, which God declares he even has magnified above his own name (Ps. 138:2).

Anyone interested in what has happened recently to the battle for the Bible ought to read this book, unpleasant though the experience may be. It will provide a look at the results of modern critical scholarship, and give believers a deep appreciation for the real Gospel of Jesus, the entire contents of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

In conclusion, Mr. Mitchell's book certainly is able to live up to half of his claims: it is for unbelievers; yet as a half truth is also a whole lie, Mr. Mitchell's account is tried in the balance and found to be a lie. This is no Gospel at all, but the hiss of the serpent. ♦

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