

book, *Corrupting the Word of God*, on the history of the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel. (Both books are available from the CPRC Bookstore for £8 and £15, respectively, plus 10% P&P.)

Now to the Scripture: “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom. 11:28).

This verse is a clear illustration of the principle that a text’s interpretation must be considered in the light of its context. The context in Romans 9–11 clearly indicates that Paul is answering the question, If the gospel is being preached to the Gentiles, has God forgotten His people, the Jews? Paul answers, first of all, by saying that election and reprobation were worked out by God throughout the physical descendants of Abraham: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (9:13). Not all Israelites were saved; just read Romans 9:6-8! It is, therefore, a violation of Scripture to interpret “they” in Romans 11:28, as meaning all men head for head. It refers only to the nation of Israel and that as organically conceived.

Because of their unique place in history, the Jews as a nation are not considered as Jews head for head but as a nation that occupies a special place in God’s working out of His purpose of salvation in Christ. The nation of Israel’s special place is defined in Romans 9:4-5. Therefore, as Paul discusses the gospel preached also to the Gentiles, he uses the figure of an olive tree: Israel is the natural olive tree; the Gentiles are of the wild olive tree (11:16-24). Each branch is a generation as it grows. Once a branch of a wild olive tree is cut off, that branch (those who believe not the gospel) is lost forever.

But this is not true of the Jews. Because they are the “beloved,” the nation, organically considered, was cut down but individual Jews can yet be saved, a privilege denied the nations of the Gentiles. This privilege is granted only to the Jews. Election determines who among the Jews is saved. Therefore, the reprobate Jews are “enemies” for the sake of the Gentiles, to make room for these Gentiles in the olive tree (11:11ff.).

The questioner asks for a book that deals specifically with Romans 11:28. Let him order Herman Hoeksema’s commentary on Romans, *Righteous By Faith Alone* (£20 plus 10% P&P), where he will find a detailed explanation of this matter. *Prof. Hanko*

Rev. Stewart will be interviewed by phone on Iron Sharpens Iron Radio on “Regeneration: God’s Gift of a New Heart” on Thursday, 25 June, from 4-6 PM (Eastern Time in the US) or 9-11 PM (UK time), DV. Listen live on-line (www.ironsharpensironradio.com). The audio of the previous interview on the new birth, “Supernatural and Infallible Regeneration: Most Delightful, Astonishing, Mysterious and Ineffable” (cf. *Canons* III/IV:12), is on a special webpage containing sermons, articles, and box sets of CDs and DVDs on this beautiful subject (www.cprc.co.uk/resources-on-regeneration).

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Website: www.cprc.co.uk

Lord’s Day services (11 AM & 6 PM) live video stream: www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming

Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunnan Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851

pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni • www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC

Covenant Reformed News

June 2020 • Volume XVIII, Issue 2

The Well-Meant Offer and Organic Unity (1)

I wish to apologize to readers of the *News* for not answering their questions sooner. One reason was the volume of questions; the other reason was my determination to complete my treatment of God’s organic dealings with His creation over several issues.

This is a fundamental difference between the Reformed faith and the Arminianism that includes the notion of a gracious offer of the gospel in which God supposedly expresses His affection for absolutely all men and, in that love, passionately desires to save the reprobate. This is rank heresy and a denial of God’s purpose in the preaching (Isa. 6:9-10; II Cor. 2:15-17). I have received a number of questions concerning this error and the teaching of Scripture. I will now respond to one of them, Romans 11:28, though briefly, in the light of what I have written earlier.

There is one warning, however. The defence of the gracious offer of the gospel to absolutely everybody is usually done by a very random and sometimes arbitrary choice of texts. Advocates of this view jump rapidly from verse to verse without carefully considering them in the light of the whole of God’s Word.

I follow Martin Luther’s view of Scripture. Heretics, he said, can always find a text that is supposed to prove their point. If one makes this his way of using Scripture, he can make Scripture teach anything he wants to prove. Luther believed that the Scriptures are an organic whole. I believe that too. The whole of Scripture is a portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ, the revelation of the God of our salvation. If one is painting a portrait, one cannot present the subject’s eyes without taking into account the whole portrait.

My Bible teacher in high school, himself belonging to a domination other than the one to which I belong, warned us of taking a verse out of its immediate context and the context of the whole of Scripture. He told us, in an unforgettable illustration, that he could prove from Scripture that we ought soon to commit suicide, quoting the following texts: “[Judas] went and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5); “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37); “That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27).

While that may seem far-fetched, it is like what Arminians do. They quote John 3:16, for example, without considering the following verses or John 17:9 or Romans 9 or our Lord’s prayer in Matthew 11:25-27, where He thanks His heavenly Father that He has revealed the truth to some and hidden it from others.

It is somewhat wearisome to run after these Arminians as they, like bumble bees, flit from text to text without carefully studying any of them. Nor do the defenders of this position do their homework before coming up with question after question. Let them read Reformed literature, such as, Arthur Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God* or my recent

Faith Alone and Imputation

In three previous issues of the *News*, we have been considering Romans 4:2: “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.” Let us now see how the argument of this Scripture applies to various groups.

Judaism teaches that obedience to the Torah merits before God. Roman Catholicism claims that man’s own good works, performed by cooperating with divine grace, are a crucial component in his righteousness before Jehovah. According to the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision, one’s personal obedience to the Most High in this life is part of the basis of one’s justification on the last day. In Islam, keeping sharia law in the service of Allah obtains righteousness before him. The liberal Protestant looks to his churchgoing, saying of prayers, etc., as grounds for his acceptance with God. The “man in the street” thinks that, since he is a “good person” who has (supposedly) “never hurt anyone,” God would never cast him into hell.

All such foolish claims constitute boasting—people boasting to themselves and boasting about themselves to others. But such boasting is of no value before the holy God of heaven. He beholds sin in all that we do (Rom. 3:9-20; Isa. 64:6). His standard is not human or religious opinion but His own perfect moral law (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10). He is the One who sees the heart, which is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9), with all its evil intentions and motives (Heb. 4:12). As the infinitely majestic One, He demands that He always be glorified as the supreme goal of all our thinking, speaking and doing. The Psalmist was right: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3).

Thus justification cannot be by man’s works, even in the tiniest little part. This shuts us up to the grand gospel truth that father Abraham was justified by faith alone, which is developed in the three clauses of Romans 4:3.

This verse begins, “For what saith the scripture?” Literally, it refers to “*the scripture*,” namely, Genesis 15:6, which is quoted in the rest of Romans 4:3. This verse from the first book of the Bible is the *locus classicus* for justification by faith alone in the Old Testament, being cited in Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23, and explained in Romans 4.

“For what saith the scripture?” Romans 4:3 continues, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” The text does not say, “Abraham *worked*, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” or even “Abraham *believed and worked*, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” The Scripture says, “Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

Romans 4:2 rules out *in toto* man’s works in his justification, while verse 3 mentions faith as the only means of justification. To echo the apostle’s earlier statement, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (3:28).

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (4:3). There are three key words or phrases in the last clause. First, “it” refers back to “believed” and so speaks of faith. Second, “counted” means imputed or reckoned to one’s account.

Third, “counted ... for righteousness” is equivalent to God’s gracious justification, His declaration that we are righteous or just in His sight.

Here again we oppose not only Rome, but also the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision. In their corruption of the gospel, all of these heretical movements attack gracious imputation. Yet father Abraham’s being counted or imputed righteous occurs in Genesis 15:6, the foundational Old Testament Scripture, which is quoted in Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23, and developed in Romans 4 as the equivalent of justification.

Regarding the truth of imputation, the *Canons of Dordt* reject the classic Arminian heresy which states, “God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace” (II:R:4).

Of course, “faith itself” is not “perfect obedience” to Jehovah’s holy law and it is absurd to reckon that He would regard or impute it as such. Nor can the infinitely just God reckon man’s imperfect obedience as if it were a full and complete keeping of His pure moral standards. The *Canons* are correct: “these [Arminians] proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church” (II:R:4).

The Scriptures do not teach that the Triune God regards faith “as if it were” righteousness or accepts faith “instead of” righteousness, as some sort of substitute for perfect obedience to Jehovah’s law. This would be ascribing to man’s faith the place and role of Christ Himself. He is the true substitute of all elect believers, for the Lord Jesus is the One who died on the cross under the wrath of God instead of us, and the One who kept the law of God in our place and for us.

The Bible says that we believe “unto” righteousness (Rom. 10:10) or that faith is reckoned to us “for” righteousness (e.g., Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3, 5, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6), not that faith is imputed to us “instead of” righteousness or “as if it were” righteousness.

Faith’s unique role in justification is that of the means or instrument that lays hold of the righteousness of God in Christ. Faith looks outside itself and away from itself to the righteousness of another, even the Lord Jesus, whose righteousness it appropriates. Faith is counted to us for righteousness as the only means by which we receive Christ’s obedience reckoned to our account!

Rev. Stewart

To view the new CPRC Book Catalogue, go on-line (www.cprc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Book-Catalogue-2020.pdf) or request a hard copy, if you are in the UK.

PayPal has now been added to the CPRC website. 1) People in the UK and the rest of the globe (except the US and Canada) can order and pay for our books and box sets of CDs or DVDs (www.cprc.co.uk/bookstore) on-line by PayPal or bank transfer (www.cprc.co.uk/ordering-information). 2) People in the UK (who can also contribute Gift Aid) and all the nations of the world can donate to the CPRC by PayPal or bank transfer (www.cprc.co.uk/product/donations).