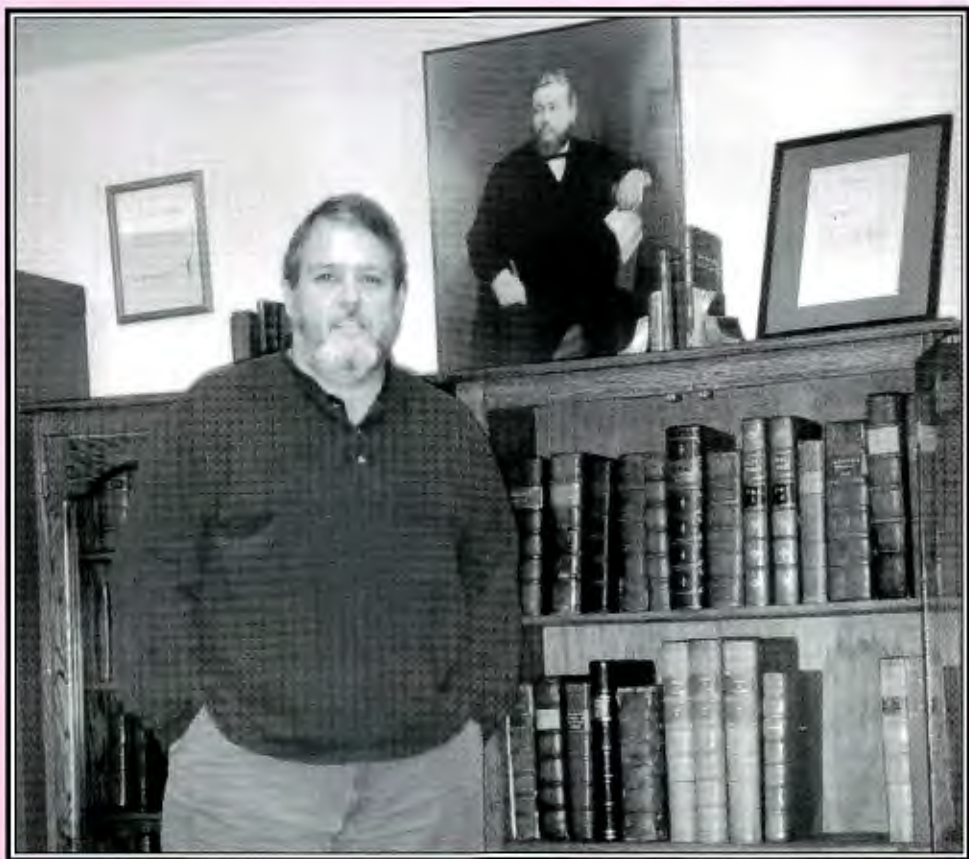


REFORMATION TODAY



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1997

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Valuable papers in church history

The theme of the annual Westminster Conference, London, 10-11 December 1996 was *The Fire Divine*. Dr Robert Oliver of Bradford-on-Avon addressed the subject, *The Dominant Religious Power: Evangelicalism in England, 1800-1835*. Dr Robert Godfrey, President of Westminster Seminary, California, delivered the opening paper on *The spirituality of Martin Luther*. There were four other stimulating papers followed by discussion. It has been remarked by many that the standard of discussion at this conference is amongst the highest in the world. The six papers are due to be published in the summer of 1997 at £4.95 (including UK postage). Orders to: John Harris, 8 Back Knowl Road, Mirfield WF14 9SA. Cheques payable to 'The Westminster Conference'.

On 12 December at a ministers' fraternal in Leeds, Dr Godfrey spoke on *The Genius of John Calvin*, followed by a stirring address relating the theme of Revelation 21:8 to the need not to be cowardly but courageous for the truth when there is pressure to compromise.

New Reformed Index

A complete and combined Author and Title-Keyword Index to three Reformed Sources, namely *The Banner of Truth* magazine 1955-1995, *Reformation Today* 1970-1995 and the *Puritan/Westminster Conferences* (referred to above) 1956-1995 has been produced on PC HD 3.5" diskette for £1.50, including postage. It is hoped that this will be published but it will come to about a 244 page paperback. The diskette is obtainable from: Michael Keen, The Christian Bookshop, Alfred Place, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 2BS. Telephone 01970 612891.



Robert Oliver



Robert Godfrey

Front cover: Don Kistler (see news) the founder of *Soli Deo Gloria* publishing house situated in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, USA. In the background is a portrait of C H Spurgeon. Included in the catalogue of available books is the title *A Marvelous Ministry*, which, besides a most scintillating biography of Spurgeon by Geoff Thomas, has various chapters such as, 'Spurgeon and his Social Concern' by David Kingdon and 'Spurgeon and his Activity in Politics' by Tim Curnow.

Editorial

Arminius and Arminianism

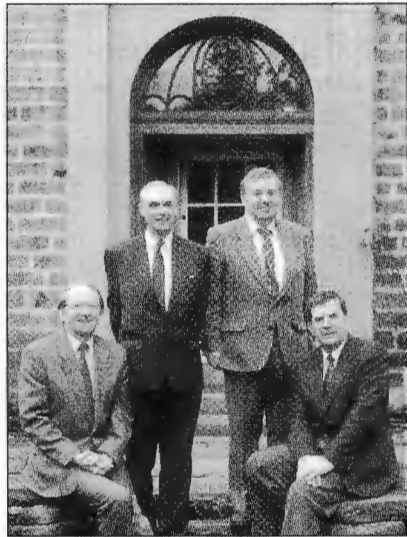
Of course Jacobus Arminius had no idea that he would give his name to a form of theology which has prevailed from his day to this. Arminianism is mostly sustained not by systematic biblical thinking but by emotional responses to the implications of Calvinism. In this issue it is suggested that the response of the Synod of Dort to the tenets of Arminianism in the five points (summarised by the acrostic TULIP), is not the best way of teaching the doctrines of grace.

As the issue is mostly devoted to this theme the subject is developed historically, biblically and polemically.

1. The story of Arminius, Arminianism and the response of Dort in the five points represented in the acrostic TULIP.
2. An exposition of the five points of Romans 8:28-30.
3. The Five Points, the Gospel and Salvation – In this article Bob Sheehan corrects some of the misconstructions current today in those who equate the gospel with Calvinism. He helpfully illustrates the biblical manner in which C H Spurgeon viewed those of Arminian persuasion.

Iain Murray and The Banner of Truth Trust

For a long period up until the 1960s



From left to right: Iain Murray, Maurice Roberts, Hywel Jones and Sinclair Ferguson

Grand Rapids was regarded as the capital city of the world for Reformed publishing. No publisher is better than its peers. In Christian publishing, once purely economic factors take over or new leaders represent heterodox principles, it is only a matter of time before that company becomes a liability to the Christian Church.

Today the Banner of Truth is by far the most prolific and reliable publisher of Reformed books in the world.

From the beginning the Banner has followed the example of the mainline Puritans. Hyper-Calvinism has been

avoided, as well as antinomianism in which there is a disjuncture between justification (which is external, forensic and perfect) and sanctification (which is inward, progressive and imperfect). The Banner policy has been consistent in keeping within the parameters of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* while at the same time following a generous attitude toward Reformed Baptists in the Spurgeonian tradition.

For forty years Iain Murray (whose early influence is referred to in the article on Arminius) has been the principal leader in the Banner. On October 31, 1996 he retired from his position as Editorial Director of the Banner.

Hywel R Jones is the new Editorial Director. The editor of *The Banner of Truth* magazine is Maurice Roberts, with Iain Murray and John J Murray as assistant editors. Associate editors are Walter Chantry, John R de Witt, Sinclair Ferguson, Al Martin and Geoff Thomas.

We wish Hywel Jones every success as he takes on a very responsible leadership role.

The Archbishop of Canterbury visits the Pope

During the first week of December the British press carried many articles reporting the visit of Dr George

Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, to the Pope. Dr Carey affirmed 'the absolute commitment both of himself and also of the Anglican Communion to the full, visible unity of God's Church'.

The Pope told the Anglican primate bluntly that only he had authority 'as the successor to St Peter' to lay down doctrine! There is an impasse between the two communions over the question of women elders. The decision in 1992 by the Church of England to ordain women priests deeply angered the Vatican. It is to the credit of George Carey that he asked Catholics to understand that for Anglicans and Lutherans, who have recently entered into intercommunion, the Reformation was 'not so much a tragedy as a rediscovery of the Bible, of justification by faith, of the local church and of priesthood'. By priesthood we take the archbishop to mean the priesthood of all believers.

This is by no means the first time that Roman Catholic/Anglican unity has been promoted. For a number of years there was a special commission working to this end, ARCIC, but that seems to have run out of steam. The Ecumenical movement has drifted more and more toward inter-faith and inclusivism which makes the gospel irrelevant. Until the Roman Catholic Church revokes the anathemas of the Council of Trent there can be no progress toward unity for those who are serious about the gospel.

Arminius, Arminianism and TULIP?

Erroll Hulse

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was a Dutch theologian educated at Leyden, Basel and Geneva. At Geneva he studied under Theodore Beza (1519-1605). It should be noted that Beza was the successor of John Calvin. However Beza hardened the lines of Calvin's theology to a position from which it would be easy to deduce monstrous and offensive views of God. Arminianism is mostly a reaction against such ideas and that certainly was the case with the man from whom we now have the term 'Arminianism'. Beza demonised the Anabaptists as radical revolutionaries, *which they certainly mostly were not*. It is only in our generation that the reputation of the Anabaptists is being repaired through the labours and monumental scholarship of historians like G. H. Williams. Beza was also a hyper-Constantinian who strongly advocated the execution of heretics.¹ Just as Beza made Arminius shudder so we sometimes hear constructions that make us shudder and which give a sympathy for why Arminians are driven to think as they do.

When he returned to the Netherlands Arminius served as a pastor in Amsterdam.

In his reaction against the scholasticism and rationalistic theology of Beza, Arminius taught that election is conditional on man's response and is dependent on God's foreknowledge of a person's faith and perseverance. Arminius believed that it was possible for a true believer to fall away and be lost. Arminius believed in the free will of man and he believed in universal redemptive grace. In other words he believed that Christ made salvation possible for everyone but not any one person in particular. He rejected the idea of God's election and maintained that some choose God.

Arminius is always described even by his critics as a sober, consistent Christian who lived a blameless and godly life. Richard de Witt in a paper on the Arminian conflict and the Synod of Dort (Puritan Conference paper 1968), suggested that Arminius was morally blameworthy for not sticking to the credal articles of the Dutch Reformed Church of which he was a trusted minister. However Arminius himself protested that he did sincerely and

faithfully hold to the doctrines of his denomination. I believe that he was sincere but muddled in his thinking.

There is no question that Arminius was deemed trustworthy since he was appointed to a senior position in the University of Leyden in 1603. However the following year he came into conflict with one Gomarus, a well-known leading theologian. A great deal of controversy was generated. Suggestions were made that a general Synod should be called to bring about reconciliation. In 1609 Arminius died. His ideas continued to spread pervasively and widely in all sectors including the common people.

In 1610 the followers of Arminius met at Gouda to prepare a remonstrance against the theology of Calvinism, that is Calvinism as it had developed under Calvin's successor Theodore Beza. This remonstrance resulted in the name 'Remonstrants'. They formulated their concerns in the form of five propositions:

1. Predestination is conditional on a person's response, being grounded in God's foreknowledge.
2. Christ died 'for all men and for every man, so he merited reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for all – yet so that no one actually enjoys the forgiveness of sins except the believer'.
3. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit is necessary to salvation.
4. Grace is resistible.
5. The final perseverance of believers is an open question.

In 1611 there was a response by the opposite party, the Contra-Remonstrants, who produced seven articles restating the teaching of the Reformed confessions.

A conference was held in the Hague in 1611 but this did not lead to agreement and in the following years controversy raged around these issues.

Prince Maurice remained neutral until 1616 when he joined the Calvinist party. The Prince was encouraged to call for a National Synod which in fact became unique in Protestant history because of its international character. The Synod took place in 1618 at Dort. 56 ministers and ruling elders attended from the Dutch churches and 18 political commissioners who were not members of the Synod but who supervised the proceedings. Foreign delegates from a number of nations were invited to participate. For political reasons delegates from France and Scotland were not allowed to attend. King James who encouraged the Synod was at that time busy persecuting the Scottish Church for its non-

conformity to the Anglicanism of which he was the supreme head. King James appointed six Anglicans (and they were all very much Anglican) to attend.

The Synod convened on November 13, 1618. It was destined to run for 145 sessions the last of which took place on May 9, 1619. Next to the Westminster Assembly (1643 to 1647) the Synod of Dort is regarded as the most significant Synod in the history of the Reformed faith.

From its inception the Remonstrants were treated as an accused party. At the 22nd session thirteen Remonstrants appeared before the Synod. Episcopius was their leader and spokesman. He stated their case with eloquence but gave offence by being too bold and dogmatic. He also lacked finesse and diplomacy. For instance it was not necessary for him to declare the assembly to be schismatical. Thereafter the Remonstrants were excluded. At the conclusion of the Synod they were dismissed from their positions in the Church. During the discussions the issues were by no means clear-cut. Delegates from other countries argued persistently for the universal sufficiency of the atonement and for the sincere intention of God in the free offer of the gospel.

The Synod published five canons which are the obverse of the five Arminian points. A summary of the points are:

1. The decrees of election and reprobation are absolute and unconditional.
2. Although Christ's death is sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world, the atonement is in fact limited to the elect, who are thus certain to be saved.
3. The total inability of man to will the good necessitates the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
4. God's call is effectual, and hence his grace is irresistible.
5. Those elected and called cannot but be saved and cannot finally be lost.

The shortest summary of the position outlined at the Synod of Dort is found in the acrostic TULIP. Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and Perseverance of the saints.

Despite the efforts of the Synod to expose and oppose Arminianism those ideas did spread pervasively throughout the world, eventually permeating almost all Protestant churches.

There are different forms of Arminianism. One of these is Wesleyan Arminianism. Various degrees of synergism characterise Arminianism. By synergism is meant the idea that God's grace is mixed with human ability. It is

the idea that we are saved by grace but to that must be added a human contribution. It is true that the sinner must come to Christ of his own free will. That is imperative. But according to Scripture that willingness in its totality is due to the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:1-10).

In spite of the theological renewal of the last thirty years in which the Reformed faith has been widely propagated, Arminianism is still the prevailing belief in evangelical circles. There are some Presbyterian and Reformed Baptist denominations or groupings and many individual pastors who maintain a clear understanding of the doctrines of grace and which resist Arminianism.

There are dangers in the presentation of TULIP. The background of TULIP, as has been shown, is polemical. It has its basis in an argument. Arminianism is mostly due to ignorance and a lack of exposure to expository preaching. But Arminianism is also nurtured by revulsion when God is depicted as arbitrary in his decrees. Calvinism is often caricatured by its opponents. Also to be reckoned with is genuine hyper-Calvinism which denies common grace and which restricts the free offer of the gospel. These issues are very much with us today and I urge the reading of Iain Murray's book, *Spurgeon versus Hyper-Calvinism – The Battle for Gospel Preaching*.² Iain Murray expounds the universal gospel invitations, the warrant of faith, human responsibility and the love of God, none of which issues are mentioned in TULIP.

The best part of TULIP is the first letter. The fall of mankind into sin is total and every part of every sinner by nature is at enmity toward God. When this is grasped grace is welcome and the gospel is music in the sinner's ears.

When I first became a Christian I was ardently Arminian. I came to London from South Africa fully persuaded that God chose those who chose him by their free will. Then I came under the teaching of Dr Martyn-Lloyd Jones and Ernest Kevan, then the Reformed Principal of the London Bible College. In addition there was the personal friendship and influence of Iain Murray, whose latest book I have just recommended, and David Fountain. While friendly toward them I still regarded these two in particular as dangerous and deluded hyper-Calvinists! But after several months the powerful expository ministry of Doctor Lloyd-Jones was constraining. What finally settled these issues for me was an intense study of the biblical text of Romans chapters 1 to 3. The truly desperate fallen state of man in sin is described. It is clear that God must take the initiative. It takes the three persons of the Trinity in united action to save sinners.

As far as I am aware the two foremost Puritans of the last 150 years, C H Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, never preached through TULIP as a series. When the Metropolitan Tabernacle was opened Spurgeon had others do this. I have heard master preachers wrap TULIP in Scripture. It can be done but it requires skill. I have never preached through TULIP and discourage that procedure for the simple reason that no application is suggested in the acrostic. In Scripture the doctrines of grace are always surrounded by application. Furthermore in every biblical context there are correctives whereas none whatever are suggested in TULIP. It is always preferable to preach the doctrines of grace from Scripture.

For instance the sovereignty of God in salvation can be preached from Romans chapter 9. But before any wrong conclusions can be made we are into chapter ten which insists on the necessity of the universal preaching of the good news. Then think of Nicodemus and John 3. Nicodemus must have been staggered by the inability ascribed to him by our Lord. 'Nicodemus, there is nothing you can do! You are dead in sin. You must be born from above!' But as he wends his way through the night he remembers those words which prompt him to look and live, to believe and receive.

In the hands of a master preacher TULIP can be effective and I am sure often has been. But we have to account for the times that this has not been the case.

Conclusions

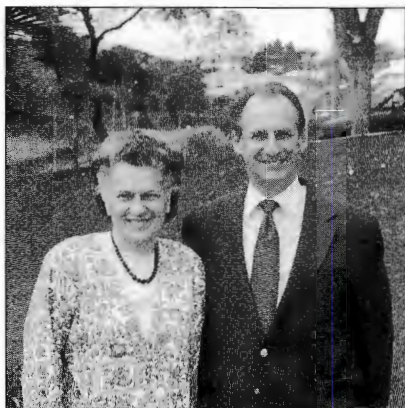
Arminianism is a system of human thought which stems like hyper-Calvinism its counterpart from rationalism rather than Scripture. There are issues which have to be left to lie side by side. God is transcendent. We are created and limited. What we do not understand we accept by faith.

Arminianism is dangerous because it weakens the authority of Scripture. Episcopius the Remonstrant leader sadly fell into many errors, even fatal errors concerning so basic a subject as the Trinity. That is typical of Arminianism. For instance Methodism was once a thriving evangelical denomination but it slid from Arminianism into Liberalism and now its demise is almost complete.

References

1. Leonard Verduin. *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*. Paternoster. 1964, page 81ff.
2. Commended is the penetrating treatment of Arminianism by Robert Letham in the *IVP New Dictionary of Theology*, 1988.

Brazil



Richard and Pearl Denham

Editora FIEL

The 12th Annual FIEL Conference was held in Aquas de Lindoia, Brazil, 7-11 October 1996. Over 480 attended plus some 70 children. It was particularly encouraging to see a larger number of pastors at this conference than ever before; there was a most welcome increase in numbers of Baptists which indicates an increasing impact on this constituency. Efforts are made at the conference to maintain unity with Presbyterian brethren. The ministry of Drs Tom Ascol and Mark Dever was greatly appreciated. In addition, over US\$ 35,000 of books and tapes were sold.

Richard Denham who leads the work asks for prayer for the continued

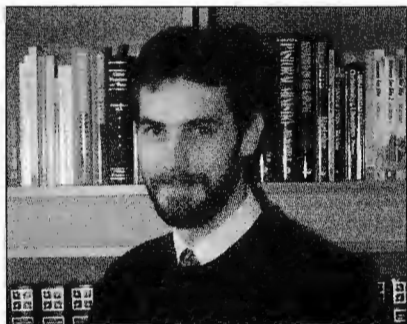
development of the 'Adopt a Brazilian Pastor' scheme. Gifts to FIEL enable a book a month to be sent to interested pastors, and pay for them to attend the annual conference. This ministry has made a great impact on many pastors who have come to understand the doctrines of grace and other biblical teaching for the first time. Now there is the possibility of extending the scheme to Portugal, where a book distributor has already been identified. Extension into Portuguese-speaking African countries is also being considered. Brazilian pastors who have benefited from the ministry of FIEL are enthusiastic about supporting such extension work so that others may be blessed as they have been.

Gifts or requests for further information about the work may be sent to: Christian Literature Advance, PO Box 5532, Chula Vista, CA 91912-5512, USA.

New Zealand

Grace Baptist Church, Christchurch

Dafydd Hughes has sent news by e-mail of his settlement into a church planting situation in Christchurch on the east coast of South Island. The population of South Island is small, under a million and less than the city of Auckland. (There are reputed to be about 70 million sheep on South Island).



Dafydd Hughes

The work that has begun is very small with only eight adults and three children. The work is supported financially by four of the five RB churches in the North Island. Pastor David Yan of Emmanuel Church, Auckland preached on 2 Thessalonians at the formal opening of Grace Church which was attended by 41 people. Dafydd has been preaching through Nehemiah. The words of Sanballat 'What are these feeble Jews doing?' (Neh 4:2) have been appropriate together with the promise 'Our God will fight for us' (Neh 4:20).

This infant work, with Dafydd in his first pastorate, is commended to the prayers of our readers.

USA

Soli Deo Gloria Ministries

It was a great pleasure to visit the office of SDG and meet with the two key men there, Don Kistler (see front cover) and



Joel Rishel

Joel Rishel. The ministry of SDG is outstanding. Valuable Puritan books long unobtainable, except from second hand dealers or rare book specialists, are now being made available. In addition to publishing, Don Kistler, the pioneer of this work organises an annual conference in Pittsburgh. Since June he has been joined in the work by Joel Rishel who, as office manager, has taken much of the workload to enable Don to work on new books.

All the publications deserve a full review and commendation. Just to give some savour of what is being done I refer to some of the more recent attractively produced hardback publications.

The Anatomy of Secret Sins, Obadiah Sedgwick (1600-1658), 382pp.

The Excellency of a Gracious Spirit, Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646), 259pp.



John K La Shell, Ray Martin and Robert Salzman

The Best Match or The Soul's Espousal to Christ, Edward Pearce (d 1673), 205pp.

The Works of Christopher Love (1618-1651), Vol I 676pp.

The 1997 publishing schedule is also full of good things. For a full list of titles available as well as the 1997 schedule, write to:

Soli Deo Gloria, PO Box 451, Morgan, PA 15064, USA.

Unity at Allentown, Pennsylvania

Many of the large cities of America are devoid of Reformed Baptist churches. Yet in Allentown, PA, two churches combine for an annual conference at which I was privileged to be the visiting

speaker during October 1996. Dr John K La Shell is the pastor of Grace Community Church and Ray Martin is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church which was founded by Dr Robert Salzman who is currently an elder there. These churches benefit from the unity they share, a unity in the truth as is illustrated from a paragraph in the brochure which advertised the conference in October:

'The Conference for Theology and Life' is based on two simple premises. First, good theology is essential for good living. Second, the kind of theology which best summarises the truths of Scripture is the God-centred theology of Augustine, the Reformers, the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. This kind of theology is often called Reformed or Calvinistic.

The Golden Chain

*The doctrines of grace
according to Romans 8:28-30*

Erroll Hulse

*For those God foreknew he also
predestined to be conformed to
the likeness of his Son, that he
might be the firstborn among
many brothers. And those he
predestined, he also called; those
he called, he also justified; those
he justified he also glorified.*

What is meant by the doctrines of grace? Answer: those truths which display God's gracious actions in those who cannot save themselves. Where do we find those truths? Answer: Passages like Ephesians 2:1-10 and Romans 8:28-30 express clearly the doctrines of grace. The latter is sometimes called the golden chain of grace.

Within the context of administering comfort to the suffering, Romans 8:28 marks a turning point in Romans 8. Having described life in the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-27) the apostle introduces the purpose of God our Father.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. This purpose of the Father is then described by way of five actions which are linked together like links in a chain. Those in view have been introduced as those who love God and for whom all things work together for good.

So what are the five actions of God the Father?

1. *He loved us*
2. *He predestined us*
3. *He called us*
4. *He justified us*
5. *He glorified us*

The initiative in each of these actions is the Father's. The purpose of each action is for our good. These actions are sovereign in the sense that God is active and we are passive. They are gracious actions because as sinners and rebels we deserve nothing. Hence the expression sovereign grace.

1. He loved us

The text declares *For whom he foreknew*. Frederic Godet who is no lightweight expositor claims that this means nothing more or less than knowing beforehand. That is the position taken by many who suggest that God foreknew those who would believe and predestined them to glory. That cannot be correct for two reasons.

Firstly the Hebraic meaning of foreknowledge is implicit in New Testament usage. The idea is of an intimate relationship. This is expressed powerfully in 1 Peter 1:20 where Christ is described as foreknown: 'For he was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you' (NASB). The NIV translates, 'He was chosen before the foundation of the world.' Peter speaks of God's foreknowledge of Christ in terms of choosing and appointing him to be our Redeemer. In the introduction Peter describes the elect as those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. In other words they are beloved of God the Father. To know means to know intimately. 'I know my sheep and am known of mine'. Thus Paul strongly rejects the idea that the Lord has cast away a people that *he foreknew* (Rom 11:2). That does not mean a people whom he merely knew about. It means a people upon whom he set his love.

The above meaning of intimate knowledge is conveyed by Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth.' Also Hosea uses the term 'to know' to refer to a marriage relationship, 'I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought'. In that terrible experience in the wilderness Jehovah was joined to his people. The verb *jada* often carries considerable depth of meaning in the Old Testament conveying the idea of a deep relationship of love. There is a lament when this kind of knowledge of love is absent (Hos 4:1 and 6:6). To Jeremiah the LORD says: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you: Before you were born I sanctified you: and ordained you a prophet to the nations' (Jer 1:5).

Secondly there is the consideration of parallel passages which explain precisely the actions of God the Father. 'For he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ' (Eph 1:4,5).¹ The grace given to us has its spring in the love of God the Father (2 Thess 2:16). The Father has given a people to Christ (John 6:37). Christ's love for his people is concurrent with that of his Father. It is this love that sustained Christ in his determination to go through with the crucifixion (Rom 5:6-8; 8:37; Heb 12:2; Gal 2:20).

Use. The context from Romans 8:18 concerns our present sufferings. We are comforted by the knowledge of the eternal electing love of God and that we are chosen to be in Christ. That love is a superlative love. It is '*so loved*'. The Father so loved that he gave his one and only Son to be a the propitiation for our sins. How can we reciprocate this great love? The answer: Beloved, if God so loved us we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:10-12).

2. He predestined us

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity to the purpose of his will (Eph 1:11). The love of God the Father is active and this is the source of his foreordination of his people to eternal life. Here predestination focuses on his people and in particular the purpose that they should be conformed to the likeness of Christ, 'that he might be the firstborn among many brothers'. The term firstborn reflects the priority and supremacy of Christ (Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6 and Rev 1:5). These details anticipate the glorification described in Revelation 21:2 and the relationship which will then pertain, 'Here am I and the children God has given me' (Heb 2:13).

This truth is comforting for it shows that everything is under the complete control of God. 'Known to God from eternity are all his works' (Acts 15:18). He knows what is to come for he has decreed what is to come. This is made clear in the 1689 Confession: 'From all eternity God decreed all that should happen in time, and this he did freely and unalterably, consulting only his own wise and holy will. Yet in doing so he does not become in any sense the author of sin, nor does he share responsibility for sin with sinners. Neither, by reason of his decree, is the will of any creature whom he has made violated' (ch 3 par 1).

Predestination points to the origin of all things while providence points to the direct control of the Holy Spirit over all things in creation and in humanity, to cite the confession again; 'Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God's providence. As God is the First Cause of all events, they happen immutably and infallibly according to his foreknowledge and decree, to which they stand related' (ch 5 par 2). Thus Peter reminds his hearers at Pentecost that Christ suffered according to the set purpose and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). The control of the Spirit in providence is not general merely. It is particular even to a sparrow's nest and the hair upon our heads (Matt 10:29,30).

This second action is the only one in the sequence which is opened further. The great end of the Father's purpose is our sanctification. *He predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* We should note that this is intensely practical. Conformity to the likeness of Christ involves progressive sanctification which is every Christian's business every hour of every day (Rom 12:1; Phil 2:12,13; 2 Cor 3:18). The end of the process will be glorification when we will be like Christ who is our prototype (Phil 3:21). Our glory is to share his glory (Col 1:15 and 18). Yet he has a unique glory (Heb 1:6). We look forward to the full expression and enjoyment of our adoption as his brothers (Heb 2:10-18).

Use 1. The absolute sovereignty of God is a bulwark to us spiritually. We are in conflict with the post-modern philosophical climate of today in which nothing is regarded as sure. We must proclaim boldly the absolute sovereignty of the God of the Bible in everything. Western culture is similar to that of Athens when Paul preached at Mars Hill and asserted, 'For in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). We must not be discouraged by the indifference and unbelief of the unregenerate mind and remember the promise that the Holy Spirit will convince our hearers of sin, righteousness and judgment to come (John 16:8).

Use 2. The pursuit of holiness must be our constant aim and effort. In that we are encouraged by the knowledge that this is the ultimate reason in God's purpose.

3. He called us

In the opening sentence of the letter to the Romans Paul describes himself as called to be an apostle and then describes the believers in Rome as ‘those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ’ and those called to be saints. The Father who has loved us and predestined us is the author of our calling. ‘It is he who constitutes the bond with the Saviour and therefore puts us in possession of all that the Saviour is. It is of the Father that Christ is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption’ (1 Cor 1:30).²

Note the explicit rôle of the Father when Paul declares, ‘God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful’ (1 Cor 1:9). A further commentary and confirmation of all that we have considered so far in Romans 8:28-30 is stated in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, ‘God who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time’ (2 Tim 1:9).

Use. We are to declare the praises of our Father who has effectually called us with a high (Phil 3:14), heavenly (Heb 3:1) and holy (2 Tim 1:9) calling. We are to give diligence to make this calling sure (2 Pet 1:10). This calling from our Father is a calling to peace (Col 3:15). It is a calling to patience which endures beatings. ‘But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called’ (1 Pet 2:21).

4. He justified us

Justification by faith is the theme of Romans. Having introduced this in 1:16,17 the apostle goes on to show that the world, Jews and Gentiles, is destitute of righteousness. But now a saving righteousness is provided through the redemption that is in Christ (Rom 3:21-26). The method of justification he shows to be the same in all ages, namely by faith alone (Rom 4). The blessings that accrue are described in chapter 5 and in chapters 6 and 7 the relationship of justification to sanctification is expounded.

The catechism well summarises this teaching when it describes justification as an act of God’s free grace wherein he freely pardons all our sins, and accepts

us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us which is received by faith alone.

Justification is a marvel. Why? God does what a human judge cannot and must not do. He declares righteous those who are really ungodly. If human magistrates did this it would be an abomination (Prov 17:15). Yet our omnipotent Creator does it and is righteous in doing so. In fact the bottom line is justice, that he might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus (Rom 3:26). The Father's justification is not as scandalous as it first appears because it is based on union with Christ. That union supplies the righteousness which is the only ground of justification which is forensic and external but the same union supplies rivers of living water, life abundant, in the hearts of the justified, which is internal and dynamic.

Use. Justification is the foundation of our assurance. When condemned by devils or by our own conscience we have refuge in justification. *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies!* We claim this justification in the context of union with Christ and the pursuit of holiness (Rom 6:1-4; 2 Cor 7:1).

5. He glorified us

Glorification is the final step in the application of redemption. In line with the previous acts this too is attributed to the Father. It will take place when Christ returns. At his command the bodies of all believers from all history will be raised and reunited with their souls. Every believer will then have a perfect resurrection body like that of Christ himself. The Holy Spirit will be the immediate agent of omnipotent power to achieve this, the greatest of all creative miracles. Yet while there is concurrence in the Trinity this glorification of believers is specified as the act of God the Father thereby affirming that this is his ultimate will for those who are members of his family by adoption.

Sometimes readers wonder why glorification is expressed in a past tense. The aorist tense denotes an action or an event. Its function is not one primarily concerned with time but rather with drawing attention to the significance of an action or event. That action or event is being highlighted in its entirety. The stress therefore in these five actions is on the significance of each action as an event.

The glorification means that our bodies will be redeemed. The most detailed description of what this will involve is 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, in which the words most striking are ‘powerful’ and ‘imperishable’. These are telling adjectives which relate to our resurrected physical bodies.

We eagerly await the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). When our bodies are raised from the dead we will experience complete victory over death. Death will be swallowed up in victory. This victory will be overwhelming and comprehensive. It will extend to the whole creation. *For the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God* (Rom 8:22). As Adam and Eve were placed in a habitat or environment suited to them so we will be. The earth will be a glorified earth. Today as never before cameras explore the exquisite glories of this present creation: trees, flowers, marine life, animals. If Christians controlled the media appropriate psalms and hymns would be included ascribing the praise to our Creator. We must depict heaven as a new earth, not skies. Little wonder that unbelievers deride that as boring. We need a better term than ‘heaven’, because to many that means ‘sky’.

The glorification of the body means that we will not be spirits forever ‘ether sailing’ with hippos and elephants sailing around with us in the skies. Just as it is heresy to suggest that Christ’s resurrection was merely spiritual and his physical body left in the tomb, so it is heretical and harmful to promote the idea that in the next world we will be mere spirits. Anything which deprives us of our intrinsic and essential humanity and which radically disconnects us from a human environment is harmful. Some hymns convey the idea that we will be eternal astronauts fixed in orbit. The truth is that we will be as we are now but free entirely from sin, disease and the ageing process. Our minds and bodies will possess additional capacities and those lacks which frustrate and torment us now will be repaired, made good and elevated.

With regard to the glorification we have to balance what we do know with what is too advanced for us at this stage; as the Scripture says,

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him* (1 Cor. 2:9).

At the same time Paul prays that we might know the hope to which we have been called and the riches of our inheritance (Eph 1:18).

Use. Meditation on the certainty and reality of the glorification as an act of God the Father is encouraged not only here but in other scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5 where Paul reminds us that we are gradually dying but we look forward to a powerful body which can never die, a body which in the analogy of architecture is like a stone building compared with a canvas tent.

The application of the doctrines of grace

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God be for us who can be against us? These questions have the force of pressing upon us the outcome of the great gracious acts of God on our behalf. If he is for us in the way described then what have we to fear from anyone or anything? Paul focuses on three actions of the Father and shows how we are to apply these in a practical way.

1. The gift, even to death, of his own Son is primary. Since that is a fact how shall he not with Christ freely give us all things?

2. Justification. Who justifies? The Father! That is decisive!

3. The love of the Father. This love is expressed in the gift of Christ and in Christ's own love for us. Nothing can sever us from that love. The most threatening powers and the most climactic scenarios are described, faced and defied, in the name of him who loves us for ever and who continues to act on our behalf. Christ is at this very moment interceding for us. Hallelujah, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

References

1. The textual problem as to where 'in love' belongs in the text is discussed by William Hendriksen in his commentary on Ephesians. He adequately defends the placing of the expression 'in love' with 'predestined' which is the way in which the NIV translates the verse.
2. Prof John Murray, Works Vol 2 p 166.

Note

Compared with the five points represented in the acrostic TULIP the Golden Chain has many advantages. It is set in the context of Scripture. The actions are all related to the first Person of the Trinity. The whole has its foundation in the love of the Father. Justification by faith is present which it is not in TULIP. The whole concludes in the glorious prospect of the resurrection followed by a sterling application. The advantage of TULIP is that it begins with total depravity. Foundational to any appreciation of grace is conviction of sin. The more acute our sense of guilt and sin the more we appreciate the wonder and glory of the doctrines of grace. Particular redemption is implied in the Golden Chain. Particular Redemption is explicit in statements such as Hebrews 10:14.

The Plight of Russia



Roger Weil in Minsk

Roger Weil

Russia is geographically the largest country in the world, stretching over eleven time zones. Now that Ukraine and Belarus are separate nations Russia stands sixth in the population league table at 153 million (China 1,214m, India 904m, USA 258m, Indonesia 195m, Brazil 165m).

The general situation in Russia is extremely critical. The government can pay neither its workforce nor its massive army because, due to the chronic economic conditions, it is unable to collect the taxes needed to run the country. Nearly every week fresh groups of workers demonstrate in Moscow demanding to be paid their wages often due for three months, some even longer. The same is true of the army. Officers even have to get what manual work they can, unloading wagons etc. just to make ends meet!

The military high command were shocked to hear that the rebels in Chechnya were equipped with more modern weapons than their own troops. Starving soldiers in charge of military warehouses had been selling black market weapons, and even some personnel carriers, to the rebels! A top general in charge of the nuclear industry in Chelyabinsk committed suicide due to the terrible strain of a possible breakdown in security. Thousands of highly skilled scientists and technicians were becoming desperate having received no wages for several months – the conse-

quences of what might happen had so preyed on the general's mind that it proved too much for him to bear.

Hyper-inflation has put millions of Russians, and especially pensioners, on the bread-line. During the 1980s tourists received one rouble for one pound, now it's about nine thousand roubles to the pound!

The Mafia has become a threat of massive proportions. These ruthless criminals have committed several thousand killings this year. All sections of Russian society is in the grip of this evil. Recently a well known American business leader was murdered. It is not difficult to imagine the dent this makes in confidence. The threat the mafia poses to the stability of Russian commerce is lethal. Only by taking what are called 'special measures' can any government break its hold on the national life. Basic law and order is in free-fall. For years Russians have been accustomed to strong government – the big fist! They have even admired that and now see the advantages of law and order. They see they have exchanged law for a so-called freedom that has brought them nothing but loss of empire, rampant inflation, poverty, widespread corruption, a breakdown in law and order and mass unemployment, just the conditions that are needed for the reappearance of a dictatorship.

For decades the vast size, prestige and influence of the Russian army has been the backbone of Soviet society but now its morale is so low that talk of mutiny cannot be ruled out. This has been exacerbated by underfunding and the Government's failure to pay their wages. The leadership of the army may well be tempted to put an end to the seemingly disastrous experiment in Western-style democracy by a *coup d'état*. Such a scenario is no longer regarded as beyond the realms of possibility.

Against such a dark and forbidding backdrop the rise and progress of church life is encouraging. From all parts of the former Soviet Union one hears of churches being built and congregations growing in size. In the Ukraine growth in the Baptist denomination is reckoned at about one hundred new churches per year and the same would be true for Pentecostal churches. Generally speaking believers have been among the poorest classes of Russian society so food and clothing in some areas are in short supply for many families. Christian literature can be printed and distributed freely throughout the land and much good is being done by Western Christians in facilitating its production inside the country or importing it from abroad.

Those interested in further details are invited to write to: Roger Weil, 28 Hayesford Park Drive, Bromley, Kent, BR2 9DB.

The Five Points, the Gospel and Salvation

Bob Sheehan

Those of us who rejoice in the five points of Calvinism (often referred to as TULIP) see in them great truths which we hold dear, because they give an understanding of the greatness of the Gospel and an appreciation of the magnitude of God's grace towards us. We concur wholeheartedly with John Newton's assertion, 'The views I have received of the doctrines of grace are essential to my peace. I could not live comfortably a day, or an hour, without them.'¹

Regrettably, however, the beautiful doctrines of grace have sometimes been turned into something ugly by those who, in their enthusiasm for the truth, go to extremes. It is sad and alarming to hear of those who are arguing that the doctrines of grace are the Gospel and that salvation is only possible to those who believe those doctrines. These strong assertions require some response.

What does it mean to preach the Gospel?

Both John Calvin and John Owen in their works recognise that the term Gospel has a variety of meanings in its biblical and theological usage.² This is not surprising as the Greek noun for Gospel is used on 77 occasions in the New Testament and the related verb 55 times.³ In different contexts it has a variety of shades of meaning.

The narrow use of the term Gospel

In its narrowest use the Gospel refers to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel by which we are saved. Paul uses it in this sense in 1 Corinthians 15:1f: 'Now I declare to you, brothers, the gospel which I gospelled to you, which you also received, on which you have also taken your stand, through which you are also being saved.'

What was Paul's Gospel through which we are saved? Does his summary of the matters of first importance (v3) list the doctrines of grace? Are total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints asserted? No!

Rather, Paul declares that ‘Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried, and that he was raised the third day according to the Scriptures’ (v4). Charles Hodge reminds us, ‘The death of Christ for our sins and his resurrection were therefore the great facts on which Paul insisted as the foundation of the Gospel.’⁴

When we preach the Gospel in the narrow sense of the term, those essential truths which declare what God has done for the salvation of sinners, we are preaching nothing more and nothing less *than Jesus Christ and him crucified* (1 Cor 2:2). Many people have preached such a Christ without understanding the doctrines of grace.

Spurgeon and the Downgrade Controversy

Late in his life, when C H Spurgeon was facing the onslaught of Higher Critical views of the Bible and a doctrine of salvation without a substitute, he distinguished between the Arminians, with whom he vigorously disagreed, and the proponents of the New Theology, with whom he considered fellowship sin. ‘We are asked whether Methodists are upon the downgrade and we are happy to reply that we do not think so. In our fellowship with Methodists of all grades we have found them firmly adhering to those great evangelical doctrines for which we contend.’ After a criticism of the historical tendencies of Methodism he continued, ‘We care far more for the central evangelical truths than we do for Calvinism as a system. . . Those who hold the eternal verities of salvation, and yet do not see all that we believe and embrace, are by no means the objects of our opposition: our warfare is with men who are giving up the atoning sacrifice, denying the inspiration of Holy Scripture and casting slurs upon justification by faith.’⁵

The distinction that Spurgeon drew is most important. A man may hold to the great evangelical verities, or central evangelical truths, of the atoning sacrifice and justification by faith alone and yet be an Arminian. Nevertheless, although his Arminianism is a heresy, he can, in the midst of it all, still be preaching the central facts of the Gospel.

Evangelical Arminians

Later in the same year Spurgeon spelt this out even more clearly, ‘Many evangelical Arminians are as earnestly on our side as men can be. We do not conceal our Calvinism in the least; but this conflict is for the truths which are common to all believers. This is no battle over words, but it deals with the eternal verities – those foundation truths which belong not exclusively to this party or to that.’⁶

The foundational truths of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:1-4) are not the exclusive property of Calvinists, but truths which are common to all believers.

The wider use of the term Gospel

In its widespread use in the New Testament the word Gospel can mean the foundational truths or have a wider meaning. Mark began his Gospel with the statement: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God (Mark 1:1). The Gospel that Mark had in view was not simply the death and resurrection of our Lord but all the message concerning him.

Similarly, when our Lord promised that wherever the Gospel was preached in the whole world his anointing at Bethany would feature (Mark 14:9), he was not implying that the anointing with the nard was part of the fundamental message by which we are saved, but part of the whole truth by which we are instructed. No one, as far as I know, has ever claimed that if we do not mention the anointing of Jesus with ointment every time we preach, we are not preaching the Gospel!

In this wider sense we cannot preach the Gospel without preaching the five points (and the many other points) of Calvinism, and all other doctrines the Scripture contains.⁷ For B B Warfield Calvinism was the Gospel in all its purity,⁸ a whole presentation of the truth of God.

C H Spurgeon's New Park Street Sermons are legendary. A survey of the preaching from 1855-1860 will show that in his preaching to his regular congregation in his church building Spurgeon fearlessly declared the doctrines of grace. On September 2, 1855 he preached a sermon entitled 'Election'; on December 2, 1855 the title was 'Free-will a slave'; on March 30, 1856 his sermon was on 'Effectual Calling'; and on April 2, 1856 'Final Perseverance'.

However, in his preaching evangelistically he was more careful because he considered that more foundational truths had first to be grasped by those unfamiliar with the Gospel. He explained this in a sermon entitled 'Particular Redemption' preached at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, on February 28th 1858:

When first it was my duty to occupy this pulpit, and preach in this hall, my congregation assumed the appearance of an irregular mass of persons collected from all the streets of this city to listen to the Word. I was then simply an evangelist, preaching to many who had not heard the Gospel before. By the grace of God, the most blessed change has taken place; and now, instead of having an irregular multitude gathered together, my congregation is as fixed as

that of any minister in the whole city of London . . . From being an evangelist, it is now my business to become your pastor. I think, then, it will strike the judgment of every person, that as both the congregation and the office have now changed, the teaching itself should in some measure suffer a difference. It has been my wont to address you from the simple truths of the Gospel; I have seldom, in this place, attempted to dive into the deep things of God. A text which I thought suitable for my congregation in the evening, I should not have made the subject of discussion in this place in the morning. There are many high and mysterious doctrines which I have often taken opportunity of handling in my own place, that I have not taken the liberty of introducing here, regarding you as a company of people casually gathered to hear the Word. But now since the circumstances have changed, the teaching will be changed also. I shall not now simply confine myself to the doctrine of faith, or the teaching of believer's baptism: I shall not stay upon the surface of matters, but shall venture as God shall guide me to enter into those things that lie at the basis of the religion that we hold so dear. I shall not blush to preach before you the doctrine of God's Divine Sovereignty; I shall not stagger to preach in the most unreserved and unguarded manner the doctrine of election. I shall not be afraid to propound before you the great truth of the final perseverance of the saints; I shall not withhold that undoubted truth of Scripture, the effectual calling of God's elect; I shall endeavour, as God shall help me, to keep back nothing from you who have become my flock. Seeing that many of you have now tasted that the Lord is gracious, we will endeavour to go through the whole system of the doctrines of grace, that saints may be edified and built up in their most holy faith.⁹

C H Spurgeon obviously saw a difference between preaching the simple Gospel, which he defined as 'the doctrine of faith', and 'the high and mysterious doctrines', the doctrines of grace, which he reserved for those who had grasped the basic truths of the Gospel and who were ready to move from milk to meat. If there can be no true preaching of the Gospel without preaching the five points of Calvinism, then Spurgeon was not an evangelist and did not preach the Gospel during the revival he experienced!

Spurgeon, however, knew his Bible well enough to know there are doctrines which are the foundation of the faith, suitable for those who need milk, from which those ready for meat need to be able to advance (Hebrews 5:11-6:2). These doctrines include *repentance from dead works and faith towards God, the teaching of baptisms and laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and everlasting judgment* (Heb 6:2).

Many an Arminian, and those innumerable preachers who do not know what they

are (!), have preached the need of repentance and faith, baptism, the reception of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the dead and judgment. To preach these truths does not require us to mention the doctrines of grace. It is milk preaching for baby Christians. It is monstrous to say that only five pointers preach this foundational Gospel. It is accurate to assert that only five point Calvinists preach the meaty Gospel in its fullness.

Are only those who believe the doctrines of grace saved?

It is exceedingly sad that anyone should distort the Gospel answer to the anguished request of the sin-convicted heart, 'What is it necessary for me to do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30) The apostolic answer was neither 'Believe on the Lord Jesus and the doctrines of grace and be saved', nor 'Believe on the Lord Jesus as revealed in the doctrines of grace and be saved'. It was simply 'Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved' (Acts 16:31).

Calvin comments on this passage, 'This definition of salvation, that one is to believe in Christ, is short and meagre in appearance, but yet it is ample. For Christ alone has all the elements of blessedness and eternal life included in himself. He offers them to us through the Gospel and we receive them by faith . . . But two things must be noted here. The first is that Christ is the one and only goal of faith . . . In the second place we must observe that after we have embraced Christ by faith, that alone suffices for salvation.'¹⁰

We do well to note that Christ is the one and only goal of faith. Much of the New Testament is spent repudiating and opposing gospels of Christ plus something else. It would be the supreme irony if Calvinists, who are so insistent on salvation by grace alone, through faith alone because of Christ alone, should themselves add to that all-sufficient Christ belief in the doctrines of grace as a necessity for salvation.

What would the preachers of salvation by faith in Christ *and* the doctrines of grace do when preaching on the dying thief who went to Paradise (Luke 23:39-43)? For centuries Christians have used this passage to show that faith in Christ alone receives full salvation and that nothing more is needed.

Calvin comments, 'We ought likewise to observe by what keys the gate of heaven was opened to the robber: for neither papal confession nor satisfactions are here taken into account, but Christ is satisfied with repentance and faith, so as to receive him willingly when he comes to him.'¹¹

Ryle reminds us that, 'The dying thief was never baptised, belonged to no visible

church, and never received the Lord's Supper. But he repented and believed and therefore he was saved. Let those things sink down into our hearts. Christ never changes. The way of salvation is always one and the same. He lives who saved the penitent thief. There is hope for the vilest sinner, if he only will repent and believe.'¹²

Not without the greatest flights of imagination could it be argued that the dying thief understood the doctrines of grace and was saved by faith in them. Expounding this passage Ryle comments:

The first notable step in the thief's repentance was his concern about his companion's wickedness in reviling Christ. 'Dost thou not fear God,' he said, 'seeing thou art under the same condemnation?' The second step was a full acknowledgement of his own sin. 'We indeed are justly in condemnation. We receive the due reward of our deeds.' The third step was an open confession of Christ's innocence. 'This man hath done nothing amiss.' The fourth step was faith in Jesus Christ's power and will to save him. He turned to a crucified sufferer and called him 'Lord' and declared his belief that he had a kingdom. The fifth step was prayer. He cried to Jesus when he was hanging on the cross, and asked him even then to think upon his soul. The sixth and last step was humility. He begged to be 'remembered' by our Lord. He mentions no great thing. Enough for him if he is remembered by Christ.¹³

The dying thief stands as a memorial to salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, the perseverance of the saints: these doctrines, wonderful though they are, were not in his thoughts. Judgment, condemnation and salvation through Christ were! By paying attention to the latter not the former he was saved.

If the Philippian gaoler and the dying thief can be saved without a knowledge of the doctrines of grace (although of course they experienced the reality of them without knowing the theology of them), then believing the doctrines of grace cannot be essential to our salvation.

In his autobiography Spurgeon has a chapter entitled 'A Defence of Calvinism'. In that chapter he gives a vigorous defence of each of the doctrines of grace. He has no difficulty in declaring Roman Catholicism and Arminianism to be heresies. Why are they heresies? Because they add to the work of Christ in relation to our justification. What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ – the bringing in of the works of the flesh to assist in our justification? And what is the heresy of Arminianism but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the

touchstone, will discover itself here.¹⁴ What a solemn thought that those Calvinists who insist that only those who believe in Christ and the doctrines of grace can be saved should fall under the same condemnation.

Nor should we ignore the fact that in the very same chapter Spurgeon comments, "There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer – "I wish to be called nothing but a Christian"; but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin, I reply, "I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it".¹⁵ Spurgeon was firstly a Christian, secondly a Calvinist.

Did Spurgeon then believe that only Calvinists were saved?

But far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views. Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him that, while I detest many of the doctrines he preached, yet for the man himself I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan . . . I believe that there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour, and are as dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of heaven.¹⁶

Spurgeon's position is not determined by sentiment but by Scripture, because the Gospel is not 'Become a Calvinist' and be saved but '*Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved*' (Acts 16:31).

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A Woman who Fears the Lord

Albert M Wolters

Proverbs 31:10-31

This is an acrostic poem with 22 verses corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet like Psalm 119. There is one small exegetical problem that exegetes have wrestled with down through the centuries. The problem is this: What does verse 30 mean?

Here is the climax to the whole poem – ‘A woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.’ That’s the punch-line after the description of all the wonderful things that this woman does; running an estate, spinning and weaving, engaging in international trade and all sorts of things, very down-to-earth, ‘secular’ affairs. What does that penultimate verse – ‘a woman who fears the Lord’ – have to do with all these regular activities of running a household? It is very interesting to look at the history of exegesis and to find out the different ways in which people have answered that question. It is possible to chart the ways in which people have answered that particular question: what does this explicitly religious verse have to do with all of these mundane activities?

1. *Gratia contra naturam* – Grace against nature

Some interpreters have followed the principle: *Gratia contra naturam*. Grace against nature. The earthly is in tension with the spiritual. In other words the ordinary regular household type activities that the woman is engaged in belong to the mundane things of the natural world. Grace is represented in the faith of the woman who fears the LORD. So according to the first paradigm, those two are in conflict with each other. They are incompatible.

There are two ways in which exegetes have dealt with the poem according to this first paradigm. They have either secularised the religious pull of the relationship or they have gone the reverse route and they have sanctified the secular pull. For more than a thousand years, from the time of the Church fathers until the Reformation, until Luther, everyone who commented on that poem assumed that the whole thing was an allegory. It simply was not referring to a real woman. In the Jewish tradition they said that the woman represents the Torah. In the Christian tradition they said

the woman represents the Church. So when it says that the woman plants a vineyard, that planting refers to church planting and all the activities of the woman are metaphorical ways of referring to various kinds of spiritual activities that the Church engages in. Of course they did not have to spiritualise the second part of verse 30 – it was already spiritual. In effect they took the grace pull and pushed that out to accomplish the rest of the poem and to say, ‘Well, it’s all spiritual.’ In Catholic commentaries this interpretation persists until the 20th century. It is the result of seeing an incompatibility between nature and grace, between these ordinary human, businesslike activities of the woman and her fear of the LORD.

Another way of solving the apparent contradiction is to do the opposite. That is to take Proverbs 31:30 and to secularise it. This is done by simply removing the reference to the fear of the LORD in verse 30. A good number of critical scholars have done just that. They say that’s impossible in such a secular poem, that at the end there should be such a reference to the fear of the Lord – it can’t be original! Some later pious scribe must have inserted it! The first edition of the *Jerusalem Bible* reads, not ‘a woman who fears the LORD’, but ‘the woman who is wise’. It changes the text because it doesn’t think that religious emphasis fits in this secular context.

So those are two ways in which that first paradigm has influenced exegetes.

2. *Gratia supra naturam* – Grace above nature

We now consider another approach – *Gratia supra naturam*. Grace above nature. Let me give you a few quotes of people who have viewed the matter this way. The ‘supra’ tradition is the standard Roman Catholic view, namely that grace is ‘supra’ that is above, nature. Grace is like ‘icing on the cake’. A quote from a Benedictine exegete, Calmet, from the first part of the 18th century on Proverbs 31:30 reads: ‘To this point Solomon had hardly praised anything in his mother but virtues which though rare did not transcend the natural order.’ Calmet is saying, until we get to verse 30 we’ve only been talking about virtues below the line, we haven’t got beyond the natural order. ‘He established as virtually exclusive evidence as proof of her praiseworthy qualities, the diligence, alertness, discipline and efficient administration of the famous lady’ – all natural things. ‘Here however, he teaches that all these qualities, indeed even her beauty and charm are worthless and to no avail unless the fear of God, piety and true wisdom are added to that.’ We need to get the second storey on top of the natural order.

Another quote from a Roman Catholic exegete from the 20th century, a German cardinal: ‘The pearl of women... has not forgotten the one thing needful amongst all the Martha cares of a busy life, but by her fear of God she has set the crown on all of her life’s work.’ ‘Set the crown on’ is the supra paradigm. So that’s another

way of relating those two pulls of the relationship; the fear of the LORD is like icing on the cake – you add that to the natural order.

3. *Gratia juxta naturam* – Grace alongside nature

The third paradigm *Grace alongside nature*, is the one that's often associated with the Lutheran tradition. As you know, Luther translated the Bible into German, a magnificent achievement. He used to have small marginal notes by way of commentary. Next to verse 30 he said: 'That is to say, a woman can live with a man honourably and piously and can, with a good conscience be a housewife (i.e. not a nun) but she must also, in addition and next to this, fear God, have faith, and pray.' It's fine for her to be a wife, to do all things that a good burgher mother in Germany would do, raise a family, run a household, that's good, she doesn't have to be a nun, there's nothing lower about that, but *alongside* of that (emphasised) she should also fear God and pray.

4. *Gratia intra naturam* – Grace in nature

Well, how about the right perspective? *Gratia intra naturam* says that the fear of God is something that penetrates and permeates all these so-called secular activities.

It's not something that stands in opposition to them, it's not something which is added as icing on the cake, not something that stands alongside, but rather something which permeates the whole. Grace inspires all living. Grace motivates the believer to live for God in everything.

The Puritan Thomas Cartwright on Proverbs 31:19 concerning the woman spinning thread suggests that common, ordinary duties are a pleasing service of God. Cartwright is critical of the Anabaptists who held to the first paradigm and the Roman Catholics who hold to the second paradigm which devalue the ordinary activities of life.

Abraham Kuypers in his devotional works comments that there is very little information on the internal qualities of the woman, only that she fears the Lord. He suggests that all her daily activities evidence her godliness and it is that godliness which inspires her life and exemplifies her relationship to God.

Albert M Wolters is a professor of theology at Redeemer College, Ontario, Canada.

Paul, the Law and Justification

A review by Bill James

Paul, the Law and Justification,
Colin G Kruse, IVP (Apollos),
1996, 320pp, pb, £14.99

The doctrine of justification is inseparable in Protestant minds from the name of Martin Luther. It was his own personal crisis of faith, and his rediscovery of justification by faith that was so central to the Reformation and the break with Rome.

Over the years some have questioned Luther's exegesis of Paul which identifies first-century Judaism so closely with medieval Catholicism and a religion based on merit. Most importantly, the work of E P Sanders in the 70s revealed the Judaism of Paul's day to be not a crass system of works, but a religion based on election and grace. This has led to some furious rethinking of Paul's letters, and the challenge that Protestant theology has been blinkered by Luther's interpretations. In evangelical circles perhaps the contributions of James Dunn have been most influential.

Dunn contends that Paul's expression 'works of the law' does not refer to some slavish obedience to the law to

gain favour with God, but is rather a technical term denoting those boundary markers which set apart the Jews as the covenant people of God. These were the food laws, circumcision, Sabbath, and other observances required by the Old Covenant. To the Jewish mind such observances were indispensable to covenant membership. They were not performed meritoriously, but simply set apart God's people from the world. After the coming of Christ, many Jews found it impossible to discard these practices. In Galatians for example Paul records his conflict with Peter over the issue of table fellowship with Gentile Christians. Paul makes it clear that the only boundary marker of the New Covenant people of God is faith in Christ; Jewish food laws are now an unacceptable hindrance to the fellowship created between Jewish and Gentile believers. According to Dunn, when Paul teaches that we are not justified by the works of the law he is not setting up an argument between merit and grace, but is rather speaking about the identity of the people of God: is it a matter of being distinctively Jewish or a matter of faith in Christ alone?

Colin Kruse responds to this debate. First, he gives us a survey of important monographs over the past

100 years. This is a helpful and easily accessible introduction to the debate. Then we are presented with a fresh exegesis of the relevant texts in the light of the current arguments. There are extensive chapters on Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans, as well as a chapter devoted to the other Pauline letters. At the end of each chapter the main points of Paul's argument are drawn out by way of conclusion. Many of the insights of the recent debate are incorporated into these expositions. This controversy is helpful in forcing us to re-read and re-think Paul from a new perspective. However, Kruse is critical of Dunn at some points. He maintains that when Paul speaks out against the 'works of the law' in Romans he is opposing the idea of moral achievements making a contribution to our justification. While in principle first century Judaism was not legalistic, yet in practice it degenerated into a meritorious system which Paul condemned. And in practice any reliance on works whether they be performance of the whole law or just Jewish identity markers, is an addition of human effort and merit to justification as a free act of God's grace alone.

Having affirmed justification as the work of God in granting us peace and right standing in his sight, the question is raised of the continuing function of the law in the Christian life. Kruse affirms that we are

liberated from the system of the Mosaic Covenant, and no longer bound by the stipulations of the law. However there are positive illustrations of the continuing role of the law as a pattern or paradigm of the Christian life. For example, OT discipline is a pattern for NT discipline of the incestuous offender in 1 Corinthians 5. Later on in the same epistle OT teaching of the oxen being allowed to eat the grain as they tread it out is used as a pattern for support of gospel workers. However, it is disappointing to find that the author affords no special place to the ten commandments. His treatment of the quotations of commandments in Paul's letters is unconvincing.

The treatment of the Christian life also fails to answer some of the questions of the current debate. Dunn defines justification in a way which moves beyond a forensic declaration of right standing in God's sight to a transformation of the believer to walk in the obedience of faith. It would have been helpful to have more material on this vital matter of definition. The issue of judgment according to works also deserves more attention.

This is a useful volume in pointing us to the fruits of modern scholarship. If read critically it will prove stimulating in helping us to reconsider and appreciate afresh the central doctrine of justification by faith alone.

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Assistant Editor
Associate Editors

ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ
 BILL JAMES, 9 Epsom Road, Leamington Spa CV32 7AR
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