

REFORMATION TODAY

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The Gospel of Christ Revealed





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Editorial

The Gospel of Christ Revealed

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

Although God has decided to keep certain things to himself, he has given us the glorious revelation of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and what he has done for lost sinners. Geoff Thomas' third instalment in his series of sermons on Deuteronomy 29:29 shifts the focus to this glorious gospel that God has revealed in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel can be summarised in a few lines, and through the work of the Holy Spirit can be understood by a child. At the same time, what God has revealed is a gloriously rich source of truths that takes more than a lifetime to mine for its treasures.

Luke Jenner explores the Scriptures to help us understand the position of Adam before he fell in sin. This has been expressed in what many Reformed theologians have called the covenant of works. This is a rather neglected topic which opens another crucially important dimension of the gospel. Adam broke this covenant, but Christ came to fulfil the just demands of God in his active obedience. Luke demonstrates that Christ's joyfully active obedience to the unadorned Word of God is foundational to our redemption. This reminds us of J Gresham Machen who on the last day of his life wrote a telegram to John Murray saying: 'I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ; no hope without it', (quoted in the introduction written by Ned Stonehouse of J Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1982), p 14. The conclusion of Luke's article is that to *embrace* the covenant of works in our understanding is to find

Christ displayed in more of his glory than perhaps we'd seen before.

All people without exception need the gospel to be saved. As Paul says, there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). But the gospel will also save people from every tribe, race and nation. The church unites all kinds of people; there will be unity in diversity. This gospel is therefore also the biblical antidote to racism as Ronald Kalifungwa shows in his second article on this topic.

The gospel also transforms individual people; sinners will be turned to become children of God. No matter their background, the gospel has this power. This is because the Lord Jesus 'is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb 7:25). Oliver Allmand-Smith illustrates this truth in the first article of a series on the life of William Gadsby. Despite all kinds of shortcomings, the Lord not only saved him, but used him mightily in the work of the gospel.

By the time you read this issue of *RT*, the year 2017 will have ended; the year in which we remembered the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It is most encouraging that this did not only happen in the traditionally Protestant parts of Europe and North America, but also in an enthusiastic way in Kenya as we can read in our News section.

May the Lord bless us all in the ministry of the gospel in the New Year AD 2018. ■



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The Secret Things and the Revealed Things

'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.'

Deuteronomy 29:29

More than one commentator, or theologian, or even the men I have spoken to about this verse, have pointed out that its primary emphasis is not on the secret things that belong to God but the things that are revealed. They belong to us; they are ours and they are our children's forever, in order that we, knowing them, may put them into practice and follow them. This verse is far more about grace than ignorance. I fear I have been guilty of some imbalance so far in stressing what are some of the secret things that belong to the Lord, but I have used the theme of secrecy to speak of all the things we do know. Our problem is reconciling what seem to all of

us to be contradictory truths. However, in this third article I must redress the balance and present to you the things that are revealed, that belong to us today, that are utterly sufficient for our whole pilgrimage to glory. What is revealed to us is...

What must I do to be saved?

At this point there are rich answers. The advice is utterly unambiguous. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved' (Acts 16:31). We have heard of Jesus. We have been told that he is the promised Messiah, the God-man, the Son of God, there are four Gospels of his life, and many epistles that describe his great

achievements, and we have responded to them, we have moved in and believed the testimony God has given us about him. We believe the claims the New Testament makes about Christ, that he is God's Son, that he became the Lamb of God and took away the sin of the world, that in him is eternal life. First of all we have become gripped by that message. We believe that it is true. We have to start there, with this immense fact of the magnetic uninventability of Jesus of Nazareth.

Then we have moved beyond that. We have committed ourselves to Christ. We have believed into him. We have put our trust in him. We have come to rely upon him; we have come to follow him; we have become his disciples. We discover that he is a many-sided person and because of that our faith in him must also be many-sided. There are as many perspectives to saving faith as the multi-perspectival Christ himself. If I would state that in the baldest terms it would mean that we're to believe in the two natures of Christ, as God and man, that we believe in the three states of Christ as pre-incarnate, humiliated and exalted, and that we believe in the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king. Now I don't expect that dangling that skeleton before you will do you much good, barely stated in that way. I will say it in another way. I will put some flesh on it...

1. We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ the Prophet

We commit ourselves to this great teacher, sent into the world by its Creator with a message, and he has faithfully delivered it, everything the Father has given him to say to us, the parables, the sermons, the claims and the promises. We have them in the

New Testament and we believe them. Never man spake like this man, and we in faith place our understanding and our minds absolutely under the authority of what he has said. For us he can say nothing wrong. I mean by that that the first great hallmark of the Christian believer is that he believes a thing to be true because the Lord Jesus has said it. He is a pupil who is following a great rabbi. He is a disciple following an infallible teacher. He is in the school of Christ listening to and heeding this divine and omniscient speaker, and believing in Christ is first of all believing in Christ his tutor. Do we believe everything Jesus says? Do we believe it because Jesus says it? We submit to his authority. We follow Jesus the great teacher. That is where faith begins.

2. We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ the Priest

What has Christ the Priest done? He has made himself the once and for all sacrifice for our sin. He has given himself for us. He has met the whole cost of our redemption. He has become the great argument with which a sinner can go to God and say to him, 'Forgive me for Jesus' sake.' I'm asking, have we such confidence in what Jesus Christ did in his dying love, when he said at the end, 'It is finished' that we go to God with this argument, and with none other argument than Jesus' blood? Do I go to God and say, 'Pardon my sins,' and all my plea that he hear and answer me is the great atonement that Christ has made on the cross? Can we today contemplate the great white throne of judgment in all its splendour, and all its purity, and all its omniscience, and all its intelligence, and know that it is appointed for me at my death to be there facing God? Yet I can look steadfastly at it and say, 'Any man who can

go there with the blood of Christ as his single plea doesn't need to be afraid.' Have we that kind of confidence in what Christ has done? You understand that faith is not that I can go there without fear. It is not that, that I don't tremble at the thought of dying and being judged by the Almighty, but faith is this. I might not be sure whether or not I have Christ, but what I know is this, that the man who has him doesn't need to be afraid of condemnation. He knows that for the believer in Christ there is no condemnation. That is what our faith is. It is such faith in the blood of Christ that we are sure that those who are covered by it have nothing to fear, even when we are not infallibly sure that we ourselves are covered with it. It is such confidence in that blood of Christ that we envy those who we know are covered by its provision, even though there are moments or background thoughts that suggest we are not totally confident that we ourselves have it. So, I say, we follow Christ the infallible teacher, and we trust the Lord Jesus as the great Priest and sacrifice. Then there is this:

3. We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Shepherd King

We trust in everything he does in us and to us and for us, everything he allows to happen to us. We submit to his total sway over our lives. We take what he gives and we love him still. We say with Job, 'Though he slay me yet will I trust him.' We have that faith that says his will for our lives is what we want. It controls our daily living; we are subject to its dictates; we must follow his guidance. If he opens doors for us we say, 'Thank you'. If he closes doors for us we say, 'Thank you'. We accept his daily providential control of our lives, even when

our hearts are breaking. When he says 'Don't,' we don't. When he says 'Stop,' we stop. We obey his imperatives because he is our Lord. And I must ask whether we have such faith in the King that we are content to be ruled by him, to be the sort of person doing the sort of work we do with all our might and to his glory? Have we such faith in the King that it is to him we look for vindication? That at last he will protect us and deliver us from all our enemies?

So we have faith in Christ the infallible teacher, and faith in Christ the great high priest and sacrifice, and we have faith in Christ the great governor and ruler of our lives. We submit to his rule and rejoice in his protection. That is believing in the Lord Jesus of the Bible, the Lord Christ of the three great offices he holds in the Kingdom of God, offices he has been given by his Father, and then there is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as God, the LORD Jesus, Jehovah Jesus, the God who is Jesus, that we say to him, 'My Lord and my God.' We bow before him. We fall at his feet. We worship in wonder, love and praise. Do you worship Jesus? It is not enough to have a high understanding and a high regard for him. It is not enough even to worship through him, but we worship him. We confess with our tongues that he is Lord. There is none on earth that we desire but him, and seeing him in heaven is all our hope.

Is there something else? Is there something else to believing on the Lord Jesus Christ? I am saying to you that the person who is trusting in Christ like that has no need of anything else. That man has eternal life. That man is saved. That man has every spiritual blessing. If he has Christ then he needs nothing else. There is no 'Christ and'

there is just Christ. There is faith alone; there is grace alone; there is Christ alone, and there's no plus. We are not told believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ and you will feel ecstatic, or you will feel a high. It says, '... and you will be saved.' Do we see the New Testament telling us that when Philip and Nathanael and Andrew and Peter came to Christ that they had great feelings? Is there any emphasis upon their feeling tremendous elation? There is no such emphasis at all. Of course, many Christians have known a great sense of peace at the time of their conversion, and that is perfectly legitimate and perfectly healthy and quite possible, but the mistake is to make that normative and the sure proof that you have become a real Christian.

There are many Christians who simply cannot tell at what moment in a month or year they took possession of Christ because that moment was not registered by feelings of euphoria. There was no consciousness of a burden rolling off. I am seeking to encourage them and saying that there is no promise anywhere that whenever a sinner is converted and believes in Christ he is going to have gut feelings of elation. We may have them but we may not, and if we don't then we are not to say, 'Woe is me; I am not a believer.'

Let me be careful. There is, of course, a tremendous reality about walking with God. There is the reality of communion with God. There are times when the peace of Christ fills a place, and the world is so wonderful afterwards. There is

If he has Christ then he needs nothing else. There is no 'Christ and' there is just Christ. There is faith alone; there is grace alone; there is Christ alone, and there's no plus.

the surpassing reality of a hearing and answering God, and a guiding God, and a loving God, and a great comforting God. I am not going to reduce the living God to a mere system of propositions and logic. He lives! He is not remote from our daily experience. There is God answering, and God opening doors, and God upholding us – very often in elementary ways. There is God giving us grace to bear loss, and giving us boldness and a stammering tongue to speak his word, giving us wisdom to overcome certain problems, and giving us patience in the midst of difficulty – all that is real. But my point now is this, that a man is saved from the dominion and guilt and penalty of sin if he

has Christ. I am saying let's not deny our Christian standing because we haven't yet had those other blessed phenomena. Those things are not necessary for salvation. They are not necessary for great usefulness in the cause of the gospel. What is necessary is that I have Jesus Christ, that I am in Jesus Christ, that I am united by faith to the Saviour, that I am trusting in him. That is all. That I am his, that I belong to him because I have simply, in my mind and in my heart, committed myself to him as my prophet, priest, king, my Lord and my God, that I have done that, that there has been a movement within me begun and sustained by the Holy Spirit of self-commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. If there's that, then I have become a Christian. I am a child of God for ever. I am in his hands, and he will never let go of me because he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

About this point – of what I must do to be saved – there is such lucidity in the New Testament. What must I do? What great mountain must I climb? What great depths must I plumb? What great price have I got to pay? What achievement must I effect? What experience must I have? ‘Come unto me!’ That is the total biblical answer to the question of what must I do to be saved. Go today in his name to the throne of God and say to God, ‘I’ve looked at my past . . . I’ve

looked at all that’s been, and I’m appalled by it. It is indefensible. I want it covered in the name of Jesus.’ Go to God and say as you look forward to all the possibilities of your future, ‘I won’t be able to cope with parenthood, and sickness and the loss of those I love and growing old and dying all by myself. I need the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.’ You express your faith in prayer to God in the name of Jesus because prayer is simply the articulation of our faith. So we know what we must do to be saved. Then there is another matter which is not at all secret.

How then should I live?

We often make that question sound so mysterious, and very complicated, and difficult but it is not at all a secret thing. Are we really perplexed in the 21st century as to how we should behave and live? What about the Ten Commandments? ‘You shall have no other gods before me . . . You shall not make for yourself an idol . . . You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain . . . Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy . . .

What is necessary is that I have Jesus Christ, that I am in Jesus Christ, that I am united by faith to the Saviour, that I am trusting in him. That is all.

Honour your father and your mother. . . You shall not murder. . . You shall not commit adultery. . . You shall not steal. . . You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. . . You shall not covet.’ Aren’t those commandments plain, simple, wise, and clear? In the original Hebrew they number 173 words. In the European Union’s regulations on the importing of cauliflowers there are almost 30,000 words! With the decline of the Ten Commandments our land has entered the age of lawyers and

litigation. I once went to see our Member of Parliament (who has since passed away) and he fobbed off my concerns by saying, ‘We want to build a compassionate society.’ But he was quite unable to define what compassion and caring means. Men mock God as lawgiver but still hope that people will behave themselves. Wales is afflicted with increasing sin, but a decreasing sense of sin.

But we are not limited to knowing how we should live by the Ten Commandments alone. The Lord Jesus Christ amplifies and clarifies them in the Sermon on the Mount. He shows his disciples the inward nature of God’s requirements, that we can sin in our hearts, that feelings of anger are a sin – even if they never register on our faces or in our voices. We can lust after another person in our hearts without ever touching that person. We can break the tenth commandment by being utterly discontented with what we have and aching for something that another person has – though we never say a word about it. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

Then there are issues of guidance about eating and drinking and places of amusement and how we surf the world wide web and sport and fashion and how we spend our money and time. The Christian has great freedom, but we are also members of one another. So Paul again gives us advice to help us in these areas. The Christians in Corinth were very aware of their freedoms and they had a slogan, ‘Everything is permissible.’ They were confident that if something were not clearly forbidden in the law of God then it was permitted. Paul doesn’t deny the slogan and the truth it contains, but he does add two qualifying clauses, ‘but not everything is beneficial’ and ‘not everything is constructive’ (1 Cor 10:24). Bring in those criteria and judge your choices also by that, he says. Then he says to us all, ‘Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others’ (1 Cor 10:24). There is your own liberty, but is certain conduct really beneficial in the light of your place and usefulness in the kingdom of God? Is it really constructive to be engaged in that? I am saying that in Christian conduct there are such additional helpful principles as to how we face some rare dilemmas.

I am declaring that there is absolute clarity when the apostle Paul explains how Christians are to live. Usually at the conclusions of his letters Paul addresses parents, and husbands and wives, children, employers and employees. ‘Be this kind of person,’ he’s saying to them. He gives us the moral requirements that have to characterise the elder and the deacon. ‘Behave like this,’ he’s saying to them. Then he addresses the whole congregation with the requirements of the Christian life.

These words were read so well in the Royal Wedding a few years ago, in what was the high spot of that ceremony for many of us, such an unusual and splendid choice of a Scripture reading, ‘Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’ (Rom 12:9-21).

I ask you again, are we Christians really perplexed as to how we are to live? Have we no guidelines for our behaviour? That is not our problem. In my experience of myself and of others many of the great difficulties that we propose to other people as being problems of guidance are in fact problems of fundamental conflict with the law of God. We pretend often that we don’t know God’s will; ‘Shall I marry this person who has only a passing interest in the Christian religion?’

That is not a problem of guidance. That is a problem with your own attitude to specific teaching in God's word. Time and again we find ourselves in pseudo-dilemmas of that kind. We pretend that there is ambiguity, that we think it is all very complex about when life begins, about abortion, and about euthanasia, and we know surely in the depths of our own conscience that it is not lack of clarity. It is our own hypocrisy and pretence.

I know only too well that every human being caught on the horns of those dilemmas thinks that his involvement in them is unique, and that whereas the law applies to every other Christian facing that problem, yet his case is different. We imagine that our infidelities . . . we imagine that our unwanted pregnancies . . . we imagine that our unlawful liaisons . . . we imagine that our infatuation with a married person . . . we imagine that all ours are different. They are pure. They are beautiful. They are not like the others. Yet you and I must stand before the unambiguousness of God's word, before the utter stark clarity of that law which says, 'This is the way, and you walk in it.'

I think that believers ought to be taught Sunday by Sunday how to handle their own problems because of the clarity of biblical teaching, and it is a mistake on the part of God's church to pretend that it is so complicated to live this Christian life that we must replace our churches with counselling centres. It is only because we have lost our confidence in the Bible and so lost our way, and we are pretending

that Christian ethical decisions are hidden from us, that they are a secret thing that belongs to God. So we imagine that abortion, and self-pity, and festering worry, and discontentedness, and perplexity are problems that require specialist attention. The divine answer is here in the Scripture and in the word preached in all its clarity.

The problem is to accept it, and to handle it, and to say to ourselves, 'There is no ambiguity here. God's will is clear.'

I don't know these things only from the angle of counselling others. I know this from the intimate hypocrisies of my own heart. I know that one can so easily create pseudo-dilemmas, and one can pretend that there's no way anyone can find out the answer to a problem or some ethical principle. 'It is all a mystery!' I am saying that those great principles of God's

word, and the powerful moral axioms of the Bible are amongst its least ambiguous elements. There are great paradoxes: where did sin come from? When will be the end of the world? How can God be sovereign and man be held responsible? Those are secret things that belong to God, but there is nothing secret about the sanctity of life, and we must be careful lest we try to make an ethical decision a problem of guidance, or of pastoral counselling, or a matter of prayer when it is a more straightforward matter of obedience. Then there is one more thing...

Where can I find contentment?

I believe that we are now living in the most affluent and the most discontented

generation in our history. You see the restlessness in the craving for non-stop entertainment, for drugs, for 'exciting' new relationships, and for alcohol. People are discontented and they long for peace of mind; can a 'little pill' from the doctor provide it? Contentment is not one of those secret things. It is not hidden. Paul tells us that he learned it; Jesus Christ taught him contentment, by his example and by his words. In other words, Paul was not contented because of his upbringing, the stability of his home, his environment. It was not because he was favoured with a certain personality. Contentment is not a matter of genes and chromosomes. If you plead, 'My mother was restless and her mother before her, and I get my discontentedness from them,' then that is no justification. You can overcome your family traits. You may not blame your upbringing, and you may not blame your personality. You may not think that if only you had the second blessing, Holy Spirit baptism, that after that you'd be contented. You learn it. That is what Paul did. It did not come to him on the Damascus road, one minute a restless bundle of energy, irritable and driving on and on, and the next moment laid back and everything hanging loose. Paul learned it. He did not pick it up speaking in tongues; he learned it, and if he learned it then every Christian may learn it. How do we learn it? I will tell you, without money and without price. It is no secret; it is revealed. What you learn first of all is...

1. Being discontented is a sin

Learn that. Charge your consciences with that. It is a sin against our whole Christian position. We preach that our Lord is a good Shepherd, that he leads us besides the still waters, and our hope is, 'green pastures

are before me that yet I have not seen.' He works all things together for our good, we say; our best things and our worst things must work together for our good. Then of course some things happen and it is right to grieve. Grieving and being discontented are not the same thing. Jesus wept, but Jesus was not discontented; he was not petulant and self-pitying. He groaned over Jerusalem's folly, 'O... Jerusalem, Jerusalem!' Let's grieve; let's break our hearts; let's wish ourselves accursed for our brethren's sake that they might be delivered, but let's not parade a discontented spirit for months, because then we are saying 'Jesus is mistaken to do this... he is wrong to allow this to happen to me.' Let us say to ourselves, 'Now you are being discontented and that is a sin.'

2. We can learn the possibility of being contented, just like Paul

Maybe one day he was sitting in a meeting and one or two men were speaking. One man began to speak to them about Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not be in want.' The man said to them all that this was wonderful, 'for us all to have such a Shepherd, and whatever our circumstances he will provide all we need richly. Isn't it wonderful to have such a Shepherd?' he said to them, Paul listening in the second row. 'Do our lives reflect this fact?' He challenged them about their trust in God. Were they sinning by not trusting in his wisdom and love? Paul listened very thoughtfully. He wondered whether he was trusting God as he should. Was he a discontented man? Jesus has promised that his sheep would not be in want. 'I can become a contented man.' He thought. 'I should be a contented man.' He took the thought on board; he learned to become

In my experience of myself and of others many of the great difficulties that we propose to other people as being problems of guidance are in fact problems of fundamental conflict with the law of God

increasingly contented, and so do we, maybe not as suddenly as the imaginary scene I have described of Paul learning it. Maybe you learned it over a period, seeing one truth, and experiencing something else, and fitting them together, seeing the connection and saying, 'I must become a more contented person.' Then...

3. We take our stand on this great principle, 'Thy will be done'

I think that that is where contentment grows. There is the commitment of our hearts to that very simple principle that what I want in my life is the will of my Lord, and as long as I know that it's God's will I won't quarrel. There is no way that we as Christians can say, 'I delight to do thy will, O Lord,' and then, all of a sudden, when God gives us his will we are in all kinds of anguish, getting upset, and annoyed, peeved and plaintive.

I know that theologically today this is the clearest response I can make. God is sovereign and he deals with me always and only through Christ my loving Saviour. Everything that touches me has first to get the approval and permission of the friend of sinners, Jesus Christ. It cannot touch me at all without his first commanding it, 'Go ahead and touch him.' That was the case with Satan wanting to smite Job and God finally agreeing and saying, 'So far . . . but no further.' So it is with the trials the Lord agrees to permit to come into your life.

That's the most fundamental pastoral and comforting truth I can make from this pulpit, but I realise that when you are down in the valley of the shadow, or in the vortex of suffering and pain it is then immensely difficult. But I know there is no

other way. My heart's commitment, and the centring of all my emotions on this, is that what I want in my life is the will of God.

Very often that is the reason we are not contented Christians. We don't want God's will. We don't really like God's will. We want our own will, and I would suggest to you that if we alter our perspectives and stand on that principle, 'Thy will be done,' then we would learn many things. We would be taught each day as we rise that it is a day that the Lord has made. We'll have nothing today but God's will. Nothing can take from us the providence of God. We'll have nothing but the cup that God has filled to overflowing.

You see the marvel of that? 'Every day will I bless Thee, and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever.' For each day I am experiencing what is God's will for me. Every day I am taking the cup which he has filled for me. He has put it in my hand. Each day is the Lord's workmanship. It is one that he has made for me. When you feel, 'It's not a good day today' then you add to yourself, 'but he's made it.' I have to try, when there are tremendous emotional currents running through my life, shattering providences, and my family is muddled, and my friends are disoriented by unbelief, then, in the agony and emptiness of my providence to say, 'Thy will be done.' Let me lay hold of that in my desolation: this is the Lord's will; this is God's cup; this is the Father's hand giving it to me. I have to try to keep myself there. This is the day the Lord has made. I will be glad and rejoice in it. ■

Dr Geoff Thomas served Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth for over 50 years until his retirement in 2016.

LUKE JENNER

THE COVENANT OF WORKS



In my final year of university, I was happily making my way through a Christian book that had been given me by a friend. And then I read this sentence:

'From the comparison which Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-19 ... it is necessary to postulate that had Adam successfully passed his probation, he would have been confirmed in holiness, moving from the state of being able to sin ... to a state of not being able to sin.'¹

I had never heard of anything like this before. I wrote in the margin, 'Not sure where he gets this from.' Unbeknownst to me, however, I had just met what Reformed theology has generally called 'the covenant of works', for the very first time.

Broadly speaking, that phrase has been used to delineate the nature of the relationship existing between God and Adam prior to the fall.² My initial reaction to it was perhaps a very common one. 'Probation? Where's that in the text? Confirmation in holiness? Pure speculation.' Yet here I am now, writing an article essentially arguing for that old marginal note of mine to be erased.

I hope it's because my theology has matured a bit since I was an undergraduate. Certainly it would be true to say that whether you agree or not with the concept (or the terminology) of the covenant of works, at least to engage with the field of debate does require a willingness to dig fairly deep into Scripture. Many have engaged with these questions over the years, and not all have come to the same conclusions even *within the Reformed tradition*. So do weigh this particular attempt at an overview. Do so most of all because *Christ* is central to all study of the covenant of works. So some digging will be worth it.

My approach

Nothing is more important here than having a *biblically rigorous hermeneutic*. Scripture must interpret Scripture. More

specifically, later revelation must interpret earlier. This is crucial when approaching issues that are concerned with the events of the early chapters of Genesis. Those events receive the bulk of their inspired, authoritative interpretation from *outside* those chapters, not from *within* them. In other words, we not just can but *should* import theology into early texts that do *not* contain that theology on the surface, because subsequent revelation requires it of us.³

This biblically-mandated hermeneutic is necessary for weighing the possibility of a covenant of works in the first two or three chapters of Genesis. We must exegete Moses' Eden narrative in the light of the rest of Scripture and not, as it were, *simply on its own terms*. So that's what this article attempts: first with respect to the concept of a *covenant* in Eden, and secondly in investigating the place of *works* within it.

1. A covenant in Eden?

Many have noted that the word 'covenant' (*berith*) does not appear in the text of Genesis 1-2. Yet there is no reason why the elements of such an agreement cannot be present even so. A report that says, 'Jones was caught at silly mid-off but Smith managed to remain at the crease until rain stopped play' is talking about 'cricket' – only conceptually, without using the word. This is why 2 Samuel 7 (for example) is universally recognised to refer to the *Davidic* covenant – even though the word *berith* is not there. The concepts are.⁴

Many within the Reformed tradition argue that the concepts are there in Genesis 1-2 as well: Two parties. A binding agreement ('do not eat'). Curses for disobedience (explicit). Blessings for obedience (implied). And a covenant sign (the tree of life). To these elements we will soon return. Let me first add one more feature of the Genesis narrative which is often passed over: Moses seems to make a deliberate shift in his terminology for 'God' from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2. Throughout the first chapter, God is 'Elohim' without exception. But when the creation of man is reconsidered in more detail after 2:4, he is only ever referred to as 'YHWH Elohim'. Moses – the Moses for whom God's *covenantal* self-designation ('YHWH') was imprinted on him ever since the burning bush – cannot be doing this by accident.

Broadening the picture, note that sometimes the Holy Spirit later brings to light theological features of Genesis that he never spoke of directly when carrying Moses along. Only in Luke 3:38 does he call Adam 'the Son of God', or in 1 Corinthians 15:22 declare that all humanity was 'in Adam'. The Spirit announced in the New Testament what he had only whispered in the Old.

Might he have done the same thing with the 'covenant' concept? Yes. But this time he didn't delay until Luke or Paul. *Moses himself* applies covenant terminology to the original creation situation, and within just a few pages of it too. Genesis 6:18, where we have the first explicit use of the word 'covenant', provides us with the first

Many have noted that the word 'covenant' (*berith*) does not appear in the text of Genesis 1-2. Yet there is no reason why the elements of such an agreement cannot be present even so.

clue that we ought to read the first two chapters with a covenantal perspective. The language is important:

'But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark...'⁵

Here God does not 'cut' (*kārat*) a covenant with Noah, as he usually does when *inaugurating* an Old Testament covenant. Rather, he 'establishes' it. In other words, Genesis 6:18 is an example of God 'sealing' an *already-existing* covenant 'cut' (ie made) at an earlier point in history.⁶

The same phenomenon does occur with other covenants. For example, in Genesis 17:7 God 'establishes' the pre-existing covenant he 'cut' with Abraham in Genesis 15:18.⁷ Apply the same logic to Genesis 6:18 and you find that some covenant prior to the Noahic covenant must be in view. The Noahic covenant, in other words, is not a novelty. It is the re-establishment of a

¹ Robert Reymond, *The God-Centred Preacher* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2003), 93.

² This (extra-biblical) term apparently first came to prominence in the covenant theology of the 17th century.

³ For example, we assert that Abraham 'rejoiced to see Christ's day', only on the basis of revelation later than Genesis (John 8:56).

⁴ Cf. Psalm 89:28.

⁵ Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁶ This point is made cogently by William Dumbrell in *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 1-20.

⁷ Cf. also Ex 6:4; Lev 26:9; Deut 8:18; 2 Kings 23:3.

relationship already set up in antecedent history.⁸

We can move beyond Genesis to see more covenant language applied to the earliest chapters of history. According to Jeremiah 33:19-22, God in the past made a covenant with 'day and night'. What could that be, except a primeval 'creation covenant'?⁹ And according to Isaiah 24:5-6, the inhabitants of the *entire earth* have 'broken the everlasting covenant'. In the light of further revelation in the New Testament we surmise that such global unfaithfulness can only have its roots in our unavoidable unity with Adam as our federal head. Almost certainly, then, this text must refer to some kind of covenantal arrangement with that head in the garden of Eden, which also extended to all his posterity.

Then there's Hosea 6:7. There's almost an entire corpus of literature on this verse alone. Suffice to say that I think that 'And they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant' is both a responsible translation of the Hebrew¹⁰ and the best way of preserving the prophetic force of Hosea's argument, thus bolstering the case for an Adamic covenant of some kind in Eden.¹¹

In sum: 'If the actual word "covenant" is missing [from Genesis 1-2], the reality of a first covenant appears in outline.'¹² Because of the creator-creature distinction,

such an arrangement is not only present but absolutely necessary.¹³ More than that, it demonstrates God's infinite love and condescension to us, his lowly creatures – even when we were perfect! That ought to stir us to both humility and worship.

So there was a covenant in Eden. But what kind of covenant was it?

2. A covenant of works?

Many Reformed scholars use the language of an Edenic covenant as a way of describing the divine-human relationship established *purely by virtue of man's creation* in the image of God. But is there more to be said? Can we affirm a specific arrangement beyond (or within) this 'creational order' which can be termed the 'covenant of works' in *distinction from* a so-called 'covenant of nature'? Did God make specific requirements of Adam that were not just revealed to him through his natural understanding of who he was, but by special revelation? The Reformed community basically splits here, and you will probably have to read beyond this article to make a more informed decision. But this can still be a primer: my aims are i) to provide a definition of what this more specific 'covenant of works' might entail, ii) to make a case for why it seems to me to be theologically necessary, and iii) to delve into something of its actual substance.

a. Definition

The term 'covenant of works' can mean slightly different things to different people. Here is my own working definition: *the specific, divinely-revealed contract of command voluntarily imposed¹⁴ on unfallen Adam by God as the central feature of his existence as God's image-bearer and head of all creation, conditioned upon his probationary obedience, and promised to issue in his progression to irreversible glorification, according to the demands of strict justice.*

What a mouthful. Let's unpack it.

b. Theological necessity

It's my contention that Adam's image-bearing does not exhaust the substance of the covenant of Genesis 1-2 made with him and with the world through him. This again will require the biblically-mandated hermeneutic that later revelation – particularly Romans 5:12ff and 1 Corinthians 15:20ff – is to govern our reading of earlier revelation in Genesis 1-2.

Of course, man's created status is organic to the covenant arrangement. 'Yet,' as O Palmer Robertson says, 'the response to

the particular prohibition ... was crucially determinative.'¹⁵ Robertson is referring, of course, to Genesis 2:16-17:

It is this understanding of the particular necessity of the divine prohibition within the creational context of Adam's situation that enriches our understanding of the obedience of Christ.

'And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

It was in fact *necessary* for Adam to receive this specific command *within* the superstructure of his creational image-bearing. The 'crucially determinative' nature of Adam's response came from the fact that the prohibition employed an 'exploratory

law', a commandment of God which was necessary in addition to the 'natural law' simply impressed on man's conscience. This was done so that 'God ... might [thus] declare himself to be the Lord of man and man might understand himself to be a servant bound to obey and adhere to him.'¹⁶ It was necessary *verbally* to express this command to Adam because 'by the light of nature he would have been no more directed to abstain from the fruit of this tree than of any other in the garden.'¹⁷ Adam must simply humble himself before

⁸ Hence the extensive parallels between the pre-fall and post-flood world (eg the repetition of the mandate of 1:28 in 9:1ff).

⁹ The phrase is Dumbrell's.

¹⁰ wehēmāh ke'ādām 'āberū berith.

¹¹ See Byron G Curtis, 'Hosea 6:7 and Covenant-Breaking like/at Adam' in Bryan D Estelle, J V Fesko and David VanDrunen (eds.), *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009) for a most helpful survey of views, and exegetical discussion.

¹² Henri Blocher, *In The Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 111-12.

¹³ See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume II: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 569.

¹⁴ 'Voluntarily imposed' may sound like a contradiction in terms, but I am using the word 'voluntarily' to describe the imposition of the covenant from God's standpoint, not man's. Man had no choice regarding its imposition upon him, but God did. He was under no obligation to introduce such an arrangement into Eden. Once introduced, however, an element of judicial obligation entered the situation even on God's side (see below), but that does not alter the nature of its initial imposition as entirely voluntary on his part.

¹⁵ *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 83.

¹⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Volume I: First Through Tenth Topics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 579.

¹⁷ Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants that God Made With Men Before the Law, in Covenant Theology From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 44.

God's Word without any particular reason given. '[A] most radical test of the original man's willingness to submit to the specific word of the Creator is involved.'¹⁸

It is this understanding of the particular necessity of the divine prohibition within the creational context of Adam's situation that enriches our understanding of the obedience of *Christ*. He treated the 'bare Word of God' as a full and rich meal for his soul, on which he was pleased to dine in glad obedience. He needed no other 'rationale' for conformity to the law, beyond a knowing trust in the paternal bounty of the lawgiver.¹⁹ And in that lies the foundation of our salvation. His joyfully active obedience to the unadorned Word of God is foundational to our redemption.

So it is salvation issues that are at stake here, when we take seriously the federal teaching of Romans 5:12-21, and conceive necessarily of Adam and Christ as facing the *same* tests of submission to the will of God. In other words, a failure to carve out a theologically necessary niche for the specific *command* of God to Adam within his created status is to diminish the active obedience of Christ.

So much for 'the specific, divinely-revealed contract of command ... as the central feature of his existence...' What did it mean for that to be 'conditioned upon his probationary obedience, and promised to issue in his progression to irreversible glorification'?

c. Eschatological goal

Some theologians choose to take the position that in Eden Adam was already in his eternal state or destination, beyond which he would not progress, nor did he need to. They often do so on the basis that the text of Genesis does not teach that Adam could have been confirmed in a state in which he was no longer able to sin.²⁰

But is that hermeneutically wise? The text of Genesis does not state that Adam was constituted federal head of the race, either. Does that mean we should dismiss it as conjecture? (The New Testament says 'No'.) But before we examine how New Testament revelation similarly impacts the question of a probation/confirmation in holiness for Adam, I would argue that a life beyond Adam's created Edenic existence is implied within the text of Genesis itself. Even on its own terms, the arrangement specified in Genesis 2:16-17 surely cannot be said to be the best or highest condition for Adam, *if he were to find himself in it for ever*.

Consider for a moment a world where the sanctions of that situation do last on into unending ages. This is nothing less than affirming that the threat of death is promised to hang over Adam indefinitely. Is this really 'God's best' for him? – 'as good as it gets'? All we know of the loving character of God surely demands that in the Edenic stipulations there is an implied promise made regarding obedience to them. Some end to the initial contract

must be in view – some progression to something better.

Combine this with the reality of free access for a *malevolent* force in the garden, and surely it confirms that this cannot be God's eternal intention for Adam: regular meetings with the snake for all eternity, *even if every effort by the tempter is consistently rebuffed*? Can God really allow potential destruction to lurk in serpentine form behind every tree of Eden, and this be considered 'God's continuing favor', beyond which there can be 'no greater reward'?²¹ No. 'To restrict man to the mere continuation of his original state of beatitude would be no blessing at all, but a curse.'²²

Even from Genesis, then, we surmise that God's eschatological goals for creation were in view *even before man's fall into sin*.²³ Coming to the New Testament, we find that conclusion confirmed and elucidated. When Paul contrasts the future resurrection body with a lesser state of existence in 1 Corinthians 15, he does not simply juxtapose it with the fallen, corrupted bodies in which we currently dwell. Rather, he conceives of the glorious resurrection body of Christ/Christians as also eminently superior to Adam's body in

its unfallen state. Paul's quotation in 1 Corinthians 15:45 about the situation from which humanity progresses to glorification comes not from Genesis 3 or afterwards, but from Genesis 2:7. There is an order to things: 'natural' (NB Paul does not say 'sinful'/'fleshy' here) first – then the 'spiritual' (1 Cor 15:46). The implication is that Adam still had 'something to reach', 'somewhere to go', *even when he was morally perfect*. God had an eschatological destination for him even while an unbroken communion existed between the two of them. Creation from the very outset pointed beyond itself to the consummation – *before* the Fall and the protevangelium.

It is crucial to see redemption in Christ as not aimed at simply restoring creation to its pre-fallen state but at elevating creation beyond Eden to its eschatological consummation.

It is for this reason that it is crucial to see redemption in Christ as not aimed at simply restoring creation to its pre-fallen state but at elevating creation *beyond* Eden to its eschatological consummation. This is something that can be achieved only by the making of disciples who are recreated 'in Christ', and who thus belong to that consummation even in the here and now (Phil 3:20-21). Thus any approach to mission which emphasises the significance of cultural or creational renewal *abstracted* from the healthy growth of the *church* specifically, is biblically anaemic at best.²⁴

¹⁸ Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 84.

¹⁹ Cf. Matt. 4:4.

²⁰ See, for example, John M Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 64.

²¹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 64.

²² Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 92.

²³ See Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 325.

²⁴ This point is brought out in an audio address by Lane G Tipton called 'The Covenant of Works: Eschatological Focus', accessed at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=51909193369> on 21.04.17. See also Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

There is further warrant for seeing an eschatological goal to the covenant of works in the presence of the tree of life of the garden (Gen 2:9; 3:24). In Revelation 2:7 this tree reappears as something which i) 'is in the paradise of God' (ie reserved for the glorified situation ahead of us) and ii) is promised only to 'the one who conquers'. It is a future reality contingent upon overcoming. It appears once more in Revelation 22:2-3, where it is tied to the complete absence of any curse. So if the tree of life in Revelation symbolises the consummation of the kingdom in a new creation that is eternally unassailable, are we not required to make that interpretatively authoritative for our understanding of the same tree of life back in Genesis 2? That is, it was presented to Adam as symbolic of a potential future in which he too would enjoy a life that was in no way threatened by the possibility of falling from God's favour.

This has important implications for the security of our salvation in Christ. If Christ only returns us to the state Adam was in before the Fall, then we are no more secure than Adam was: because Adam fell! But praise God, we do have eternal security in our restoration by great Adam's greater Son. He passed the test where Adam failed; he takes humanity beyond probation to its unshakeable eschatological goal. So if you hold the

Adam-Christ parallel of Romans 5 dear, you must also maintain the probationary nature of the Edenic situation.

d. Judicial foundation²⁵

We come now to the final elements of my definition: *the specific, divinely-revealed contract of command voluntarily imposed ... according to the demands of strict justice.*

One of the reasons John Murray famously rejected 'covenant of works' terminology was because, in his view, 'the elements of grace entering into the administration are not properly provided for by the term "works."²⁶ Murray's concern was to protect the Adamic situation from any concept of Adam *earning* eternal life.²⁷ On the surface that seems to be entirely in line with Scripture's teaching that salvation is never by works. But we must take care not to apply God's words directed to corrupt sinners after the Fall to the situation that existed before it. The covenant of works exclusively describes God's dealings with *unfallen* man.

Of course it is obnoxious to God when sinners attempt to earn God's favour. But Scripture does not despise the principle of meritorious obedience in and of itself – only as attempted within the matrix of the ruined human condition. We know this because meritorious obedience goes undespised – is gloried in, even – when it comes to the triumphant figure of the

second Adam. Keeping Paul's Adam-Christ parallel intact requires 'the reward given to Adam (and by implication to Christ) under the covenant of works [to be] a matter of strict justice and not grace.'²⁸

It's important to distinguish here between the *establishment* of the covenant of works, and its *terms and reward*. There is no doubt that to *enter into* the covenant was entirely voluntary on God's part – a non-obligatory act of condescension. You might even say it was 'gracious', if you're able to put all ideas of *redemptive* grace out of your mind. God was under no obligation to make a covenant with his creature in this way. But *after* this voluntary act of entrance into the covenant, God enacts terms for the arrangement (obedience) and issues the promise of reward, were Adam to fulfil those terms (eternal life).

For some theologians, both the *establishment* and the *reward* must have been gracious, ie, non-obligatory on God's part. I am more persuaded of a distinction: that the *establishment* of the covenant is freely gracious but its *reward* upon obedience is obligatory. Once God voluntarily binds himself to Adam in covenant, his own righteous character requires him to stand by his terms and issue the reward upon obedience, according to nothing other than strict justice. Because God cannot lie or equivocate with regard to his own word, he is covenantally self-obligated by those

terms even though he was not in any way obligated to enter into the agreement in the first place.²⁹

If, however, we do construe the reward as in some sense a gift of grace, we are saying that God is under no obligation to grant it. That means that *even if Adam obeys*, God is *still* not obliged to keep to the terms of the covenant. Adam could obey and God *refuse* to give him eternal life, if *grace* is its fundamental principle. 'But surely God would not go against his own word,' you might say. Fine! Then you agree that the covenant of works is rooted not in grace but in justice – not as to its voluntary establishment but as to its divinely-issued terms and reward.

This is all highly significant for the New Testament parallel between Adam and Christ. In Romans 5:12-21 and Luke 3:23-4:13 the work of the second Adam must be understood as accomplishing what the first Adam failed to accomplish, and as gaining what he forfeited. Critical to Christ's victory is that pure merit stands as its sole foundation. 'The grace of God factors in at no point with regard to Christ's redemptive accomplishment.' In other words, Christ's obedience totally and gladly met the demands of divine justice. It is strictly and exclusively meritorious. God cut him no slack; and he succeeded in every way.

Or would anyone dare to rephrase the high priestly prayer - 'Father, even though

²⁵ For this section I owe much (including the heading itself) to an audio address by Lane G Tipton entitled 'The Covenant of Works: Judicial Foundation' accessed at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=519091942180> on 21.04.17.

²⁶ 'The Adamic Administration', in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume II: Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 49.

²⁷ See also John Piper, 'Did God Command A Man To Earn His Life? Thoughts on the So-Called Covenant of Works' in *A Godward Life: Meditations of the Supremacy of God in All of Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1997), 171-73.

²⁸ Tipton, 'Judicial Foundation'.

²⁹ This position has historical pedigree, being held – as far as I can see – by at least Charles Hodge, Herman Witsius, Nehemiah Cox, and Francis Turretin.



New Books

The following books have been published recently and are recommended for your attention:

I know I have *not* earned the glory you promised me (for how could even a *sinless* human like me be worthy of such a reward?), I nevertheless desire to have it and therefore appeal to your grace...’ - ?

is built on a dubious kind of sub-judicial foundation. God *hasn't* done the right thing to justify us on the basis of Christ's obedience. But we know otherwise: 'he is *faithful and just to forgive us our sins...*' (1 John 1:9)

WE SEE, THEN, THAT UPHOLDING THE PARALLEL BETWEEN CHRIST AND ADAM IS NOT MERELY THEOLOGICALLY CONVENIENT. IT IS ETERNALLY SIGNIFICANT FOR US ALL.

No! 'I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence...' (John 17:4-5). Christ explicitly appeals not to his Father's condescension but to his own obedient accomplishment of the Messianic (you might say Adamic) task, as the strict basis for his Father's glorification of him. And are we not supremely glad that he could do so?

We see, then, that upholding the parallel between Christ and Adam is not merely theologically convenient. It is eternally significant for us all. The right of our Jesus to represent us even now at the throne of grace is rooted in a gloriously *kept* covenant of works. To lose that concept from our foundational understanding of Eden is not simply to airbrush out some kind of insignificant theological peculiarity from our system. It is to diminish the gospel itself. But to

embrace the covenant of works in our understanding is to find Christ displayed in more of his glory than perhaps we'd seen before.

So it's worth a second look. ■

Luke Jenner is the Pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Halifax, UK

Now unless what is true of Christ in this respect is also true of Adam, then the Pauline comparison between the two breaks down at the most basic level. Both were required to meet the terms of the covenant of works; both would receive the blessing according to strict justice; both were under a covenant of works that by definition had to be devoid of grace. Otherwise the salvation of Christ's people

- Joel R Beeke, David W Hall, Michael A G.Haykin, *Theology Made Practical: New Studies on John Calvin and His Legacy* (Reformation Heritage Books), ISBN 978-1-60178-536-7.
- John Hurron, *Particular Redemption. The End and Design of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017) ISBN 978-1-84871-752-7
- John Brown (of Haddington), *Counsel to Gospel Ministers: Letters on Preaching, Exemplary Behavior, and the Pastoral Call* (Reformation Heritage Books), ISBN 978-1-60178-530-5. With an introduction by Joel R Beeke and Randall J Pederson
- Sinclair B Ferguson, Derek W H Thomas, *Ichthus. Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Saviour* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017) ISBN 978-1-84871-620-9
- Earl M Blackburn, *How Can I Honor Christ in Fighting Cancer?* (Reformation Heritage Books), ISBN 978-1-60178-564-0
- Sinclair B Ferguson, *Devoted to God. Blueprints for Sanctification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017) ISBN 978-1-84871-690-2
- Alun Ebenezer, *And They Crucified Him* (EP Books) ISBN 978-1-78397-183-1
- Melvin Tinker, *Mass Destruction. Is God Guilty of Genocide?* (EP Books) ISBN 978-1-78397-185-5

And Dr Joel Beeke's 100th book:

- Joel R Beeke, *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith* (Christian Focus), ISBN: 978-1-78191-300-0
- Tim Grass, *Money, Mission and Ministry. The Particular Baptist Fund 1717 - 2017* (available through www.christianbooks.uk.com). This book is a fascinating historical survey of the operation of this missionary fund for 300 years!

And some more books on the Reformation:

- Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame* (IVP) ISBN 978-1-78359-529-7. A popular history of the Reformation
- Andy Johnston, *Convinced by Scripture. The Life of Martin Luther* (10Publishing) ISBN 978-1-91127-246-5
- Kenneth Brownell, *Luther and the 9.5 Theses* (10Publishing) ISBN 978-1-91127-236-6

³⁰ Tipton, 'Judicial Foundation'.

Please note that we are unable to supply these books; please contact your local bookshop.

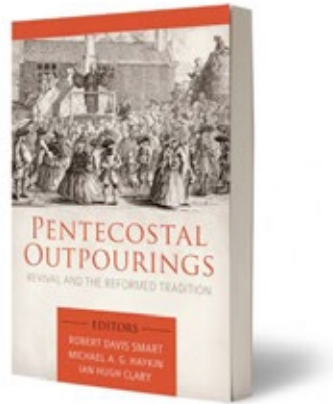


JOHN PALMER

Book Reviews

Pentecostal Outpourings

Revival and the Reformed Tradition



Editors: Robert Davis Smart, Michael A G Haykin, Ian Hugh Clary
Publisher: Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books
ISBN: 9781601784339

This is a valuable addition to reliable books about revival. The authors are drawn from the various parts of the Reformed tradition in the UK and the USA.

There are those who oppose the concept of revival. Some do so on theological grounds; others because they confuse the excesses of man-made revivalism with a true work of God. The opposite error is uncritically to accept all that men call 'revival' as indeed a real outpouring of the Spirit of God. Others are ignorant of church history and therefore of the great times of God's working in the past. This book should be a helpful corrective to all these views.

This book covers revivals which took place mostly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many of these are well known: the Great Awakening for example. Others will be less familiar to RT readers – probably less than they should

be, including God's work among Reformed Baptists either side of the Atlantic. Writers include Tom Nettles, Robert Oliver, Michael Haykin and Joel Beeke.

The conviction which has led to this book is stated in the Foreword:

'It is his [Martyn Lloyd-Jones'] emphasis upon revival that needs to be recaptured in the present. More importantly, its reality needs to be experienced in the church. Biblically and historically speaking, the term revival represents the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in which there is recovered a new awareness of the holiness of God among his people. This heightened knowledge brings in a new season of the conviction of sin, which, in turn, leads to heart-rending repentance. This lowly humility ushers in an awakened love for Christ. Believers begin to pursue personal holiness. Love for other

believers intensifies. The gospel spreads like wildfire. Sinners are brought to faith in Christ, and the church is enlarged and empowered.'

It is clear that the contributors are aware that there are many false claims to God's work, which are in fact the work of man. So, for example, revival which broke out under Asahel Nettleton's ministry among Congregationalists in America is contrasted with the results under C G Finney. The contribution on the 'Year of Grace' in Northern Ireland by Ian Hugh Clary is by no means uncritical of the methods employed by some in this work.

Throughout, the fact that God revives in answer to prayer is clearly taught. The links are made between the writings of the American Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards, the Scottish Presbyterian John Erskine and the English Baptist Andrew Fuller in the defeat of hyper-Calvinism as the dominant mind-set in eighteenth-century Particular Baptist churches in England, and the revivals which followed.

The revivals are both recounted and evaluated. This book will both enlighten the minds and warm the heart. It should reawaken the desire and prayer for seeing more of God's work to his glory in our day.

Revival

The New Testament Expectation Tradition



Author: Jonathan Bayes
Publisher: Resource Publications
ISBN: 978-1498235280

Jonathan Bayes is co-founder of the 'Concert of Prayer for Revival' which began in Yorkshire in 2011 and has spread to other places. The reviewer (as an Englishman!) and his wife were instrumental in beginning one such meeting in South Wales in 2012. So I

share with Jonathan the view that we should be, like our forebears in the 19th century, unitedly raising our voices in prayer for God to display his glory in the church and in adding to it. The early church did this, as Acts 4 tells us, and so must we.



It is often taught that, as the New Testament does not use the word 'revival', it is not a concept we should now have. The strength of this book is that it clearly shows that the promises of the Old Testament need revivals to fulfil them. For example, Isaiah 9:6 promises that of the increase of Christ's government there will be no end. Think also of Psalm 45. So we should pray for this, earnestly. The Lord's Prayer surely tells us that, while one sinner remains outside God's Kingdom, not hallowing his name or doing his will, we must still pray like this.

The book of Acts shows that it is normative for Spirit-filled preaching to produce many conversions, and also much persecution. This is 'revival' – a revival of God's saving work.

In Psalm 72:15 we are told to pray for the Lord Jesus – that is, for his glory to be seen and extended (see p8).

Where I disagree with Jonathan is that he has taken a post-millennial position, of a time which will 'climax in the revelation of the rule of Christ over all nations as a result of the Holy Spirit empowered impact of the gospel worldwide' (p120). He writes elsewhere of the 'all-pervading influence of the kingdom, which is destined truly and totally to transform all human societies' (p22). This, Jonathan believes, is what the Old and New Testaments lead us to expect.

I remain unconvinced. Let me give two reasons as an example. 'The earth will be

filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea' (Is 11:9) cannot be taken to mean, as we are told, that the 'knowledge of the LORD ... is destined to fill the earth as completely as the sea is filled with water.' The two concepts are different. The Bible implies knowledge of Christ in all the nations. The author implies conversion of everyone on earth.

Again, when the Bible promises blessings to the nations, this means to the Gentiles – not just to the Jews – not to every individual in every nation, as assumed on p102 for example: 'all the Gentiles as a unit' praising God.

I do not believe that one has to give a post-millennial interpretation of biblical texts to find them a powerful spur to revival. Having said that, this book is excellent in doing what it claims – showing how the New Testament points us back to Old Testament promises of great blessing, to drive us to our knees to plead with God to fulfil them in much greater ways. We should never, as Jonathan reminds us repeatedly, have small views of our God and what he can do. More people are now alive than have ever died, this book reminds us. How ripe the fields still are to harvest. Let us be praying, and working, in faith, for the salvation of multitudes.

I would recommend you buy this book and consider it carefully. It may not make you a post-millennial. It should make you a prayer-warrior of Jesus Christ. ■

RONALD KALIFUNGA

PART 2

BIBLICAL ANTIDOTES TO RACISM

Introduction

In the first article on the Biblical Antidotes to Racism, we saw that racism is a poison that needs to be neutralised and eradicated. We saw furthermore that if we must overcome racism, we need to imbibe biblical principles that will have the effect of inoculating us against racial dogma, racial prejudice and racial dominance. The focus in the last article was on antidotes that must aid Christians in

overcoming racism as they relate to other humans. In this article I would like to focus on antidotes that will help to neutralise racial tension in our relationship to other Christians within the body of Christ. And in this regard I would like to focus primarily on Colossians 3:11.

Paul's intention in writing this epistle was to address a number of problems that

faced the Colossian church: problems such as the influence of the philosophy of this world, which was creeping into the life of the church, Judaistic ceremonialism, angel worship and asceticism. And Paul sought to address these problems by lifting up Christ as the over-arching principle and focus of all they should think, say and do.

This Christ focus must particularly be made manifest in their relationships. Their relationships should be lived out in conformity with the fact that they are raised with Christ and related to him. In the immediate context of our text, Paul makes a contrast between life outside Christ (the old man) – life characterised by sin; national, ceremonial and social distinctions among men that perpetually separated them and fanned enmity between them, and life in Christ (the new man) – life characterised by virtues such as love, tolerance, patience, fellowship and peace.

Accordingly, he exhorts the Colossians, who had become new men, to put off the old man with his deeds and to live as the new man who is renewed according to the image of him who created him. And as possessors of this new image, they must bear in mind as they relate to others in the church of Christ that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian nor Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

What Paul is contending here is that there is a way of thinking, a way of acting, and a way of relating that is expected of those who have put on the new man even in the matter of race relations. And it is my duty in this article to open that way.

Now, it is no secret that even though Christ did not teach the church to be racist, that racism nonetheless is alive and kicking in many sectors of the Christian church. Dr Joel Nederwood of the Christian Reformed Church, wrote in one of their journals, in reference to the church in America, 'But there is racism within our church – the same kind of institutionalised racism that grows everywhere on the soil of our continent ... It is just a fact that our church has demonstrated more often than not that it is unable to receive as equals those of another race.' Many I am sure will agree that he speaks for a considerable section of the church in South Africa as well.

A few years ago I heard of a church, somewhere in RSA, that had been predominantly white but over a period of time a number of people of colour began to come in to join the church. For a moment it seemed like both black and white could live and worship together. But it soon turned out that most of the white people were feeling quite uncomfortable about this mix that was developing. The leaders of the church consequently decided to start a new church planting work in another part of the suburb that was predominantly white populated and nearly all the white members of the church decided to relocate to the new church, leaving mostly the people of colour in the 'mother' church.

I have also heard several stories of racial clashes and prejudice in the churches. Indeed I have also been a victim of racial prejudice before now. I'll never forget an incident I experienced many years ago in a church in Pretoria. I had been

invited to preach there and as the service progressed and each time a hymn was announced, a white brother, who was sitting behind me would leap over to show me the page where the hymn was. He didn't realise that I had chosen the hymns and was very embarrassed when the pastor asked me to go forward and teach the church to sing the third hymn, which they didn't know very well. He was even more embarrassed when I was invited to go and mount the pulpit. Throughout the sermon, he wouldn't look into my eyes. I have no doubt he meant to be helpful, but what was his basis for thinking that I needed his help? I had no doubt then that it was my skin colour, which happened to be different from his.

Of course, the problem of racism is not unique to our times – it is an old problem. In the early church there were always racial tensions between Jews and Gentiles. And part of the reason why Paul wrote to the Ephesians as well as to the Colossians was to ease racial tensions and to provide antidotes to any forms of racism.

And there are three antidotes in particular that I wish to draw your attention to. And the first is that we need to understand that:

1. The church by its very nature is meant to be united in diversity (Col 3:11). This being the case, four things must be true about it:

a) It must be open to people of all races (v11). Paul stresses the fact that the church must include both Greeks and Jews, and the very fact that there are both Greeks and Jews in the church must not be an

issue at all. What this means for us is that the church must open its doors to white, black, brown and yellow – every one of these has a place in the church of Christ.

b) It must be open to people of all cultures (v11). The church must be open to people who practise circumcision as well as those who don't. In the church there are neither circumcised nor uncircumcised – there are only Christians. Furthermore, it must be open to the barbarian and Scythian. That is to say, those of a primitive civilisation, and those considered to be insensitive and uncultured. Furthermore,

c) It must be open to people of all states and conditions. The church must be open to the slave as well as the free.

d) It must also be open to people of all genders. For this point we do need to turn to the book of Galatians to appreciate the point. Paul in Galatians says, 'In Christ there is neither male nor female.' Women are not second-class citizens in the church; they are just as dignified and valued as their men folk (Gal 3:28).

Ultimately, what Paul is saying here is that the church must be open to all types and to all classes of people. I do not believe that the church is a colour-blind and a classless society. I do believe, however, that the church is a society in which all colours of people and all classes of people have a place. The point of Colossians 3:11 is not that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences have no significance; they do. The point is that that they are not to be a barrier to profound, personal, intimate fellowship. Singing soprano is different from singing alto.

It's a significant difference. But that difference is no barrier to being in the choir. It's an asset. Being different in terms of our racial make-up must be an asset rather than a liability.

2. The church's high ideal of unity in diversity has been undermined and will always be undermined by sin.

And some of the sins that undermine the unity of the Spirit are outlined for us in Colossians 3:8. They include sins such as anger, wrath, malice, filthy language, and lying to one another. They also include (if I may add) intolerance, stereotype thinking, impatience and pride.

Racism, of course, is a sin, that incorporates many of these sins. Racism is pride when one race lifts itself above another and looks down upon

it. Racism is idolatry when it makes our race something of a god that we must pay homage to. Racism is murder when it makes people of one race hate brothers of another race. Racism is lying because it can injure the good name of a given race, and destroy the dignity of men who are made in the image of God. Racism in other words denies the gospel and undermines the unity that the gospel intends to build and maintain in the church.

If we entertain these sins, therefore, we will undermine the high ideal of unity in the church, which is brought about by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, if we hate these sins and love the glory and

honour of our God and the good of his church, we will uphold this high ideal of unity in diversity.

3. The church's basis of unity in diversity:

The church's basis of unity in diversity is and must be Christ. The Bible tells us here in Colossians 3:11 that:

The point of Colossians 3:11 is not that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences have no significance; they do. The point is that that they are not to be a barrier to profound, personal, intimate fellowship.

i) Christ is all. This is another way of saying that Christ is everything to the individual believer and to the church. Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Churches and individuals that do not build on Christ can never defeat the scourge of racism. Notice that there are a number of ways in which the Bible demonstrates the fact that Christ is all particularly in relation to the matter of race relations:

a) Christ is all in the sense that he is the ground of our salvation. He purchased our salvation through giving his life over in death. In so doing he provided a basis upon which all those who believe in him, whether they be Jew or Gentile, white or black, brown or yellow, can have their sins forgiven and righteousness imputed to their account (Rom 4:7,8). Furthermore, he through his Spirit regenerates and transforms the hearts of his people to a point where they can be set free from the mastery of the sin of racism.

b) Christ is all in the sense that he is the sustainer of our salvation. He has all things in him. He has every resource

that his people need to live godly lives and to overcome sin (including the sin of racism). He is all to his people. He is their light and life, their wisdom and righteousness, their sanctification, and redemption, their food and clothing, their strength and riches, their joy, peace and comfort. When Christians persevere in racism, it could well be that they are not tapping into this resource which alone is able to give them power to overcome.

c) Christ is all in the sense that he is the consummator of our salvation. He alone gives us glory hereafter. He who gives us grace to overcome sin here below will also give us grace to live without sin in glory hereafter.

d) Christ is all in the sense that he is our peace who has broken down every wall (Eph 2:14). He has removed the middle wall of partition that separated the Jew from the Gentile. He has fulfilled the Mosaic laws that separated Jews and Gentiles through the offering of himself as a sacrifice to God. He has removed the offending sin from man and turned away the divine wrath, and because both Jew and Gentile are now reconciled to God, they can be reconciled to each other. Similarly, because all the people of God, regardless of their race have been reconciled to God, they can and should be reconciled to each other.

e) Christ is all in the sense that He is our only Lord (Acts 2:36). Culture or ethnicity

is not our Lord. Christ is. There are Christians, aren't there, who are more committed to their racial grouping and culture than they are to the Lord Jesus Christ? But it is Christ who is the Lord. He is all in all to us, exceeding precious, altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousands, whom and whose law we esteem above all creatures and things.

We must therefore do his will with regard to race relations.

But he is not just all. The Bible also says,

ii) Christ is in all and under this we must stress the fact that: Christ is in all believers, regardless of their race, culture or ethnicity (Eph 4:4; Rom 8:9). We do not need to be of a particular racial grouping to have Christ in us. Christ is in all who believe regardless of their external looks (Acts 13:1,2).

Ephesians 4 also reminds us that there is one body and one Spirit and one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. Note the emphasis on 'one'. All believers are in one body – the body of Christ and one Spirit indwells them all. There is not a body for white people and another one for black people and a Spirit for white people and a different one for black people. There isn't a baptism for white people and a different one for black people. All experience one baptism of the Spirit and all have one God and Father.

That all believers, of whatever racial extraction, have Christ, who is our all, must make them very special to us. Our spiritual bond with them must matter more than our differences in race and culture.

That all believers, of whatever racial extraction, have Christ, who is our all, must make them very special to us. Our spiritual bond with them must matter more than our differences in race and culture. This, I believe, is what Paul is seeking to emphasise in this section of Scripture. What then must be our conclusion in the light of this?

Conclusion

1. If Christ is all in our unity, being like Christ must be our priority if we must maintain the unity of the Spirit. And how are we to maintain this unity? Paul lays down the method here in Colossians 3 from verse 12 through to verse 17. We are to put on the fruit of the Spirit, and we are to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. We are to fight racist tendencies with mercy, and kindness, humility and meekness and longsuffering. We are to bear with one another and forgive one another. White people must forgive black people and black people must forgive white people for any racially motivated wrongs they may have done to each other. Furthermore, we will only fight racism by putting on love, which covers over a multitude of sins. Also we must strive to have peace rule over our hearts. Perhaps you are struggling with a bad conscience over a poor racial relationship. Endeavour to clear the matter with God and with that person. That's the only way you will have a conscience at peace.

Clearly this passage is not just a general admonition to unity, but also a specific admonition to unity where the natural barriers of race so clearly manifested themselves. This text brings home a

powerful message to a church divided along the lines of race (see also Eph 4:1).

2. Because of our spiritual unity in the church even across the lines of race, we must war against prejudices we have developed against brethren of other races over time. We need to steer clear of expressions such as 'blacks can't organise' or 'whites can't live together with black people' or 'black people don't know how to spend their money. It seems that they would rather spend it on clothes and expensive cars than on a good home' or 'whites are selfish and patronising.' 'I know for a fact that there are many more bad coloured people than good ones and this is a shame. I think that they could easily be straightened out if they were taught the word of God' or 'in the minds of some of our white brethren "fellowship" usually means a paternal relationship.' Such prejudiced thinking must be eradicated and must give way to relationships that are based on love and mutual respect and trust.

3. I wish to make some suggestions that will contribute to racial reconciliation.

Firstly, we must pray that the Lord would help us to realise the ideal that he so clearly reveals in his word with regard to race relations.

Secondly, we must search ourselves as ministers and churches to see where we stand in the matter of racism and if we find we are wanting, we must repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness.

Thirdly, we must preach and teach our people how they ought to relate to this

question of racism. An exposition of the second chapter of Ephesians may be a good starting point.

Fourthly, we must examine the patterns within our churches that erect barriers to other races and endeavour to remove those barriers with the help of God.

Fifthly, we must endeavour to develop real and individual friendships across racial lines. This may help us shed some racial prejudices. We must make it a point to minister to new residents who are settling into our communities and are learning our culture and language.

We must also study the cultures of those living amongst us. We must also strive, where people of other racial groupings meet biblical qualifications, to share leadership with them.

Sixthly, we must do church planting in our cities and other communities in which racial division and conflict are often most evident, bringing the healing power of the gospel in word and deed to bear upon the situation.

4. I would like to end by giving us a picture of the goal of Christ when he

established his church. It was our Lord's aim that in this new 'race' of humans – all ethnic groups in the world will be included (Matt 24:14). And the church must be the visible expression of that, this side of eternity.

In Revelation 5:9 we are shown the perfect realisation of that goal. The picture we see there is a picture of heaven. In that picture peoples of all nations and tribes and clans and languages join together in worship. The implication is that in heaven we will recognise these distinctions while at the same time we are wholly united as one people. The unity, the diversity, and the harmony of the races will be among

the features that will bring unending glory and honour to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

May we who are this side of eternity endeavour to join the church triumphant in displaying something of this glorious unity in diversity, to the glory of our Saviour who died to bring it about. Amen. ■

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WILLIAM GADSBY

AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE (ALMOST) DEFEATED

PART 1

Have you ever felt inadequate or overwhelmed or not up to the job? Do you ever want to walk away? Do you ever feel that which is against you is greater than that which is for you? Perhaps you've tried and tried over and over, but now you're just too weary; you're worn out and you can't keep going. You are (almost) defeated.

Many churches are worn out and dying; many pastors feel defeated and they are giving up on the ministry. In my own brief

pastorate of just two decades, I have seen men giving up despite manifest God-given gifts and calling, while others have come so close to walking out on their ministry that their bags have been literally packed ready to go. In my own ministry at Trinity Grace Church in Ramsbottom (just north of Manchester) most of the elders have, at one time or another, been on the edge of giving up, and the two things that have kept them from withdrawing from their calling are team ministry and the support of fellow brothers in times of desperation.

It was only a few years ago that I was on the point of giving up myself, to the extent of saying to one of my fellow elders that I could never envisage preaching again. I had not committed any gross sin and I've not got anything significant to confess – I was simply worn out! Frankly, I was completely run down and battered – everything seemed stacked against me and I didn't have what it would take to carry on.

Just a couple of hundred years ago, here in my own city of Manchester, one of its ministers had so much stacked against him that there was no realistic possibility whatsoever of him accomplishing anything significant at all; when you read his background, upbringing and difficulties in terms of personality and perspective, there were just too many reasons why he would accomplish nothing. There was no realistic possibility that he would ever be received following any interview for a ministerial training college, seminary, or similar institution. He was a man who had everything stacked against him. Yet, as we shall see, he was greatly used by God.

Let's consider five things that weighed heavily against him:

His sins were against him

William Gadsby was born in January 1773, the ninth child in a family of 14.

HE WAS A MAN WHO HAD EVERYTHING STACKED AGAINST HIM. YET, AS WE SHALL SEE, HE WAS GREATLY USED BY GOD.

He was born the son of a road mender in Nuneaton. More importantly, however, he was born in sin. David spoke truly when he confessed in Psalm 51, 'Behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.'³¹ Furthermore, Jeremiah said that the human heart is deceitful and desperately sick and Gadsby was certainly no exception.

In Ian Shaw's helpful book (the one that I would recommend not just because it's short, but because I think it's the fairest treatment of Gadsby), it is mentioned that 'He became notorious for his swearing and profanities.'³² In a sermon preached in London in 1841, near the end of his life, Gadsby said of his pre-conversion days, 'When young, I gave myself up to profane swearing and hardness of heart.'³³ He described himself as a 'vile wretch' who 'expected hell to open up and let me in'. When he had completed his meagre education at the age of 13, he was apprenticed as a ribbon weaver for five years. During this time, 'He ran to great lengths of sin and folly, swearing, lying, and participating in all manner of mischief; already he was appearing a born leader, friendly, humorous, popular. It seems that Gadsby was a joker, one that we today might call the life and soul of the party.'³⁴ He says of himself in a sermon of 1843, 'I was a mere fool and so full of frolic that I was the

³¹ Psalm 51:5 ESV. ³² Ian Shaw, *William Gadsby*, Evangelical Press (2013), p15.

³³ William Gadsby, *Sermon of William Gadsby*, Gospel Standard Trust Publications (1991), p91.

³⁴ B A Ramsbottom, *William Gadsby*, Strict Baptist Trust Publications (2003), p17.

provider of sport for all my companions. I was the life of their society, and they seemed as if they could not live without me.³⁵ With his coarse jokes and profane talk, he would keep his friends regaled for as much as an hour at a time. There are stories of him standing on upturned tubs and regaling them, causing many to roar with laughter, and all the while he says, 'I used solemnly to declare that I would never think about religion.'

William Gadsby's sins were against him.

His poverty was against him

Even if we could conceive of young William finding some self-discipline and maturity at some point dealing with these grosser, coarser sins, his upbringing still stood against him. His parents were incredibly poor – theirs was 'grinding poverty', to put it more aptly. From the age of 9, William had to work to bring in money for his support. His father John was a road mender and as such was very poorly paid – often he was unable to make enough money even to put bread on the table. As a result, William's education was at best insubstantial, and at worst scanty and almost non-existent. When William married Elizabeth Marvin in May 1796, we are told that they possessed only a chest of drawers and an umbrella of their own. Furthermore, they had to sell the umbrella to buy a table! What they did for a bed, mattress, chairs, or other items of furniture we simply do not know. While there may be some exaggeration here, they were certainly very hard up!



The weaving industry they were involved with was a cottage industry based in their homes, and the amount of profit (if we could use such a word) that they made on each item was so small that if there were any mistakes or wastage, they would end up with no wages at all! One mistake in a week could put them at a loss. Their working hours were unbelievably long, to the extent that a mere 12-hour day was nothing but a distant dream. Furthermore, they lived constantly under the shadow of terrible fears, the most substantial of these being illness – there was no sick pay and no support, meaning that contracting any sort of illness could be a death sentence! Faced with such poverty and scarcity, what hope did William have of bettering himself or making any sort of significant impact in his meagre life? Surely, he was destined to a life of frustration and conformity grinding him

down, with his aspirations killed and hopes of usefulness dead.

William Gadsby's poverty was against him.

His education was against him

Closely linked with his poverty was his education. As a young boy he attended the church school in Nuneaton, but only for two or three days each week. We are told that he did learn to read, but never acquired any understanding of grammar or the ability to write properly. By today's standards he would be termed almost illiterate. His part-time schooling lasted only a few years; combine this with the reality of his father's long working hours and his mother being entirely occupied with providing and caring for 14 children and it seems inevitable that William must have learned virtually nothing. He could not even read the Scriptures aloud properly due to his inadequate

reading ability. On commencement of his ministry, he was barely able to read a passage of the Bible without stumbling and repeating himself. In a sermon preached in 1843, the year before his death, he could say of his first calling to the ministry: 'When the Lord first put into my heart a spiritual concern about preaching the gospel, a greater fool never had existence. I had been brought up in a country place where my speech was so broad, that I could only say "morn" for "man", and "corn" for "can". My appearance and manners were all of a piece. As it respected literature or learning, I could not read a single chapter in the Bible; all were full of what I called "hard words". From beginning to end, and what with my want of learning, and want of language, and my great ignorance, it appeared altogether the highest pitch of presumption for a fool like me to attempt to preach at all.'³⁶ The evidence suggests that he was not exaggerating.



³⁵ B A Ramsbottom, *William Gadsby*, p17.

With such a lack of education, what expectation of usefulness in the ministry could William Gadsby ever have? Surely his education was against him.

His doctrinal errors were against him

William Gadsby was guilty of serious doctrinal errors, which theoretically ought to have rendered his ministry ineffective. Gadsby began preaching at the time when Andrew Fuller and William Carey were involved in what would become one of the greatest missionary movements in the history of the church. According to Dr Robert Oliver, the period in which Gadsby was ministering was a period when the Spirit was working amongst nonconformist churches. At its root Carey and Fuller had a conviction that the

preacher must declare the gospel to all people, calling them to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus as the means of their conversion; they were convinced that as the preacher offered the free gospel, the Lord by the power of the Spirit would enable men and women to respond – what theologians refer to as effectual calling.

William Gadsby did not believe that – rather, he believed that since sinful men do not have the ability to respond to the gospel message in their fallen state, it cannot be pressed upon them as a duty

so to do. He felt that by calling people to repent and believe, the preacher was effectively misleading them by giving the impression that they had the ability within themselves to respond in faith. He did not discern that lack of ability

does not imply lack of responsibility; nor did he recognise that the power to respond to the call lies in the Holy Spirit's enabling of the elect, even as the call is given by the preacher. For this reason, Gadsby distanced himself from Fuller's teachings.

As the first and principal source of biographical details concerning William Gadsby, his son John is an important and influential figure. However, his testimony is far from faultless since he had a distinct agenda of his own to pursue. So when he

records his father 'often repeating' that 'Andrew Fuller is the greatest enemy the Church of God has ever had,'³⁷ we must not necessarily consider that to be the full picture. Certainly, he deliberately did not move in the circles of Fuller and Carey, but that does not mean he was so implacably opposed to their ministry. However, it is manifestly true that throughout his preaching ministry he was careful not to give direct exhortations to unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel.

Sadly this was not Gadsby's only doctrinal

error: he also diminished the role of the law in the life of the new covenant believer, teaching that the gospel, not the law, was the believer's rule of conduct. It was because of this view that he was often accused of antinomianism. To make matters worse, Gadsby was a man of fixed or even stubborn opinion: he would not readily change his view upon any matter once it was made. Moreover, it did not take him long to come to a view upon a matter whatsoever it might be! The story of his ordination supports this: having been asked to write down the account of his testimony and call before the meeting as was the custom (so that it could be checked over by those officiating), he simply refused, believing that his call could only be scrutinised by God who gave it and not by other ministers. He also believed that the laying on of hands 'smacked too much of Catholic ritual' and without advancing any warning in the middle of the service, he simply stepped aside as the elders sought to pray for him, so as to avoid their administrations that were so unpleasant to his spirit.

He was not interested in attending any institution of learning, joining any organisation or being part of any association. No! Gadsby was an independent of ONE. When contemplating his doctrinal errors, coupled with his absolute fixedness and obstinacy, surely his ministry would be hampered and his usefulness greatly restricted, not only in the conversion of sinners because of his false view of preaching, but also in the building up of the saints because of his unbiblical view of the law.

His doctrinal errors were against him.

The deprivation of his people was against him

Having preached his first sermon in a barn loft in Bedworth in 1798, Gadsby was ordained to the ministry in Desford in 1800 at the age of 27. In his early years he preached in the villages of Bedworth, Desford and Hinckley in the Midlands and then moved to Manchester in 1805 where he remained a minister of the Baptist Church on St George's Road until his death 39 years later in 1844.

Manchester was the first industrial town in the country and it was horribly deprived. Ian Shaw states, 'Rapid population growth left Manchester's housing stock cracking at the seams. In 1834, seventeen and a half thousand people lived underground in cellar dwellings below street level, prone to flooding. Dwellings were crammed together along unpaved and undrained streets; passageways led to cramped, stinking courtyards. Backstreets were littered with piles of rotting waste, and stinking pools of human sewage from their overflowing privy and earthen toilets. Windows were broken, boarded up, loose planks and rags used. A survey of 7000 houses two years previously found nearly 1000 premises in a state of ill-repair, and a third of them without any kind of privy. 352 streets were filled with heaps of refuse, stagnant pools, and odour. Overcrowding was chronic. Life expectancy in 1843 was just 24 years, with 57 percent of children dying before they were five. The streets around the Baptist Chapel in Manchester were in a particularly bad state. Allied to this was the poverty of the area of Manchester, in which St George's Road Chapel was

WITH SUCH A LACK OF EDUCATION, WHAT EXPECTATION OF USEFULNESS IN THE MINISTRY COULD WILLIAM GADSBY EVER HAVE?

³⁶ William Gadsby, *Sermons*, p164.

³⁷ John Gadsby, *Memoir of William Gadsby*, Welsh Trust Publications (1990). p37.

located. Gadsby wryly observed that the nearby Angel Street should have been renamed Black Angel Street because of its filthy state.³⁸

Asa Briggs describes Manchester at this time as ‘abominably filthy, the Steam Engine is pestiferous, the Dye houses noisome and offensive, and the water of the river black as ink. Malnutrition, cholera, and rickets particularly amongst the children because of the lack of sunlight that they were exposed to, claimed the lives of many. The Corn Laws were scandalous and caused terribly poverty, deprivation, and malnutrition to the working people.’³⁹ The Corn Laws had been introduced by the government in order to protect Britain’s agricultural industry; they necessitated that prices had to be fixed at a certain level and that duties had to be paid on any imports. This resulted in basic food being just too expensive for the working poor. The idea that there would be a minimum wage or a national living wage was implausible, even absurd. The poor people suffered horrendously, crime was rife, riots, demonstrations and disturbances were commonplace, alcoholism and prostitution abounded. The majority of those in Gadsby’s congregation were severely affected by all these troubles because they were ordinary working people.

What hope was there that Gadsby would make any significant impact ministering in such a poverty-stricken context, to an uneducated and needy people? This was certainly no mission to the socially

or culturally significant people of his day. Considering the overwhelming list of all that was against William Gadsby, his particular sins, his upbringing, his education, his doctrinal errors held with such fixed conviction, and the poverty and deprivation of his own people – it would seem impossible that this man could produce any sort of fruit for the glory of Christ Jesus.

So be encouraged, for his life was remarkably blessed by God producing extraordinary fruit beyond any conceivable expectations. The wonderful story of this man’s life is indeed encouragement for the (almost) defeated amongst us.

A sinner saved by grace

At the age of 17, in the state of ungodliness and sinful abandon that we’ve already described, Gadsby witnessed the hanging of three men in Coventry. Hangings were often a context for public theatre and Gadsby was looking for plenty of entertainment as he joined the crowds on this occasion. However, this hanging was particularly gruesome: one of the three men was so light and emaciated that the executioners had to pull on his legs violently in order to cause his neck to break as he was being hanged. The vision of those three men, particularly that one emaciated man hanging, propelled eternity right before the eyes of this young man; he was haunted in his mind about what it meant to stand before God in judgment; he felt the conviction and the terror of his sin. Gadsby explains



📷 *St Georges Particular Baptist Chapel*

this in one of his own sermons: ‘But when the Lord was graciously pleased to quicken my soul, being then just turned seventeen years of age, and show me something of what sin was, I really feared it then, and a turn in my mind took place of a very different kind. I was brought to feel now that my sins were against a holy, just and good God; that I had not merely to be alarmed for the consequences and punishment due to sin, but that I had to stand before the bar of infinite purity, and give an account of my awful practices, which made my soul solemnly to tremble at the Word of God, and before the glory of his majesty! It is one thing to be alarmed

at sin through the fear of going to hell, and quite another sensibly to feel it as against a holy, just, and good God, and that the soul is accountable to him for it. And while I remained in this state, all the efforts I used to extricate myself only seemed to make my case worse; for every step I took appeared as though the Lord had designed to open a fresh wound in my conscience, and only to let me experience more deeply the abominable and loathsome disease of sin. And O what a low estate is this for a poor sinner to be in, without a single ray of satisfactory hope of ever receiving the blessings of salvation!’⁴⁰

³⁸ Ian Shaw, *William Gadsby*, p40.

³⁹ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Hammondsworth, 1963), p88.

⁴⁰ William Gadsby, *Sermons*, p140-141.

Gadsby's right view of sin brought him to the extraordinary position where he feared standing before a holy God more than he feared hell – that is truly remarkable, that the fear of hell was nothing to Gadsby, compared to having to stand before a holy God. Due to his genuine conviction, according to his own particular theology of effectual calling, he did not have the power to respond to the gospel until granted what he calls 'little faith', enabling him to embrace the grace of Christ. Exactly how he understood the process of regeneration may be a point of contention, but this much is clear – he was born of the Spirit and the work of God had most certainly begun in his heart.

Gadsby said in one of his sermons, 'Few perhaps have felt more heart rending in the workings of the natural conscience than I have. I was in that terrible state for years, and when alone, I expected hell to open up and let me in, and I thought the devil was ready to drag me into hell. I verily believed that this was all nature.'⁴¹ By this he means a natural conviction rather than a spiritual one. He continues, 'But when God the Spirit came and manifested sin in my conscience, and opened a little of the mystery of iniquity, I then found that all my nature and practice had been nothing less than one constant heaving up of rebellion against a holy, just, and good God. And there I was, with all my sin and guilt torturing my mind; feeling myself as an accountable being to a holy God, whose mercy I had abused, whose goodness I had despised. If the blessed Spirit had not loved me with a peculiar love, he would never have taken so much

pains with such a hard-hearted and vile youth as I. No, he would have said, 'Let him alone; let him seal his own damnation and reap the wages due to his sin.' But O the mercy, the special mercy and love of our covenant God! When the set time came, he arrested me, broke my heart, and brought me to stand and bow before his throne as a guilty criminal; brought me to sign my own death warrant. I felt that God had a right to damn me. I had nothing to offer and I could do nothing to save myself. I felt that God would be perfectly just in cutting me off and sending me to hell. But O! God's peculiar love that was shed abroad in my heart by his blessed Spirit; which brought me to feel the love and blood of Christ, led me to trace something of the wondrous work of his wonder-working grace. Then, how my hard heart was melted! I was brought to his footstool with all humility, simplicity, and godly sincerity; filled with gratitude and love for God's unspeakable mercies in opening these great mysteries to my poor soul. I was then solemnly and blessedly led to believe in God's free mercy and pardon, and could look up and say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." O these little words, this "me", this "ye", this "I", may we all know the preciousness of them; and may the Lord, the Spirit, bring our hearts to enjoy the blessings they convey. We shall then know something of those glorious blessings of God's pardoning mercy and love, which cannot be described and which belong to his peculiar people.'⁴²

When a man knows himself to be a debtor to sovereign grace; when he knows that the only hope for sinners lies in the mercy of God revealed in Christ Jesus; when he

understands his own wretchedness, how will such a man serve and witness and preach? Upon whom will he depend? What will be his message? When he has proclaimed the gospel to thousands, to whom will he give all the glory? The conviction of his sinfulness was not against him in his life of service, but very much in his favour. It is no wonder that his dying words were, 'Free grace. Free grace. Free grace.' The abnormality of saying these words when he was about to die testifies of what importance they must have been to Gadsby. Saved by grace, free grace!

Are we sometimes less effective in our evangelism because we do not recognise the inability of man to respond to the gospel unaided? Gadsby was right about that, as well as the absolute necessity of the fullness of God's grace in the salvation of sinners. Is our own lack of conviction of sin today a real weakness? Is the wording and the phraseology found in so many of Gadsby's and Joseph Hart's hymns that we find naturally distasteful and extreme, a sign that we lack conviction of sin ourselves, and we fail to grasp the seriousness of sin and its consequences in our hearers? Have we misunderstood sin as being simply something evil, wicked or bad, rather than a cosmic crime against a holy, pure, infinite God? This was Gadsby's view.

In the light of this, he preached in a manner that produced conviction of sin in his hearers. We are so obsessed today with our methods, our approach to outreach and the way that we should go about our evangelism, jumping on the latest bandwagon, whether it's a three-point or a seven-point plan for

revitalization, or a new instrument to bring excitement. We've lost our confidence in preaching! Gadsby was never in danger of making this terrible mistake. He knew the size and the depth of the grace needed to save sinners, he preached with that always in view. I wonder if you still sing this hymn written by William Gadsby:

*Pause my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?
Have I union
To the church's living Head?*

*Am I quickened by His Spirit;
Live a life of faith and prayer?
Trusting wholly to His merit;
Casting on Him all my care?
Daily panting
In His likeness to appear?*

*If my hope on Christ is stayed,
Let Him come when He thinks best;
O my soul! be not dismayed,
Lean upon His loving breast;
He will cheer thee
With the smilings of His face.*

*But, if, still a total stranger
To His precious name and blood,
Thou art on the brink of danger;
Canst thou face a holy God?
Think and tremble,
Death is now upon the road.*⁴³

Is that a bit strong for you? It wasn't for Gadsby – a sinner saved by grace. ■

Oliver Allmand-Smith is Pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Ramsbottom, UK, and is one of the trustees of the Reformation Today Trust.

⁴¹ William Gadsby, *Sermons*, p91. ⁴² William Gadsby, *Sermons*, p91-92.

⁴³ William Gadsby, *Gadsby's Hymns*, Solid Ground Christian Boois (2009). no 698.

Remembering the Reformation in Kenya



 *Group discussion at Reformation 500 conference: Scriptures open!*

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation has been remembered in a conference in Bumala, Kenya. The following is an extract from the report by the conference chairman, Pastor Eric Ngala:

‘The Bumala Kenya Reformation 500 conference together with the Reformed Baptist Association of Kenya (RBAK) meeting brought well over 70 pastors from all over the country to Bumala. This was not just to remember what Martin Luther did on 31 October 1517 but to ask ourselves what we can do today! This conference has been described by many as the Revival 2017 in Kenya because of the nature of the proceedings and the way the participants embraced the Reformation which has led all of us back to the Bible for all matters of faith and life. Another peculiar thing with the conference is that it was a sign to the whole

country for unity and peace especially now when there is a lot of polarisation based on ethnicity! Here, the only ethnic tribe present was the sons of the Lord Jesus Christ. A lot of love was shown by all the tribes that were here as delegates who came from as far as the northern part of Kenya and the coast region!’

Keith Underhill who was there wrote the following about this meeting: ‘On the way to Pokot North, we took a detour to attend some sessions of the Association of Churches of which we are a part. Attending meant that I was asked to speak twice on aspects of the Reformation! The Chairman of the Association this year, Eric Ngala of Bumala, thought it was a good opportunity to invite pastors from around to hear about the Reformation in this 500th anniversary year. This needs to be heard in a Christian environment where the dominant note is worldly prosperity.’

‘Pastor Murungi was also speaking about being a Reformed pastor to the scores of church leaders who had been invited to hear about the celebration of the Reformation. “Many were touched according to the responses that followed” is the feedback from one pastor. There is a great need for reformation in our day. You might like to go to www.reformedgospel.org, the website where Pastor Elly Achok has eight videos on why we need such reformation.’

In God’s providence, a revival of Reformed Baptist theology began in the United States in the mid 1950s and spread throughout the world. This movement is grounded in the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689. The fruit of this benevolent providence was the establishment of Reformed Baptist churches and missions on six continents. In America this includes a church association incorporated in 1997 (Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America – ARBCA), a mission service (Reformed Baptist Mission Services – RBMS), ministerial training (Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies – IRBS), and published theological books.

In 1998 IRBS began offering Reformed Baptist courses in conjunction with the MDiv program at Westminster Seminary in California under the direction of James M Renihan, PhD. In April 2017, the ARBCA General Assembly took the historic step of approving the establishment of a fully confessional and residential seminary in Mansfield, Texas, to train men on the foundation of the inerrant and infallible Holy Scriptures for the gospel ministry.



With interest from potential students around the world and an eagerness to serve God’s kingdom in all nations, IRBS Theological Seminary plans to begin classes in the Fall of 2018.

Visit us at www.irbsseminary.org to follow our progress or like our Facebook page ‘Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies’.

Interested in applying? Contact Matt Stahl at mstahl@irbsseminary.org. Help us reach our start-up funding goals at www.irbsseminary.org/donate.

This is exciting news and I would ask our readers to pray for this new initiative that it will be a blessing to the churches and for the glory of God.

Dr Sam Renihan

I would also like to congratulate Dr Sam Renihan (son of Dr James M Renihan) for his recent PhD degree obtained from the Free University of Amsterdam. The title of his thesis is: ‘From Shadow to Substance’ The

Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642 – 1704). His thesis is also due to be published in book form soon. Dr Sam Renihan is pastor of Trinity Reformed Baptist Church in La Mirada, California, USA.



African Pastors' Conference News

The table gives an overview of recent conferences (June-Oct) and books distributed. The total number of books distributed since the start of APC in 2006 now stands at 111,555. Some extracts from the most recent report written by Nico van Zyl, the APC conferences manager:

'When you drive through Maseru and see all the big billboards of so called apostles then you realise how needed the true gospel is in a country like Lesotho. We hope and pray that many more have been blessed by the APC conferences over the years.'

It was the first time we had a conference in Chatsworth. We had 52 delegates at this conference. Pastor Reggie Kisten was the local organiser and the conference was held at Truth and Life Family church in Chatsworth. Pastor Reggie who has been attending four APC conferences in Hillcrest around 60 kilometres from

COUNTRY	LOCATION	DELEGATES	BOOKS Sold & Free
Kenya	Eldoret	63	374
Kenya	Nakuru	86	473
Kenya	Mombassa	110	519
Kenya	Nairobi	67	463
Uganda	Kampala	75	284
Uganda	Jinja	33	97
Uganda	Mbale	179	422
Uganda	Maabale	109	254
South Africa	Adullam Mission	24	234
South Africa	Soshanguve	20	140
South Africa	Soweto	20	202
South Africa	Bloemfontein	20	175
Lesotho	Maseru	17	106
South Africa	Queenstown	37	352
South Africa	King William's Town	63	632
South Africa	Chatsworth	52	556

Chatsworth told us how much the APC conferences have helped him in his ministry. That is also the reason why he asked for a conference to be held in Chatsworth. He mentioned how many churches have perverted the gospel in his area and how much the gospel is needed in Chatsworth, a predominantly Indian area. Durban has the largest Indian population (around 1 million people) of any city outside of India. Chatsworth has

a population of about 500,000 people and Phoenix, on the other side of Durban, about the same. According to Reggie the majority of Indians are still Hindu and many are also Muslims. Reggie, who has pastored for more than 15 years in Chatsworth and who has lived all his life in Durban, says that there are only about 10% professing Christians of all the Indians in Durban. Most of the delegates, about 90%, were Indian pastors. ■



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Further Details

Further details about individual APC conferences are available from Phil Roberts (phil@tentmaker.org.uk) or Frederick Hodgson (frederick.hodgson@gmail.com)

NEW REFORMED BAPTIST SEMINARY

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Visit www.irbsseminary.org
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Next Issue

- ▶ William Gadsby and Encouragement for the (Almost) Defeated (part 2)
- ▶ Shack theology