

MORTIFICATION OF SIN¹

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It is puzzling how a Christian who has experienced liberation from sin's dominion can at times give in to temptation in his daily life. The OT account of Agag and the Amalekites is a good illustration of how Christians should deal with sin. They should not try to co-exist with it, but should remove it completely. Saul partially obeyed God's directive, but Samuel obeyed it to the letter by killing King Agag. Christians obey God's command to mortify sin by living a life in the Spirit and not acknowledging any obligation to the flesh. Consistent effort to mortify sin in the body comes through a life lived in the Spirit. Mortification is the believer's responsibility and includes such responsibilities as abstaining from fleshly lusts, making no provision for the flesh, fixing one's heart on Christ, meditating on God's Word, praying incessantly, exercising self-control, and being filled with the Spirit. Covering up sin, internalizing it, exchanging it for another sin, or merely repressing it do not equate to sin's mortification. Continuously and uncompromisingly removing sin resulting in a conscience free from guilt is what the process entails.

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*Mortification abates [sin's] force, but doth not change its nature. Grace changeth the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin. . . . Destroyed it may be, it shall be, but cured it cannot be. . . . If it be not overcome and destroyed, it will overcome and destroy the soul.
And herein lies no small part of its power. . . . It is never quiet, [whether it is] conquering [or] conquered.*

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¹This essay is adapted from President MacArthur's recently released work *The Vanishing Conscience* (Word).

*Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.*² John Owen

²John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (16 vols., 1967 reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of

Every honest Christian will testify that becoming a believer does not erase the tendency to sin. He still derives pleasure from sin. He still struggles with sinful habits. Some of those habits are so deeply ingrained that he still battles them after years of spiritual warfare against them. He falls into appalling, shameful sins. The truth is, he sins daily. His thoughts are not what they ought to be. His time is often wasted on frivolous and worldly pursuits. From time to time his heart grows cold to the things of God. Why does all this happen if sin's dominion is broken?

God's Anger Against Amalek

An OT illustration may help to shed light on the Christian's relationship to sin. In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel anointed Saul and solemnly gave him these instructions from the Lord: "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (v. 3).³

God's command was clear. Saul was to deal ruthlessly with the Amalekites, killing even their infant children and animals. Their whole tribe was to be utterly and mercilessly leveled`no hostages taken.

What would cause a God of infinite love to mete out such a severe judgment? The Amalekites were an ancient nomadic race, descendants of Esau (Gen 36:12). They inhabited the southern part of Canaan and were perennial enemies of the Israelites. They were the same tribe that viciously attacked Israel at Rephidim shortly after the Exodus, in the famous battle when Aaron and Hur had to support Moses' arms (Exod 17:8-13). They ambushed Israel from behind, massacring the stragglers who were most weary (Deut 25:18). It was a cowardly attack by the most powerful and savage tribe in the whole region. God supernaturally delivered Israel that day, and the Amalekites fled into hiding. At the conclusion of that skirmish, God swore to Moses, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (v. 14). He actually made it a point of the Mosaic law that Israel was to destroy Amalek:

Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not

Truth, 1853) 6:177, 6:9.

³All Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; *you must not forget* (Deut 25:17-19, emphasis added).

The Amalekites were fearful warriors. Their intimidating presence was one of the reasons the Israelites disobeyed God and balked at entering the Promised Land at Kadesh-barnea (Num 13:29).

God's anger burned against the Amalekites for their wickedness. He constrained even the corrupt prophet Balaam to prophesy their doom: "Amalek was the first of the nations, but his end shall be destruction" (Num 24:20). The Amalekites used to harass Israel by coming into the land after crops had been sown and moving through the farmland with their tents and livestock, razing everything in their path (Judg 6:3-5). They hated God, detested Israel, and seemed to delight in wicked and destructive acts.

God's instructions to Saul, therefore, fulfilled the vow He swore to Moses. Saul was to wipe out the tribe forever. He and his armies were the instrument through which a righteous God would carry out His holy judgment on a sinister people.

The Folly of Partial Obedience

But Saul's obedience was only partial. He inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Amalekites, routing them "from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt" (1 Sam 15:8). As commanded, he killed all the people, but "he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive" (v. 8).

Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed (v. 9).

In other words, motivated by covetousness, they kept all the best possessions of the Amalekites, collecting the spoils of victory, willfully disobeying the Lord's instructions.

Why did Saul spare Agag? Perhaps he wanted to use the humiliated king of the Amalekites as a trophy to display his own power. Saul seemed motivated only by pride at this point; he even set

up a monument to himself at Carmel (v. 12). Whatever his reasons, he disobeyed the clear command of God and allowed Agag to live.

The sin was so serious that God immediately deposed Saul and his descendants forever from the throne of Israel. Samuel told him, "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king" (v. 23).

Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites" (v. 32).

Agag, evidently thinking that his life had been spared and feeling pretty confident, "came to him cheerfully." "Surely the bitterness of death is past," he said.

But Samuel was not amused. He told Agag, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Scripture simply says, "And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal" (v. 33).

The human mind instinctively recoils at what seems to be a merciless act. But it was *God* who commanded this to be done. This was an act of divine judgment to show the holy wrath of an indignant God against wanton sin. Unlike his countrymen and their king, Samuel was determined to carry out the Lord's command entirely. As it was, the battle intended to exterminate the Amalekites forever ended before the goal was reached. Scripture records that only a few years later, the reinvigorated tribe raided the southern territory and took all the women and children captive including David's family (1 Sam 30:1-5).

When David found the marauding Amalekites, "behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah" (v. 16). He slaughtered them from twilight until the next evening, killing all but four hundred who escaped on camels (v. 17).

The Amalekites are a perfect illustration of the sin that remains in the believer's life. That sin already utterly defeated at the cross must be dealt with ruthlessly and hacked to pieces, or it will revive and continue to plunder and pillage his heart and sap his spiritual strength. He cannot be merciful with his Agag, or indwelling sin will turn and try to devour him. In fact, the sin remaining in Christians often becomes more fiercely determined after the gospel initially overthrows it.

Scripture commands believers to deal with their sin by putting

it to death:

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience (Col 3:5-6, KJV).

They cannot obey partially or halfheartedly as they seek to eliminate sin from their lives. They cannot stop while the task remains incomplete. Sins, like Amalekites, have a way of escaping the slaughter, breeding, reviving, regrouping, and launching new and unexpected assaults on their victims' most vulnerable areas.

Life in the Spirit

In Rom 8:13 Paul also wrote of "putting to death the deeds of the body." After declaring victory over sin in Romans 6, then describing the ongoing struggle with sin in chap. 7, he describes the triumphant experience of life in the Spirit throughout chap. 8. In the middle of that chapter, the apostle declares that the distinctive behavior of those who are led by the Spirit is that they continually put their evil deeds to death.

It is significant that the Holy Spirit is mentioned only once in the introduction to the epistle (1:4, "the Spirit of holiness"), and not mentioned again until Rom 8:1. In Romans 8 alone there are at least twenty references to the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8 portrays the Holy Spirit as the divine agent who frees believers from sin and death (vv. 2-3), enables them to live righteously (4-13), assures and comforts them in their affliction (14-19), preserves and sustains them in Christ (20-28), and guarantees their final victory in eternal glory (29-39). Right in the context of this profound teaching about the Holy Spirit's role in the Christian's life, Paul has some important things to say about mortifying sin. He begins by contrasting life in the Spirit with life in the flesh and under the law. It is important to understand these truths in their proper context:

What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Those who are according to the flesh set their

minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.* But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you (vv. 3-11, emphasis added).

In other words, life in the Spirit is markedly different from the life of the unbeliever. *All* true Christians are "in the Spirit." They "do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Those who walk according to the flesh are unbelievers, and Paul is quite definite in making that clear: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (v. 9). Later he adds, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (v. 14).

In other words, there are only two kinds of people in the world—those who are in accord with the flesh and those who are in accord with the Spirit. Of course, there are in-the-Spirit people at many different levels of spiritual maturity. In-the-flesh people also come in varying degrees of wickedness. But everyone is either "in the flesh" (v. 8) or "in the Spirit" (v. 9). There is no category called "in between."

What Paul suggests is that the Holy Spirit changes a person's basic disposition when he is born again. He brings him into accord with Himself. He actually indwells him (vv. 9, 11). Christians become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Their orientation to God changes. Where there was enmity, there is now love (cf. Rom 8:28). In the flesh they could not please God (v. 8), but now the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them (v. 4). Central to all of this is the reality that their whole mind-set is new. Whereas the mind set on the flesh meant death, the mind set on the things of the Spirit results in life and peace (v. 6).

If your mind-set—the fundamental orientation of your understanding, its bent, its thought patterns—did not change when you made a profession of faith in Christ, something is seriously wrong. That is

not to suggest that Christians cannot fall into old patterns and habits. But it *does* mean that now that they are "in the Spirit," their thoughts toward God, sin, and righteousness are radically different from when they were "in the flesh." They have new holy affections and longings for godliness. They have a love for God that transcends their attachment to this world (Jas 4:4). They can no longer blithely "indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires" (2 Pet 2:10). They no longer have anything in common with those "who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:19-20). And it is toward heaven that their minds are now inclined. They set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5). Even when they fail or fall to earthly temptations, they "joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" (7:22). That is their basic orientation and mind-set.

In contrast, "the mind set on the flesh is death" (v. 6). Paul does not say that the mind set on the flesh *causes* death. He declares that it *is* death. The state of mind that is dominated by fleshly desires is a condition of spiritual death. In other words, those whose thoughts and desires are altogether fleshly are *already* "dead in [their] trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). This cannot be a description of the true believer in Christ.

Christians are no longer "in the flesh": "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom 8:9). The Greek word for "dwells" is *okv (oike)*, which means "I inhabit." Paul says that the very Spirit of God indwells every person who trusts in Jesus Christ. The Spirit is in believers, and they are "in the Spirit." They are not "in the flesh."

Death in the Physical Body

But they are still "of flesh," and therefore their physical bodies deteriorate and die. The germ of death inhabits them all. Because of the curse of sin, they begin to die as soon as they are born.

For the Christian, however, this earthly life has more than death: "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness" (v. 10). In other words, the human body is subject to death (and is already dying) because of sin, but the believer's spirit is already alive in Christ. Eternal life is his present possession. Though the body is dying, the spirit is already endowed with incorruptibility.

In v. 10 the word "body" clearly refers to the actual physical body (not the flesh-principle), and the expression "dead" speaks of physical death. Notice that vv. 10 and 11 use the word "body" (sma [s_ma]) instead of "flesh" (srj [sarx]) the word Paul used throughout the first nine verses. By contrasting "the body" and "the spirit" in this way, he makes his meaning inescapable. In verse 10, "the spirit is alive" refers to the human spirit, the immaterial part of man's being. The body may be dying because of sin, but the believer's spirit is fully alive and thriving "because of righteousness" because he is justified and therefore already has "passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). Paul simply says here what he also told the Corinthians, "Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).

In fact, the indwelling Spirit also promises "life to [our] mortal bodies" in a future resurrection with a glorified body (v. 11).

Paul's point is that the body apart from the Spirit of God has no future. It is subject to death. Therefore the Christian has no duty to the mortal side of his being:

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom 8:12-13).

Again Paul uses the word *sarx* ("flesh") in the sense of "sin principle" and equates it with "the deeds of the body." If you live in accord with the flesh if you live in response to bodily impulses you "must die."

Paul once more draws the line of distinction as clearly as possible between Christians and non-Christians. He is by no means warning believers that they might lose their salvation if they live according to the flesh. He has already made the point that true believers do not and *cannot* live in accord with the sin principle (vv. 4-9). Besides, Paul began this chapter with the statement, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). He will end it with the promise that nothing can separate Christians from the love of God in Christ Jesus (vv. 38-39). A warning of the possibility of falling away would contradict the very purpose for which he was writing.

Paul simply reiterates what he says again and again throughout

his NT epistles`that those whose lives and hearts are altogether fleshly are not true Christians. They are already spiritually dead (v. 6), and unless they repent, they are headed for eternal death. Meanwhile, their earthly lives are a kind of abject bondage to sin. They are enslaved to their own flesh, constrained to cater to its sensual desires.

What Is Mortification?

Christians, on the other hand, have a different obligation`not to the flesh, but to the new principle of righteousness embodied in the Holy Spirit. Therefore they labor by the power of the Spirit to mortify sin in the flesh`to "[put] to death the deeds of the body." If you do this, he says, "you will live" (v. 13).

Of course, Paul does not suggest that anyone can obtain life or merit God's favor by the process of mortification. He is saying it is characteristic of true believers that they put to death the deeds of the body. Nothing is more natural than for people "led by the Spirit of God" (v. 14) to mortify their sin. One of the proofs of their salvation is that they do this. It is expected of them. It is the expression of their new nature.

In other words, the true believer is not like Saul, who wanted to pamper and preserve Agag, but like Samuel who hacked him to pieces without mercy and without delay. Saul may have wanted to make a lap dog of Agag, but Samuel knew that was utterly impossible. Similarly, a believer will never tame his flesh. He cannot mollicoddle his sin. He must deal with it quickly and severely.

It was Jesus who said,

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell (Matt. 5:29-30).

Jesus was not speaking in literal terms, of course, though many have misunderstood the passage that way. No less than the great theologian Origen had himself castrated in a misguided effort to fulfill this command literally. Jesus did *not* call for self-mutilation, but for mortification of the deeds of the body. Mortification, in the words of Puritan John Owen, means that

'The old man,' with his faculties, and properties, his wisdom, craft, subtlety, strength; this, says the apostle, must be killed, put to death, mortified, that is, *have its power, life, vigour, and strength, to produce its effects, taken away by the Spirit.*⁴

Rom 8:12-13, the verses where Paul introduces the idea of mortifying sin, signal a major turning point in the logical thread that runs through Romans 8. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

It is here for the first time, in this chapter, that we come to the realm of practical application. All we have had up to this point has been a general description of the Christian's character, his position. But now the Apostle has really come explicitly to the doctrine of sanctification. *Here we are told exactly how, in practice, the Christian becomes sanctified.* Or, to state it differently, here we are told in detail and in practice how the Christian is to wage the battle against sin.⁵

Paul does not promise immediate freedom from sin's harassment. He does not describe a crisis-moment sanctification, where the believer is immediately made perfect. He does not tell the Romans to "let go and let God" take over while he sits idle. He does not suggest that a turning-point "decision" will solve the matter once and for all. On the contrary, he speaks of a continuous struggle with sin, where he is persistently, perpetually "putting to death the deeds of the body."

The language is often misunderstood. Paul is not calling for a life of self-flagellation. He does not say believers should starve themselves, wear camel-hair shirts, or deprive themselves of life's basic needs. He is not telling them to mutilate themselves or live monastic lives or anything of the sort. The mortification Paul speaks of has nothing to do with external self-punishment. It is a spiritual process accomplished "by the Spirit."

Paul is describing a way of life where *Christians seek to throttle sin and crush it from their lives, sapping it of its strength, rooting it out, and depriving it of its influence.* That is what it means to mortify sin.

⁴Ibid., 6:8., emphasis added.

⁵D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17: The Sons of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 92, emphasis added.

How Does a Christian Mortify Sin?

Mortification involves the cultivation of new habits of godliness, combined with the elimination of old sinful habits from one's behavior. It is a constant warfare that takes place within the believer. Although a Christian should expect his triumph over sin to be ever-increasing, his mortification can never be wholly complete before he is glorified. He is to remain perpetually committed to this task. He must see sin as a sworn enemy, and commit himself to slaying it wherever and whenever it rears its head.

Obviously, mortification is the work of believers only. Unbelievers are called to repent and flee to Christ. Those still enslaved to sin have no means by which to put sin to death. The Holy Spirit—the agent of mortification—does not indwell them. Their only hope is the salvation offered to those who will trust Jesus Christ and entrust themselves to Him. No one can mortify sin who is not "in Christ" and "in the Spirit."

Scripture offers several practical means whereby believers can mortify their sin. Their growth in grace depends on their obedience to these duties. None of them is a fleshly or mechanical formula. They are not religious activities or rituals. John Owen observed that most of the Roman Catholic religious system consists of

mistaken ways and means of mortification. . . . Their vows, orders, fastings, penances, are all built on this ground; they are all for the mortifying of sin. Their preachings, sermons, and books of devotion, they look all this way.⁶

But sin cannot be annihilated through legalism, monasticism, pietism, asceticism, pharisaism, celibacy, self-flagellation, confessional booths, rosary beads, hail Marys, or any other external means. The instrument of mortification is the Holy Spirit, and His power is the energy that works in Christians to carry out the process. All the means of mortification are simple commands of Scripture that they are to obey. The following will highlight some of the key ones.

Abstain from fleshly lusts. Peter wrote, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). In other words, stop lusting. Abstain from it. Stay away from it. "Flee immorality" (1 Cor 6:18). What could be more direct?

⁶Owen, *Works* 6:16-17.

Do you want to put to death the lusts in your heart? Then stop entertaining them. Peter does not prescribe a program of therapy. He does not suggest that it be treated as an addiction. He simply says abstain. Quit doing it. You have no business indulging such thoughts. Put them away at once. *You yourself* must do this; it cannot be done for you. There is no point waiting for some heavenly power to erase this sin automatically from your life. You are to stop it, and stop it immediately. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

I do not know of a single scripture⁷ and I speak advisedly⁷ which tells me to take my sin, the particular thing that gets me down, to God in prayer and ask him to deliver me from it and then trust in faith that he will.

Now that teaching is also often put like this: you must say to a man who is constantly defeated by a particular sin, "I think your only hope is to take it to Christ and Christ will take it from you." But what does Scripture say in Ephesians 4:28 to the man who finds himself constantly guilty of stealing, to a man who sees something he likes and takes it? What am I to tell such a man? Am I to say, "Take that sin to Christ and ask him to deliver you?" No, what the apostle Paul tells him is this: "Let him that stole, steal no more." Just that. Stop doing it. And if it is fornication or adultery or lustful thoughts, again: Stop doing it, says Paul. He does not say, "Go and pray to Christ to deliver you." No. You stop doing that, he says, as becomes children of God.⁷

Here is perhaps the most straightforward, obvious means of mortifying sin: *stop doing it*. Too many people think they must wait for an extraordinary experience, a miracle from heaven, a sign from the Lord, or whatever. They think some special divine intervention is necessary to free them from a sinful practice or pattern of thinking. No, that is precisely the error Romans 6 refutes. You *are* free from sin; now stop doing it. "Abstain." Reckon yourself dead to sin, and do not do it anymore. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7). It is as simple as that.

Make no provision for the flesh. In Rom 13:14 Paul writes, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." In other words, simply refuse to accommodate fleshly lusts. If you struggle with gluttony, stop loading up on junk food when you shop at the market. If you are tempted with sexual desire, refrain from filling your mind with images that feed your lust. If you do not want to fall, do not walk where

⁷D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sanctified Through the Truth: The Assurance of Our Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1989) 54.

it is slippery. Refuse to furnish your mind with the means to entertain evil thoughts. Make no preparations for the possibility of sin. Thus you can slay sin before it breeds.

Fix your heart on Christ. The apostle John wrote, "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). It is an inexorable spiritual law that you become like the object of your worship. Psalm 135 says,

The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, the work of man's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; nor is there any breath at all in their mouths. *Those who make them will be like them, yes, everyone who trusts in them* (vv. 15-18, emphasis added).

If the heathen become like the lifeless gods they worship, how much more like Christ will Christians become, since they have the Holy Spirit working to accomplish that very goal? As they fix their hearts on Christ, they discover their worship has the effect of conforming them to His image: "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

Meditate on God's Word. The psalmist wrote, "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps 119:11). The Lord told Joshua,

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (Josh 1:8).

Do you want to have success in the battle against sin? Familiarize yourself with the Word of God. Meditate on it "day and night" (cf. Ps 1:2). Let it be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Ps 119:105). As the truth begins to penetrate your heart and mind, it will confront and attack your sin.

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The truth of God's Word is the medium the Holy Spirit

uses in sanctification. Load your mind with it. Fill your heart with it. Ponder it carefully and let it direct your walk.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Phil 4:8).

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" (Col 3:16). You will discover that "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17) is the most effective weapon for hacking the flesh to pieces.

Pray without ceasing. On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took His disciples with Him to Gethsemane and told them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40). Later He found them sleeping and rebuked them for their prayerlessness. He told them, "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41).

"Lead us not into temptation" was part of the model prayer He gave the disciples (Luke 11:4). Prayer is an effective and necessary means for heading off sinful temptations *before* they can attack. Look at prayer as a preemptive strike against fleshliness. By drawing a believer near to the Lord and focusing his thoughts on Him, prayer both steels against fleshly temptation and weakens the temptations when they come.

Watch and pray. Identify the circumstances that lead you into sin, and pray specifically for strength to face those situations. Pray for a holy hatred of sin. Pray that God will show you the real state of your sinful heart. The psalmist prayed this prayer for sanctification:

Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer (Ps 19:12-14).

Prayer must include confession and repentance if it is to be effective in mortifying sin. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And the writer of Hebrews says, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).

Exercise self-control. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23) and it is also one of the means through which the Spirit enables Christians to mortify the deeds of the body. Paul wrote,

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:25-27).

The word "buffet" in that passage is a translation of the Greek word *ποπιζν* (*hupopiaz*), meaning "to strike under the eye." Athletes discipline their bodies for mere earthly prizes. If they are willing to do that, should not Christians also be willing to exercise a similar kind of self-control for the heavenly prize?

Paul does not speak of punishing the body through self-flagellation or neglect. He certainly does not advocate anything that would physically weaken or injure the body. No athlete would do such things.

The present writer once met a man who wore a belt studded with nails that constantly tore at his flesh. He felt he was punishing his body and atoning for his own sins. Many misguided people over the ages have attempted similar means to deal with the body. Martin Luther as a young monk almost destroyed his body with excessive fasting before he discovered that God's Word says, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:29). In the Philippines at Easter each year, there are men who actually have themselves crucified in a bloody ritual that they believe makes them holy.

That is not at all the spirit of what Scripture calls for. It is a watchful self-discipline that refuses to pander to the appetites of the body at the soul's expense. Jesus said, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and [the Day of the Lord] come on you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34).

Be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation," Paul wrote, "but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). To be Spirit-filled is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, just as to be drunk is to be under the influence of alcohol. Believers are to be utterly yielded to the Spirit's control.

This brings the discussion full circle to its beginning in Rom 8:13. Christians mortify sin "by the Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit's power in them that actually does the work of mortification in those who yield to Him. Once again, however, it is emphatically true that this does not mean they are passive in the process. As John Owen wrote,

He doth not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our *obedience*. The Holy Ghost works in us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works *in us* and *with us*, not *against us* or *without us*; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.⁸

In other words, it is worth repeated reminders that Christians cannot abandon their own responsibility and passively wait for God to mortify sin on their behalf. The Spirit-filled life is an active, vigorous, working endeavor, where they work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). When they obey, they then discover it is actually God who is at work in them "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (v. 13). God both molds their wills to obey and then gives them the energy to work according to whatever pleases Him. That is the Spirit-filled life.

There are many more duties related to mortifying sin`such as clothing oneself with humility (1 Pet 5:5), having the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5), putting away spiteful feelings toward others (Eph 4:31-32), putting on the armor of God (Eph 6:11-17), laying aside sinful attitudes

⁸Owen, *Works* 6:20.

(Col 3:8-9), adding the graces of spiritual growth to one's life (2 Pet 1:5-7), following the *know, reckon, yield, obey, serve* pattern of Romans 6. This basic category of being filled with the Spirit encompasses *all* of these.

It is really as simple as this: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). The fruit of the Spirit will overgrow and choke out the works of the flesh.

"Let us [therefore] cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1).

Strike Sin at Its Head

John Owen wrote, "He that is appointed to kill an enemy, if he leave striking before the other ceases living, doth but half his work."⁹ Christians must be always at the task of mortifying sin. They may slaughter a whole tribe of Amalekites, but if they deliberately permit one Agag to escape, God will not be pleased with their efforts.

The flesh is very subtle and deceptive. A particular sin may leave the believer alone for awhile to make him think he is rid of it. But it can come back with a hellish fury if he is not on guard. Sin perpetually stalks him; he must be continually mortifying it. This is a duty he cannot rest from until he rests in glory.

Give sin an inch, it will take a mile. If it can gain a footing in Christians' lives, it will send forth roots and grow like kudzu. It will use them and abuse them and inflict as much disaster as possible. Owen wrote,

Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism, might it grow to its head. . . . It proceeds toward its height by degrees, making good the ground it hath got by hardness. . . . Now nothing can prevent this but mortification; that withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour, so that whatever it aims at it is crossed in. *There is not the best saint in the world but, if he should give over this duty, would fall into as many cursed sins as ever did any of his kind.*¹⁰

Later, he added, "Sin sets itself against every act of holiness, and against every degree we grow to. Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness

⁹Ibid., 6:11.

¹⁰Ibid., 6:12, emphasis added.

while he walks not over the bellies of his lusts."¹¹

Christians are not ignorant of Satan's devices, the apostle declares (2 Cor 2:11). Neither should they be naive about the subtleties of their own flesh. When Agag comes to them cheerfully, saying, "Surely the bitterness of death is past" (1 Sam 15:32) or when he wants to make friends and declare an end to hostilities that is when it is most imperative to turn on him and cut him ruthlessly to pieces before the Lord.

Sin is not mortified when it is merely covered up. A Christian can hide his sin from the sight of others, but that is not the same as mortification. If a sin has simply been papered over with hypocrisy, what good is there in that? If conscience has only been daubed, Christians are in a much more dangerous state than before. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Prov 28:13). You have not done your duty with regard to your sin until you have confessed and forsaken it.

Sin is not mortified when it is only internalized. If you forsake the outward practice of some evil, yet continue to ruminate on the memory of that sin's pleasures, beware. You may have moved your sin into the privacy of your imagination, where it is known only to you and to God, but that sin has not been mortified. If anything, it has become more deadly by being married to pretended righteousness. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for this very thing. They avoided murder, but tolerated hate. They refrained from fornication, but indulged in lustful thoughts. Jesus declared them worthy of eternal hell (Matt 5:21-28).

¹¹Ibid., 6:14.

Sin is not mortified when it is exchanged for another sin. What good is it to trade the lust of the flesh for the lust of the eyes? That lust has not been mortified; it has only changed form. Puritan Thomas Fuller said, "Some think themselves improved in piety, because they have left prodigality and reel into covetousness."¹² If you succumb to this tactic, your heart is in danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:13).

Sin is not mortified until the conscience has been appeased. The goal is "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5). As long as the conscience remains defiled, it affects a Christian's testimony.

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; *and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame*" (1 Pet 3:15-16, emphasis added).

Part of the process of mortification is to work through the issue of guilt. Those who attempt to evade guilt for sin have not properly confessed their sin; therefore they cannot be cleansed and fully forgiven.

If you want to mortify sin, John Owen wrote, "*Load thy conscience with the guilt of it.*"¹³ Contrary to the popular wisdom today, he believed the pangs of guilt were a natural and healthy consequence of wrongdoing. "Be ashamed,"¹⁴ he wrote, for he saw shame as an advantage in the mortification of sin. He correctly understood Paul's meaning in 2 Cor 7:10: "The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret."

¹²Cited in I. D. E. Thomas, *A Puritan Golden Treasury* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977) 264.

¹³Owen, *Works* 6:56.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 55.

Those who give a nod of the head to their guilt, claim the promise of forgiveness, quickly reassure themselves, and then think no more of their wrongdoing are subjecting themselves to the heart-hardening deceit of sin—especially when the sin threatens to become a habit. Let sorrow do its full work in your heart to produce a deep, honest repentance, and those sins will be severely weakened.

Sin is not mortified when it is merely repressed. Some people use diversions to avoid dealing with their sin. They try to drown their conscience with alcohol or drown out their guilt with entertainment and other distractions. When temptation surfaces, they do not give a biblical answer, as Jesus did (Matt 4:4, 7, 10). Instead they seek a fleshly escape route. Of this tendency Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

If you merely repress a temptation or this first motion of sin within you, it will probably come up again still more strongly. To that extent I agree with the modern psychology. Repression is always bad. "Well, what do you do?" asks someone. I answer: When you feel that first motion of sin, just pull yourself up and say, "Of course I am not having any dealings with this at all." Expose the thing and say, "This is evil, this is vileness, this is the thing that drove the first man out of Paradise." Pull it out, look at it, denounce it, hate it for what it is; then you have really dealt with it. You must not merely push it back in a spirit of fear, and in a timorous manner. Bring it out, expose it, and analyse it; and then denounce it for what it is until you hate it.¹⁵

That is sound advice. Christians should deal with their sin courageously, striking at its head. Subduing it a little bit is not enough. They need to exterminate it, hack it in pieces seek by the means of grace and the power of the Spirit to wring the deadly life from it.

It is a lifelong task, in which progress will always be only gradual. That may make the fight seem daunting at first. But as soon as Christians set themselves to the work, they discover that sin shall *not* be master over them, for they are under grace (Rom. 6:14). That means it is God who is at work in them both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). And having begun His good work in them, He "will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

¹⁵Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-17* 143.

INVOLVEMENT AND BIBLICAL COUNSELING¹

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Attempts at biblical counseling sometimes neglect the important factor of establishing a facilitative relationship between the counselor and the counselee. Such a relationship can come through a demonstrated compassion such as Jesus and Paul had for people they ministered to, a compassion that is possible for the counselor to develop through controlling his thoughts. The necessary involvement can also develop if the counselor follows certain guidelines in showing respect for his counselee. The facilitative relationship is also possible when built on the foundation of sincerity, when the counselee realizes that the counselor is perfectly honest and has no hidden agenda. The substance of the counsel given is of greatest importance, but the involvement of the counselor with his counselee is most frequently the packaging that makes his advice effective in helping people.

* * * * *

Biblical counseling seeks to solve people's problems. It is about discovering the causes of those problems and then applying biblical principles to them. Sometimes even the best-intentioned counselors err, however, by trying to attain these goals without an attempt to incorporate an indispensable element. That element is *involvement*

¹This essay will appear in the forthcoming book *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Word) of which Professor Mack is editor. President MacArthur and the faculty of The Master's College are collaborating on this work scheduled for release in the very near future.

with the person counseled.²

Consider the approach of a counselor described by Adams:

Clara comes to you stating that she has filed for divorce on the grounds of mental and bodily cruelty.

Clara returns for the third session. "I tried to get him here but he had *other* things to do," she begins. "You know what his other things are, of course. I told you all of them."

"I don't want to hear such charges behind Marty's back," you respond. "This continuing hostility toward him, even though you told him you forgave him, seems to indicate that you made little or no attempt to bury the issue and start afresh. I don't think that you understand forgiveness. You . . ."

"Forgive him! You know there is a limit. After he has beat me, and his drinking away our money maybe, but when I came home and found him in my bed with that woman, I can never bury that! He is just an immature, immoral, animalistic pig," she declares.

You tell her that it will be necessary for her to change her language about her husband and that you are here to help but not to salve her self-righteous attitude and listen to her ever-increasing charges against her husband.

²Of benefit would be a lengthy discussion of the necessity of the counselor's involvement *with Christ* only when he or she has a vital, intimate relationship with the Lord can counseling be truly effective (cf. Matt 7:3-5; Acts 4:13; 1 Cor 11:1). But this essay will discuss primarily the counselor's involvement with the counselee, an involvement which is intended to develop and maintain a facilitative relationship between the two. Ultimately and preeminently the purpose of that involvement is to enhance the counselee's involvement with Christ. The vertical dimension is what makes biblical counseling different from all other forms.

"Why are you siding with him? I'm the one that belongs to this church!" She breaks into tears.³

Why did that third session deteriorate into near hopelessness before it had hardly begun? It was not because the counselor offered bad advice—most of what he said was probably true. Rather, it turned sour at least partially because he took what may be called the "auto mechanic" approach to counseling.

When someone leaves a car for repair, the mechanic pulls out the shop manual for that particular model. After putting the car through various diagnostic tests, he repairs any indicated problem as the book prescribes. Sadly, some counselors treat people this way. They restrict their responsibility to finding out what the problem is and what the Book says to do about it and to moving directly to "fix" the problem. They devote little effort to developing their relationship with the counselee.⁴

This neglect in counseling commits the error of treating the counselee as a mechanism, in contrast to biblical counseling which tries to help the *whole person*. People's problems are important and counselors should not ignore them, but biblical counselors should come to these painful problems through a genuine care and concern for the total being of their counsees.⁵ Efforts to help people should not be exclusively *problem-oriented*. They should be *person-oriented*, with the resolution of problems flowing from that focus. This sets counseling in its proper context.

The counselor in Clara's case failed because he was too problem-oriented in his approach. Apparently he had done very little to establish involvement with his counselee. He had not labored to develop a facilitative relationship so that she knew he cared about her.

³Adapted from Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Casebook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 186.

⁴The counselor who is guilty of neglecting the relational side of his responsibility lends validity to the criticism that biblical counselors merely "throw out Bible verses" or "shove Scripture down people's throats." As we will see later in this chapter, that kind of "biblical" counseling is patently not biblical.

⁵A friend of the writer told a story of the time when he had a bad toothache and the dentist he called wanted him to come in for a preliminary appointment so that they could "get to know one another." The friend said that he was not interested in "building a relationship" with the dentist—he just wanted to get rid of the pain in his tooth. What is unnecessary in dentistry is, however, quite necessary in biblical counseling.

He could have taken some time to listen to her and sympathize with the pain she was experiencing, but had jumped right in and addressed her sin.⁶ Almost immediately Clara viewed him as her opponent rather than her ally. As long as she had this perspective, his counsel to her was next to meaningless. His words could be completely true and appropriate to her situation, but she would nonetheless reject them.

Proverbs 27 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a *friend* [emphasis added]" (v. 6) and "A man's counsel is sweet to his *friend* [emphasis added]" (v. 9). People are more receptive to counsel from those whom they know to be on their side. Allies can speak to them frankly about their faults. They may find temporary annoyance with criticism, but they soon realize that sincere concern is behind the criticism and their critics are only trying to help. On the other hand, if a stranger or seeming enemy offers the critique, people tend to react defensively and are suspicious of the underlying motives.

As in any other relational function, *a counselor's impact and influence in the lives of people are usually related to people's perception of him*. That is why involvement is so vitally important to the counseling process. Usually the counseling process is most effective after the achievement of an acceptable level of involvement.⁷

With this in mind, a consideration of three ways for developing involvement with people seeking help is in order. *Compassion, respect, and sincerity* are the foundations for building a facilitative relationship with counselees.

INVOLVEMENT THROUGH COMPASSION

A counselee's awareness that the counselor genuinely cares promotes involvement.

Two Great Examples of Involvement

⁶Clara's sin was of utmost importance and needed attention as the counseling progressed, but the counselor's approach gave Clara the impression that he did not view her husband's sin as a serious matter. That created an immediate wall between them at a time when her husband's hurtful actions so completely dominated her thinking.

⁷Of course, the counselor cannot *make* the counselee view him or her as a friend or ally. Some people may be so predisposed against their counselors that nothing can reverse their feeling. Nevertheless, the counselor is responsible to do whatever he can to be the kind of person that deserves respect and trust.

Jesus. Undoubtedly the greatest counselor who ever lived was the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesied that "His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor" (9:6) and that upon Him would rest "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength" (11:2). One of the keys to His success as a counselor was His great compassion for men and women, a characteristic evident throughout the gospel accounts of His life and ministry.

Matthew records, "Seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36). The Greek word for His compassion in Heb 4:15 is *synpauv* (*synpathe*) which is the source for the English "sympathy." *Syn* (*Syn*) means "with" and *pauv* (*pathe*) (or *psxv* [*paschi*]) means "suffer." He suffered with the needy multitudes. He felt for them and cared for them with a compassion that permeated all His attempts to meet their needs (Matt 9:35, 37-38). Far from being a cold-hearted, "auto-mechanic" counselor who limited his attention to the problems and treated people like statistics, He was a person who had compassion for them.

Mark 3:1-5 says that Jesus noticed a man with a withered hand in the synagogue and that He was angry and sad over the Pharisees' lack of sensitivity toward the man. He showed His own compassion by restoring the man's hand despite His enemies' objection to His doing so on the Sabbath.

A rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking eternal life, but left without it because he loved his riches too much to give them up at Christ's command. Even so, Mark 10:21 says, "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him." Even when Jesus had to uphold unpopular standards that repelled people, He did so with compassion.

One day Jesus was with His disciples when a funeral procession passed near them (Luke 7:11-15). A widow's only child had died, so Christ stopped to comfort her: "And when the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, 'Do not weep.'" He then proceeded to raise her son from the dead.

Jesus' compassion caused Him to shed tears of grief, as Luke 19:41 notes. He wept over Jerusalem as He predicted the future judgment of God to come upon it. When He saw the sorrow of Mary over the death of Lazarus, "He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled" (John 11:34-35) and wept with her. She and all the others Jesus interacted with throughout His ministry could tell from being around Jesus how much He cared for them. This is one of the qualities that contributed to His being the Wonderful Counselor. He did not

just observe problems and dispense platitudes. He epitomized the compassion every counselor needs.

Paul. In the writer's opinion, the second greatest counselor who ever lived was Paul. Many picture Paul as a staunch defender of the faith and brilliant theologian, but fail to realize that he also was a compassionate man who cared deeply for people to whom he ministered. Paul reminds the Ephesian elders, "Night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears" (Acts 20:31). The Greek word for "admonish" *noyuetv (nouthete)* also means "counsel" and most often means "correct" or "warn." Even when Paul rebuked Christians for their sin, his tears communicated a genuine, caring, and loving heart.

Paul's great love for his fellow Jews is a theme of Rom 9:1-3: "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He was on the verge of willingness to burn in hell if that would save them! Surely contemporary counselors have a long way to go to match that kind of compassion!

Paul felt the same for his Corinthian converts. He refers to a strong letter of admonishment he had written to them: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you" (2 Cor 2:4). He also speaks of the "daily pressure" of concern he feels for all the churches, and then says, "Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Cor 11:28-29). Paul identified with the problems and weaknesses of his "counselees" to the degree that he experienced them himself.

The Thessalonian church received an especially moving expression of Paul's love for them: "We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess 2:7-8).

Paul cared for people, and they knew it. His heart was "opened wide" to them (2 Cor 6:11). That is the reason he could be so straightforward in addressing their faults without alienating them in any way. If a contemporary counselor is to be effective, he must have the same

kind of compassion.

How to Develop Genuine Compassion

Perhaps some question whether they have the kind of compassion Jesus and Paul had or wonder how they can develop more of it. Fortunately the Bible tells how to emulate these great examples. Following are some suggestions from Scripture about how to develop compassion toward people needing help. Because any righteous attitude, action, or emotion originates in the mind (cf. Rom 12:2), these suggestions pertain to how a person thinks.

Think about how you would feel if you were in their position. In many of the previously mentioned passages about Jesus' compassion, the text first mentions His seeing or looking upon people. For instance, Matt 9:36 says, "*Seeing* [emphasis added] the multitudes, He felt compassion for them." The account of the mourning widow records, "When the Lord *saw* [emphasis added] her, He felt compassion for her" (Luke 7:13).⁸ That is very significant. Jesus looked thoughtfully at people who were experiencing difficulty, i.e., He put Himself in their place and intentionally tried to feel what they were feeling. His compassion for them arose from that empathy. Even now though in heaven, He is "touched with the feelings of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15, KJV).

Consider again the case of Clara. She concluded that her counselor was not in sympathy with her. All she sensed from him was condemnation. The counselor should have first listened to her complaints and concerns and tried to understand how she was feeling. Before responding, he could have asked himself, "What would it be like for me to come home to a wife who was wasting all our money on alcohol? What would it be like to have a wife calling me names, scratching me, and throwing things at me? What would it be like to have a wife who did not care about what I thought or what I said? What would it be like for me to come home and find my wife in my bed with another man? How would I feel? What emotions would I be experiencing?"

The counseling process does not end with understanding the feelings of the counselees, of course. Their sin problems need addressing with a view to finding solutions. But the counseling process must

⁸Cf. Matt 14:14; Luke 10:33; 15:20.

start with that understanding. In most cases, effective counseling cannot occur until the counselor demonstrates to the counselee the compassion of Christ by identifying with his or her struggles.

Think of them as family members. Paul says in 1 Tim 5:1-2, "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters." A deliberate effort to treat the counselee as a close relative will contribute toward developing compassion. In reality, counselor and counselee are spiritual brothers or brother and sister if both are Christians. The heavenly Father expects His children to treat each other according to their spiritual ties.

Think about your own sinfulness. Gal 6:1 instructs and cautions counselors: "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted* [emphasis added]." When counselors learn of sin in the lives of their counsees, they must remember that they are not immune to that deadly disease and can fall into sin just as easily as anyone else. No one has done anything that a counselor could not do, if it were not for the grace of God. Keeping that in mind will guard the counselor against becoming self-righteous or condescending toward those who sin, and help him to reach out to them in compassion as Jesus did to the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11).

Think about practical ways that you can show compassion. Compassion is not so much an emotion as it is a choice of the will. Though a counselor may not *feel* like being kind to someone, he can still do so (cf. Luke 6:27-28). Often those feelings of love for others result from a counselor's choice to act in a way that pleases and benefits them. Asking the following questions may help determine whether a counselor has genuine compassion for the people he is trying to help:

- Have you told the counsees verbally that you care for them? (Phil 1:8)
- Have you prayed for them and with them? (Col 4:12-13)
- Have you rejoiced and grieved with them? (Rom 12:15)
- Have you dealt with them gently and tenderly? (Matt 12:20)
- Have you been tactful with them? (Prov 15:23)
- Have you spoken graciously to them? (Col. 4:6)

- Have you continued to love and accept them even when they have rejected your counsel? (Mark 10:21)
- Have you defended them against those who mistreat and accuse them? (Matt 12:1-7)
- Have you forgiven them for any wrong they have done to you? (Matt 18:21-22)
- Have you been willing to meet their physical needs if necessary? (1 John 3:17)

INVOLVEMENT THROUGH RESPECT

Not only do people need to know that the counselor cares for them; they also need to know that he respects them. Webster defines respect as "deferential regard" and "considering another worthy of honor." The Bible lauds that quality repeatedly. Rom 12:10 tells Christians to "give preference to one another in honor." Phil 2:3 commands, "With humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." First Peter 2:17 instructs, "Honor all men." To return once more to the counselor trying to help Clara, he failed miserably in this area. The way he talked to her implied only disrespect, which no doubt is the major reason their relationship took a bad turn.

In cases when a counselee shows little respect for the counselor, it is often because the counselor has shown little respect for the counselee. The counselor is repayed what he or she has sown. So when the one seeking help fails to look to the one providing help as he should, the first question the counselor should ask is, "Have I honored him as God commands me to?"⁹

How to Show Respect for a Counselee

One can show respect in a counseling context in several ways that help establish the necessary involvement:

By proper verbal communication. The counselor can demonstrate respect for a counselee in the way he talks both to and about him. Paul advises, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be

⁹Not every counselee will respond with the proper respect for the counselor, of course, even when he receives the utmost respect the counselor has to offer. He may be a person who simply respects no one. The counselor must, nevertheless, exemplify a godly honor for him, and trust that God will use his example to convict the counselee of his own pride.

kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 2:24-25). Scripture never condones rude or harsh speech, even when speaking the truth (cf. Eph 4:15). Proverbs says that "sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness" (v. 21) and "pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (v. 24). So the way a counselor communicates verbally is of primary importance in showing respect to a counselee.

By proper nonverbal communication. The mouth is not the only way to show respect; the rest of the body can do the same. Moses wrote, "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly" (Lev 19:32, NIV). In the OT, etiquette required younger people to stand when an older person entered the room. That was a nonverbal way of saying, "We honor you, we respect you." This kind of unspoken communication is as important to God now as it was then, because it reflects one's opinion of another.

The acronym S-O-L-V-E-R is useful as a reminder of several ways to show respect to a counselee nonverbally. These are traits of a person who is truly helpful, of which a counselor should be conscious during every counseling session:

"S" stands for squared shoulders. Face the counselee in a way that indicates you are alert and giving him or her all your attention.

"O" stands for open stance. Relax your arms, hands, and shoulders as if to say, "I am here to receive whatever you want to communicate. You have access to me."

"L" stands for leaning slightly forward. This shows interest in what the person is saying to you.

"V" stands for vocal quality. Maintain a volume and intensity in your speech that is neither abrasive nor hard to hear. Let your voice always reflect tenderness and compassion rather than anger and irritation.

"E" stands for eye contact. Look at people, especially when they are speaking. Don't stare at them so much that you make them uncomfortable, but show your interest in what they are saying by giving them your rapt attention.

"R" stands for relational posture. Coordinate all your body, head, and facial movements in a way that is most conducive to the comfort of the counselee. Your posture should not be stiff and robotic, but neither should it be so totally relaxed that the person thinks you're about to go

to sleep.¹⁰

In all these areas a counselor needs to keep a good balance so that the counselee does not perceive him as either too uptight or too indifferent, because either perception can build a wall between him and his counselee and interfere with the counseling process.¹¹

By taking their problems seriously. Never minimize the problems presented by counsees. A counselor may think, "This is so trivial why are they making a big deal out of it?" But it *is* very important to them, or they would not be sitting across from you. By taking their problems seriously, a counselor is communicating respect. On the other hand, making light of their problems will alienate them from the start and remove any hope they might have had that you could help them.

By trusting them. First Cor. 13:7 says that love "believes all things." Applied to counseling, this means that a counselor should believe what his counselee tells him, until the facts prove otherwise. He should also believe that the seeker has entered counseling because he wants to please God more. Presumptive suspicion is a worldly attitude, not a Christian one (Phil 2:3). One psychology textbook says this about Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls:

Perls . . . expresses his skepticism about those who seek therapy and indicates that not very many people really want to invest themselves in the hard work involved in changing. As he points out, "Anybody who goes to a therapist has something up his sleeve. I would say roughly ninety percent don't go to a therapist to be cured, but to be more adequate in their neurosis. If they are power mad, they want to get more power. . . . If they are ridiculers, they want to have a sharper wit to ridicule, and so on."¹²

¹⁰Adapted from Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper: Model Skills and Methods for Effective Helping* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 1986) 76-77.

¹¹That is why body-language is not a light issue. Over the years the writer has observed many physical habits of counselors from foot-tapping to slouching to constant yawning that have in one way or another seriously hindered their relationships with counsees.

¹²Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 1977) 179.

Believers in Christ cannot approach counseling with that cynical attitude, because Scripture says that love believes all things. No doubt people will sometimes come with insincere motives, but the counselor should not allow himself to think that until he has good reason to do so.

By expressing confidence in them. The Corinthian church had more problems than any other Paul wrote to, but nonetheless he told them, "I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you" (2 Cor. 7:16). No matter how many weaknesses counselees may have, if they are believers, the counselor should convey the attitude that he is confident they will respond well to the counseling and grow through it.

Because Scripture states that God is at work in believers "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13) and because Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, . . . and they follow Me" (John 10:27), the counselor should have an attitude of relative confidence that believing counselees will respond positively to the directives of the Lord. He should also communicate the same to people he is helping. Frequently, in fact in every epistle but one, Paul follows this practice with people he was counseling through his letters. In each he advises them about serious problems in their midst and in their lives. With only one exception (Galatians), his teaching, reproof, correction, and admonition join with expressions of confidence in and respect for those whom he counsels.

Paul not only knew the problems of people to whom he wrote; he also recognized and appreciated the good qualities and behavior that God had accomplished in them. Furthermore, he gives the impression that he expects them as Christians to respond to counsel from the Lord in a positive way. In essence, he respected them and had confidence in them because he respected and had confidence in the Lord and His Word. So it should be with today's counselor as he counsels. He should communicate an attitude of respect for and confidence in his counselees because he has respect for and confidence in the Lord and the promises and power of His word. As God works in them to produce godly strengths and virtues, it is appropriate for the counselor to praise God and let his counselees know what he sees. When they have done a good job on their homework, it is fitting for him to tell them that. In counseling, he certainly must deal honestly and forthrightly with problems in lives of people, but he must also remember that the counsel of Phil 4:8 about focusing on the things that

are lovely, honorable, virtuous, right, and worthy of praise applies to counseling as well as to the normal routine of life.

The writer of Hebrews provides another good example of this principle in action. In the last part of chap. 10 he warns his readers sternly about the danger of apostasy, into which he undoubtedly feared they might fall (vv. 26-31). Before leaving the topic, however, he commends them for the good they have already done (vv. 32-34) and expresses confidence that they will heed his warning and prove themselves to be genuine believers. Verse 39 records, "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

By welcoming their input. A counselor can show respect for his counselees by asking them to help him through evaluating the sessions and suggesting improvements. He could say to them, "God has brought us together, and He not only wants to use me in your life but also wants to use you in my life." This also entails a willingness to receive their negative input without becoming defensive or irritated. Any such criticism or complaint provides him an opportunity to model the godly responses that he wants them to develop in their own lives. Numerous times in this writer's counseling, he has had to respond to criticism by admitting his wrong and asking forgiveness from the counselee.

By maintaining confidentiality. The counselor must show respect to his counselees by guarding their reputations as much as he possibly can without disobeying God. "As much as he possibly can" is as far as he can go, because confidentiality is not always possible (or best) in light of the commands Jesus gave in Matt 18:16-17. There Jesus says that if a brother is sinning and proves unwilling to listen to private rebuke, a believer should "take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." Regarding these verses Adams has written,

The implication of this biblical requirement to seek additional help in order to reclaim an offender is that Christians must never promise absolute confidentiality to any person. Frequently it is the practice of Bible-believing Christians to give assurances of absolute confidentiality, never realizing that they are following a policy that originated in the Middle Ages and that is unbiblical. . . .

Is it right, then, to refuse any confidentiality at all? No, confidentiality is assumed in the gradual widening of the sphere of concern to other persons set forth in Matthew 18:15ff. As you read the words of our Lord in that passage, you get the impression that it is only reluctantly, when all else fails, that more and more persons may be called in. The ideal seems to be to keep the matter as narrow as possible. . . .

What then does one say when asked to keep a matter in confidence? We ought to say, "I am glad to keep confidence in the way that the Bible instructs me. That means, of course, I shall never involve others unless God requires me to do so." In other words, we must not promise *absolute* confidentiality, but rather, confidentiality that is consistent with biblical requirements.¹³

This kind of confidentiality, along with all the other ways we show respect, is essential to building a relationship of trust between counselor and counselee.

INVOLVEMENT THROUGH SINCERITY

The kind of relationship a counselor should seek to develop with his counselees can exist only when they know he is genuine and honest. Paul described his ministry as "not walking in craftiness . . . but by manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:2). Concerning this verse Hughes has written,

So far from being marked by subterfuge, self-interest, and deceit, however, Paul's ministry was one in which the truth was manifested, openly displayed, outspokenly proclaimed (cf. 3:12f.), in such a manner that none could gainsay the genuineness and sincerity of his motives.¹⁴

The counselor must be like Paul in his counseling, having no hidden agendas or disguised motives, but openly revealing the truth about who he is (and even what he is thinking) to those he seeks to

¹³Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 30-32. See also George Scipione, "The Limits of Confidentiality in Counseling," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 7/2 (1984):29-34.

¹⁴Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 124.

help.¹⁵ Only then will they be able to trust him through the process.

What are some areas in which he can show his sincerity and practice honesty in counseling? Scripture indicates he can do so in the following ways.

Be honest about your qualifications. It is easy for a counselor to misrepresent his credentials to counselees in an attempt to gain their respect and confidence. His goal may be legitimate, but the method is not. Even the great counselor Paul, who had every right to throw around his title of "apostle," more often referred to himself as merely "a servant of Christ" (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1; etc.). The counselor should follow this humble example and represent himself in the same way to his counselees. Certainly he must never exaggerate or otherwise deceive them about his qualifications. A relationship of trust will be highly unlikely if they find out he has lied to them!

Be honest about your own weaknesses. Openness about his own personal problems and struggles is an effective way of showing others that a counselor is sincere. Paul told the Corinthians, "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, . . . I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:1-3). He did not present himself as somebody who always had it all together. He was honest about the fact that he had weaknesses and fears. When he wrote to the Corinthians again, he told them that during a time of affliction he and Timothy had been "burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor 1:8).

That was the man who said in 1 Cor 10:13 that God would never allow Christians to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear. Yet to the same people he admitted to an experience of being so burdened that he did not think he could take it anymore. This is another reason Paul was such a great counselor: he was able to proclaim the truth firmly without leaving people under the impression that he was perfect or unable to relate to their failings (cf. Rom 7:14-

¹⁵This, of course, does not mean that he should tell his counselees everything about himself or volunteer everything he is thinking at any given moment. Nevertheless, a willingness to share his thoughts and experiences with them is a good indicator of the godliness of his attitudes toward them, toward himself, and toward God. Reluctance to be open and transparent when appropriate and helpful, may indicate pride and a fear of man that is unworthy of a Christian, especially a Christian counselor.

25).

A counselor needs to be careful that his self-disclosure is not inappropriate in nature or in duration. He does not want to make his counselees think that he needs counseling more than they do, nor should he spend an inordinate amount of time talking about his problems when they came to receive help for theirs. But an appropriate openness about himself is very helpful in showing sincerity and thus establishing involvement. And whatever he does, he must never pretend to be something he is not.

Be honest about your goals and agenda. Generally speaking, it is advisable and fitting for a counselor to, in a prudent manner, let counselees know from the beginning what he is trying to do and how he intends to do it. He should be up front about his counseling method and standard. He should commend himself to them by being sincere and open. He should not play games with them. He should make it clear that God and the Bible are the sources of his authority. He can also let them know he does it this way because he is convinced that God's way of describing problems, identifying their causes, and solving them is really superior to any other way.

Occasionally people come to this writer wanting their problems to be labeled, interpreted, and solved psychologically. The frequent answer to them is something like this:

I want to serve and help you and I'm firmly convinced that the best way to do that is God's way. I am resolutely committed to the Scriptures as my sole authority, because I believe God knows far better what our problems really are, why we have them, and what to do about them than anyone else. So because I'm a Christian who is convinced that God's way of understanding and dealing with problems is far superior to any other way and because I want to give you the best help available, my method will be based on Scripture. If you want any different approach, you'll have to secure another counselor. For the Lord's sake and for yours, I can't approach it any other way. [This, of course, is a condensed version of what might involve a considerable amount of time to develop and explain, but it does contain the bare bones of this writer's response to people who are enamored with psychology.]

Over the years this response has brought appreciation for the counselor's honesty, and the counselees have stayed for help. From the very start they would see he was going to be honest with them and that did not destroy the needed relationship. It rather enhanced it.

A biblical counselor must never follow the example of many non-Christian therapists, who hide their true intentions and play games with people in order to get them to change. About Haley, one such therapist, Foley has written,

A third tactic [of Haley's counseling approach] is the encouraging of usual behavior. In this case resistance to the advice can only result in change. For instance, asking a domineering woman to take charge of the family will often highlight her interaction and result in her wanting to recede more into the background. What is important in Haley's approach is the question of control. If the therapist tells the domineering woman to lead, she is no longer leading but following the instructions of the therapist. . . . Like Zen Master the therapist induces change in the client by the use of paradox.¹⁶

Any kind of "reverse psychology" like that is unacceptable for the biblical counselor. It will only create barriers to his desired involvement with the counselee.

Be honest about your limitations as a counselor. When a counselor makes mistakes or has difficulty knowing how to proceed in a particular case, he should admit that. Paul told the Galatians he was "perplexed" about them (Gal 4:20; cf. 2 Cor 4:8). Also, he writes, "I am afraid that when I come again my God will humiliate me before you" (2 Cor 12:21). Now that's being honest! Paul knew and admitted that he was fallible as a minister, an admission that revealed his sincerity and enabled people to trust him.

What role does establishing a facilitative relationship with a counselee play in the counseling process? Scripture underscores its crucial place by exhortation and example. Further, what Scripture teaches, counseling experience illustrates. Here is one counselee's evaluation of some of the factors she considered most helpful in her counseling experience:

For me the content of the counseling in many ways was secondary. Often it was who the counselor was that laid the foundation for whether I could trust, accept, and do what was presented during the counseling.

¹⁶Vincent D. Foley, *An Introduction to Family Therapy* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1974) 84-85.

Admittedly, though, the two cannot be separated. If the counseling is not adequate then whoever the counselor is will not make a difference. But the one has had such an impact on me that I'd like to speak to the issue of the counselor first and probably most, but not to negate nor lessen the importance of the counseling.

It was a big step for me to be under the tutelage of a male. My relationships with both men and women have been so bad that I didn't trust anyone, although it was worse with men than with women. A counselor needs to be trustworthy. For me some of the hardest things in my life did not hit the table until long after I knew my counselor. Much of that was simply that I needed to know that no matter what was happening, he could be trusted. I had many experiences with people who didn't believe me when I told them certain things were happening in my life. I assumed that most people were like that, and feared that they all were. So I did not easily trust anyone. Time was needed and I needed to see that this counselor believed in me. I needed to see that he trusted me. I don't mean to suggest that he never had the right to question the validity of my situation (in fact he did), but I simply needed to see that I was going to be trusted, accepted and believed in.

This also then implies the need for patience, longsuffering, love and respect for the counselee. On one occasion I walked out on the counselor and slipped back down the slide, yet he was patient with me. He hurt with me and even in the midst of my own failings, I sensed the respect from him that helped me start climbing the ladder again. The counselor must not express either verbally or non-verbally the impression that this is just another problem and let's quickly get it solved and move on to more important things or people. My counselor's credibility was built over the long haul he continued to love when I did not love and tried to run. The counselee is important and this must be conveyed. The problem, whatever it is, is serious simply because it is to the counselee and the counselee needs to know that he or she is being taken seriously.

One counselor I've had seemed to have the answers too available on his cuff. At times he responded too quickly and gave the impression of having a canned approach, and I left feeling that he didn't sense the difficulty that existed and the time needed for rebuilding. Whereas my counselor seemed much more sensitive to my own hurts, and although he didn't hesitate to confront me with hard truths, he did it in ways that I knew without a doubt that he loved and cared for me and my growth in Christ.

One other very big element I needed and looked for was whether or not I was accepted. Even when things would seem to go from bad to worse, did he still accept me? As mentioned earlier, this didn't mean that he condoned everything I had done or still did. It didn't mean that

he never rebuked or reproved me or called on me to repent, but it did mean that he did it in a loving and gracious way so that I knew he was my friend and not my enemy. It also meant that my counselor affirmed me when possible he commended and complimented as well as challenged.

To sum it all up, I would say that the most effective counselors are those who are given to prayer, sensitive, loving, patient, tender, forgiving, trustworthy, giving, compassionate, and they counsel in a way that matches that lifestyle. In a sentence, the most effective counselors are people who know Jesus, reflect Jesus, relate to and counsel people in the way He did.

As that letter illustrates, those who come for counsel are often scrutinizing the counselor to see whether he or she is someone who can be trusted. If the counselor is trustworthy, he can establish and maintain the kind of relationship that will make the counseling a profitable experience for both parties.

Though God sometimes chooses to accomplish His work through unlikely ways and unlikely people, the Bible emphasizes (and the above letter illustrates) that God usually changes lives in a situation where a relationship of concern and trust exists between the helper and the one who needs help. Thus the counselor must do all he can to wrap the content of his counseling in a package of compassion, respect, and honesty.

DOES ASSURANCE BELONG TO THE ESSENCE OF FAITH? CALVIN AND THE CALVINISTS

Joel R. Beeke¹

The contemporary church stands in great need of refocusing on the doctrine of assurance if the desirable fruit of Christian living is to abound. A relevant issue in church history centers in whether or not the Calvinists differed from Calvin himself regarding the relationship between faith and assurance. The difference between the two was quantitative and methodological, not qualitative or substantial. Calvin himself distinguished between the definition of faith and the reality of faith in the believer's experience. Alexander Comrie, a representative of the Dutch Second Reformation, held essentially the same position as Calvin in mediating between the view that assurance is the fruit of faith and the view that assurance is inseparable from faith. He and some other Calvinists differ from Calvin in holding to a two-tier approach to the consciousness of assurance. So Calvin and the Calvinists furnish the church with a model to follow that is greatly needed today.

* * * * *

Today many infer that the doctrine of personal assurance—that is, the certainty of one's own salvation—is no longer relevant since nearly all Christians possess assurance in an ample degree. On the contrary, it is probably true that the doctrine of assurance has particular relevance, because today's Christians live in a day of minimal, not maximal, assurance.

Scripture, the Reformers, and post-Reformation men repeatedly

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offer the reminder that personal assurance of salvation is recognizable by its fruits: a close life of fellowship with God; a tender, filial relationship marked with childlike obedience; a thirsting after God and spiritual exercises that extol Him; a longing to glorify Him by the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Where assurance abounds, mission-mindedness prevails. Assured believers pray for and anticipate revival, view heaven as their home, and long for the Second Advent of Christ and their translation to glory (2 Tim 4:6-8).

Assurance, like salvation, is double-sided. It is the summit of intimacy by which the believer both knows Christ and knows he is known by Him. Assurance is not a self-given persuasion, but a Spirit-applied certainty which moves the Christian Godward through Christ.

Today these God-glorifying fruits are often seriously lacking. The desire to fellowship with God, the sense of the reality of heaven, the relish for God's glory, and intercession for revival all fall short of a former day. Whenever the church's emphasis on earthly good dominates the conviction that she is traveling through this world on her way to God and glory, assurance is at a low ebb (Hebrews 11).

Today the church needs to realize again that one important reason the doctrine of saving faith is of central importance to the Christian is because faith is the seed-bed of every kind and degree of personal assurance. This includes assurance that flows from each exercise of faith, from the application of God's promises to the believer, from inward evidences of grace, and from the witness of the Holy Spirit.

This question of the relationship between faith and assurance became a cardinal point in Reformation and particularly in post-Reformation theology: does assurance—that is, certainty of one's own salvation—belong to the essence of faith? More practically, is it possible to have faith without assurance? If so, does not faith lose its vitality, and assurance, its normalcy?

In dealing with these faith/assurance questions, the Reformation and post-Reformation theologians struggled against Roman Catholicism's assertion that no forms of assurance commonly belonged to Christians. But they so struggled largely because their supreme goal was allegiance to Scripture and its authority. At root, they were wrestling with biblical data, exegesis, and hermeneutics. Both testaments display a formidable tension: vital faith and some kind of normal assurance (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:16-22), conjoined with the possibility of lacking assurance (Psalms 38, 73, 88; 2 Pet 1:10).

The central concern in the discussion of faith/assurance questions in Reformation and post-Reformation writing a concern which sorely needs resurfacing today was the outworking of this scriptural tension in a pastoral context. In a meticulous augmentation of early Reformation doctrine, post-Reformed divines affirmed that certain kinds of assurance involve more than an objective resting on the promises of God in Christ. Specifically, they taught that when properly set in a scriptural, Christocentric, and Trinitarian context, the syllogisms² and the witness of the Spirit have a valid place in the believer's assurance valid, that is, as secondary grounds of assurance that do not usurp the primary ground that consists of the promises of God.

However, in dealing with questions on the relationship between faith and assurance, Reformation and post-Reformation theologians *appear* to differ considerably. Whereas the early Reformers held that assurance is part and parcel with faith, post-Reformation divines felt free to distinguish assurance from faith as witnessed by chap. 18 of the Westminster Confession. Scholarship has compounded this apparent difference by regarding it as a substantive, even an antithetical, distinction. At least two schools of interpretive thought have evolved.

The first and oldest group, spearheaded by William Cunningham, and supported by Robert Dabney, Charles Hodge, John

²A syllogism is a conclusion drawn from an action. The basic form of the syllogism when it pertains to salvation is as follows: Major premise: Those only who do 'x' are saved. Minor premise: But by the grace of God I do 'x'. Conclusion: Therefore I am saved. Many post-Reformation divines taught that two very closely related, yet distinct, syllogisms could be used to fortify assurance the practical syllogism (*syllogismus practicus*) and the mystical syllogism (*syllogismus mysticus*).

The practical syllogism was based largely on the believer's sanctification and good works as evidenced in practical daily life. Hence, major premise: According to Scripture, only those who possess saving faith will receive the Spirit's testimony that their lives manifest fruits of sanctification and good works. Minor premise: I cannot deny that by God's grace I have received the Spirit's testimony that I manifest fruits of sanctification and good works. Conclusion: I may be assured that I possess saving faith.

The mystical syllogism was based largely on the believer's internal exercises and progress in the steps of grace. Major premise: According to Scripture, only those who possess saving faith will experience the Spirit's testimony confirming inward grace and godliness, such that self will decrease and Christ will increase. Minor premise: I cannot deny that by the grace of God I experience the Spirit's testimony confirming inward grace and godliness such that self decreases and Christ increases. Conclusion: I may be assured that I possess saving faith.

Macleod, and others, views the post-Reformation distinction between faith and assurance as a positive outworking of early Reformation principles. This Calvinistic school regards the Reformers as leaving the faith/assurance question in embryonic form for maturation under their pastoral successors. The difference between the Reformers and the post-Reformation men is substantial and developmental, but not antithetical.³

The bulk of current scholarship, however, no longer views the post-Reformation struggle to develop a detailed doctrine of assurance as a faithful outworking of early Reformation principles. Rather, post-Reformation agonizings to develop a doctrine of assurance have been more recently regarded as antithetical to the simplicity of the early Reformers' insistence on the inseparability of faith and assurance. It is argued that the Reformers, and Calvin in particular, allowed no room for the practical syllogism and similar supposedly non-Christological devices as aids for defining or gaining subjective assurance. Rather, they argue, assurance must be realized exclusively through resting on the objective promises of God in Christ Jesus. With notable exceptions,⁴ the post-Reformers are viewed as having injected a cold

³A definitive essay by William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Doctrine of Assurance" (1856), first published in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* (October, 1856), has been regarded as prototypical for conservative Reformed scholarship. Cunningham argues that the Reformers embraced "exaggerated views and statements on personal assurance" as essential for every believer for two prime reasons: "First, their own personal experience as converted and believing men," in which they were graced with a large degree of assurance to parallel their "difficult and arduous labours in the cause of Christ." Secondly, Cunningham claims that "the ground taken by the Romanists in arguing against them" on the normativity of assurance stirred the Reformers to place an exaggerated accent on assurance as decisive (reprinted as Essay III in *The Reformers and Theology of the Reformation* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1862] 113, 116, 118).

⁴During the 1970's a fresh reevaluation of Protestant orthodoxy along more traditional lines was initiated by the following major works: Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza: Development of the Reformed Doctrine* (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972); John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1975); Olivier Fatio, *Méthode et théologie: Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la scholastique réformée* (Genève: Droz, 1976); Marvin W. Anderson, *Peter Martyr: A Reformer in Exile (1542-1562)* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1975); W. Robert Godfrey, "Tensions within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1974).

systematic scholasticism into the doctrines of faith and assurance, thereby supplanting the pastoral tone of the Reformers.

In various contexts Basil Hall, Robert T. Kendall and others represent this contemporary school of thought.⁵ According to that more recent scholarly consensus, Theodore Beza and William Perkins are regarded as the culprits who packed and pushed the post-Reformation doctrine of assurance down the slope of experimental subjectivity until it snowballed into the Westminster Assembly's

In the 1980's, interest in this fresh reappraisal has been sparked especially by Richard A. Muller who has ably shown that late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed documents did not support the theory of a "predestinarian metaphysic" which smothered the biblicism of the first-generation Reformers. Rather, Muller argues that although the theologians of the post-Reformation period used a scholastic methodology to clarify the Reformed theological system, they remained in essential agreement with the first generation of Reformed thought in content. According to Muller, post-Reformation orthodoxy often disagreed with the content of medieval scholasticism, but advantageously used its organizational structure. Hence in post-Reformation scholastic orthodoxy, "scholastic" refers to the method of theology utilized, "orthodoxy" to the content and doctrinal intention. Though Reformed scholastic orthodoxy stands in some methodological discontinuity with Calvin, it retains strong affinity with Reformation teaching; indeed, the Reformation is incomplete without its confessional and theological codification (*Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988]; *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* [vols. 1-2; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987-1994]. Volume 3 is forthcoming.)

For support of Muller's basic reappraisal, but with unique emphases, cf. Donald W. Sinnema, "The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618-19) in Light of the History of This Doctrine" (PhD dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, 1985); Martin I. Klauber, "The Context and Development of the Views of Jean-Alphonse Turretini (1671-1737) on Religious Authority" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987); Stephen R. Spencer, "Reformed Scholasticism in Medieval Perspective: Thomas Aquinas and Francis Turretini on the Incarnation" (PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 1988); Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

⁵Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin* (ed. by G. E. Duffield; Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966) 19-37; R. T. Kendall, "Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers," in *Living the Christian Life* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1974) 45-60; *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin* (ed. by W. Stanford Reid; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 199-214. Scholars with convictions similar to one or more of the theses of Hall and Kendall include Brian Armstrong, Karl Barth, John Beardslee, M. Charles Bell, Ernst Bizer, James Daane, Johannes Dantine, Edward Dowey, Otto Gründler, Philip Holtrop, Walter Kickel, Donald McKim, Philip McNair, Jürgen Moltmann, Charles Munson, Wilhelm Niesel, Norman Pettit, Pontien Polman, Jack Rogers, Holmes Rolston III, and Hans Emil Weber.

betrayal of Calvinism via an "apparently unquestioned acceptance of a distinction between faith and assurance, for 'Faith' was one heading in the Confession, and 'Certainty of Salvation' another."⁶ According to Kendall, the Westminster theology of the 1640's represents a *qualitative* departure from authentic Calvinism in a variety of doctrines connected with assurance, including the decrees of God, the covenant of grace, sanctification, atonement, repentance, and the role of the human will in soteriology.

Though Cunningham is far more historically accurate than Kendall, even he is not altogether correct. Neither has reached the heart of the issue. Both, particularly Kendall, exaggerate the different emphases involved. With regard to the faith/assurance question in Calvin and Calvinism, the theories of qualitative departure (Kendall) or of non-antithetical yet substantial discrepancy (Cunningham), are both erroneous.

The discrepancy between Calvin and Calvinism on faith and assurance was largely *quantitative* and *methodological*. In other words, it was a matter of emphasis and method, rather than *qualitative* or *substantial*. The present writer has shown elsewhere that these quantitative differences stem largely from a newly evolving emphasis in the pastoral context of the post-Reformation period.⁷ Second and third generation Protestant pastors often felt compelled to augment and clarify the magisterial Reformers' doctrine of assurance because of their conviction that numerous parishioners were taking God's saving grace for granted.

In this article the aim is to show through a comparison of John Calvin (1509-1564) and a typical Dutch Second Reformation divine, Alexander Comrie (1706-1774), that notwithstanding different emphases on the question of personal assurance of faith, both Calvin *and* the Calvinists were fundamentally of one mind on assurance. The focus is on Calvin because he has rightly been called *the* theologian of the sixteenth-century Reformation who wrote extensively on faith, and on Comrie because he represents the mature age of post-Reformation thinking and devoted all his major works to the doctrine of faith.

JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)

⁶Kendall, "Puritan Modification" 214.

⁷Beeke, *Assurance of Faith* 21, 33-34, 78-79, 83, 86-87, 112 ff., 143, 157, 167-68, 174 ff., 185 ff., 282, 283, 312, 316, 328-29, 345-49, 365-76. Cf. Richard Lovelace, "Evangelicalism: Recovering a Tradition of Spiritual Depth," *The Reformed Journal* 40/7 (September 1990) 21.

Nature and Definition of Faith

Calvin's doctrine of assurance both reaffirmed the basic tenets of Luther and Zwingli and disclosed particular emphases of his own. As with Luther and Zwingli, faith is never merely assent (*assensus*) for Calvin, but always involves both knowledge (*cognitio*) and confidence or trust (*fiducia*). Calvin emphatically affirms that knowledge and confidence are saving dimensions of the life of faith rather than mere notional matters. Faith is not historical knowledge plus saving assent as Beza would later teach,⁸ but a saving and certain knowledge conjoined with a saving and assured trust.⁹

Knowledge for Calvin is foundational to faith. This knowledge rests upon *the Word of God*; hence assurance must be sought in the Word¹⁰ and flows *out of* the Word.¹¹ Faith always says "amen" to the Scriptures.¹²

Hence faith is also inseparable from *Christ and God's promises*, for the sum and substance of the written Word is the living Word, Jesus Christ, in whom all God's promises are "yea and amen."¹³ True faith receives Christ, the one clothed in the gospel and graciously offered by the Father.¹⁴ Calvin makes much of the promises of God as the ground of assurance, because these promises depend on the very nature of that God who cannot lie rather than on any works performed by sinners.¹⁵ Moreover, since faith takes its character from the promise on which it rests, faith takes to itself the infallible stamp of God's very Word, and so possesses assurance in its very nature. Assurance,

⁸*Theodori Bezae Vezelii Volumen primum (-tertium) Tractationum Theologicarum* (2nd ed.; Genevae: apud Eustathium Vignon, 1582) 1:678, 3:405.

⁹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [hereafter: *Inst.*] (ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by F. L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) Book 3, chap. 3, sec. 14. (Hereafter the format, *Inst.* 3.3.14, will be used.) For Calvin's Latin works, see *Opera quae supersunt omnia* (ed. by Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss, vols. 29-87 in *Corpus Reformatorum*; Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke et filium, 1863-1900). (Hereafter:

CO)¹⁰*Calvin's Commentaries* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), on Matt 8:13. (Hereafter:

Commentary)

¹¹*Commentary* (on John 4:22).

¹²Cf. Exalto, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs bij Calvijn* 24.

¹³*Commentary* (on Gen 15:6; Luke 2:21).

¹⁴*Inst.* 3.2.32.

¹⁵*Inst.* 3.2.29, 41; *Commentary* (on Acts 2:39).

confidence, certainty, trust—all belong to the essence of faith.

This assured and assuring faith is the gift and work of *the Holy Spirit granted to the elect*. The Spirit persuades the elect sinner of the reliability of God's promise in Christ and grants faith to embrace that Word.¹⁶

Thus, for Calvin assuring faith joins indissolubly with *saving knowledge, the Scriptures, Jesus Christ, God's promises, the work of the Holy Spirit, and election*. In a word, God Himself is the assurance of the elect. Assurance is gratuitously founded upon God; apart from God's grace, a sinner cannot experience it in any way.¹⁷

Consequently, Calvin's formal definition of faith reads like this:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

In this definition, Calvin argues that faith involves something more than fully believing the undoubted promise of God *objectively*; it also contains personal, *subjective* assurance in the sense that in believing God's promise to sinners, the true believer recognizes and celebrates that God is gracious and benevolent to him in particular.

¹⁶Inst. 3.2.16.

¹⁷*Commentary* (on Rom 8:16; 1 Pet 1:4; Heb 4:10).

¹⁸Inst. 3.2.7. Michael Eaton points out that in Calvin's formal definition of faith passivity is stressed. "Faith is not doing anything; it is seeing something, it is recognition, knowledge, certainty and a firm conviction" (*Baptism with the Spirit. The Teaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* [Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989] 43). Though faith's passivity is implicit in this particular definition, such statements are frequently used to set the stage for a radical discontinuity between Calvin and the Puritans of the Westminster Confession who stressed the activity of faith. E.g., Kendall asserts that the nature of faith can be subsumed under two categories—one that is intellectualistic and passive having to do with knowledge; the other, voluntaristic and active having to do with the will. Having adopted this simplistic dichotomy, Kendall declares Calvin to be an intellectualist and Beza a voluntarist, which in turn leads to the Westminster Confession's alleged crypto-Arminianism (*Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* 3, 19-20, 34).

In reality, Calvin stressed both the passivity (when divine sovereignty, initial regeneration, and/or justification were in view) and activity of faith (when sanctification and/or the believer's responsibility were being emphasized). Cf. Robert Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort" (PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1979) 2:70-71n.

From a definition of faith that embraces assurance, Calvin logically concludes that anyone who "believes" but lacks the conviction that he is saved by God is not a true believer after all:

No man is a believer, I say, except he who, leaning upon the assurance of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death. . . . We cannot otherwise well comprehend the goodness of God unless we gather it from the fruit of great assurance.¹⁹

It is this kind of statement that evokes the charge of "incautiousness" leveled against Calvin by William Cunningham and Robert Dabney.²⁰ A culling of Calvin's *Institutes*, commentaries and sermons, however, also presents a formidable array of qualifying statements of an equally intense nature.

Calvin often repeats these themes, intermingled with a lofty doctrine of faith: unbelief dies hard; assurance is often contested by doubt; severe temptations, wrestlings, and strife are normative; Satan and the remnants of remaining flesh assault faith; trust in God is hedged about with fear.²¹

Clearly Calvin allows for varying degrees of faith and assurance. He often speaks of such concepts as "infancy of faith," "beginnings of faith," and "weak faith."²² He asserts assurance to be proportional to faith's development.²³ Regeneration, sanctification, repentance, faith, and assurance are all progressive.²⁴

In a remarkable exposition of John 20:3, Calvin seems to contradict his assertion that believers know themselves to be such when he testifies that the disciples had faith without being aware of it as they approached the empty tomb:

There being so little faith, or rather almost no faith, both in the disciples and in the women, it is astonishing that they had so great zeal; and, indeed, it is not possible that religious feelings led them to seek Christ.

¹⁹Inst. 3.2.16.

²⁰Cunningham, *Reformers* 119 ff.; Robert Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (reprint; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967) 1:216 ff., and *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) 702, 709.

²¹Inst. 3.2.7; *Commentary* (on Matt 8:25; Luke 2:40).

²²Cf. particularly Inst. 3.2.17-21; *Commentary* (on Gal 4:6).

²³Inst. 3.2.33 ff.

²⁴Inst. 3.2.14; *Commentary* (on John 2:11; 1 John 5:13).

Some seed of faith, therefore, remained in their hearts, but quenched for a time, so that they were not aware of having what they had. Thus the Spirit of God often works in the elect in a secret manner. In short, we must believe that there was some concealed root, from which we see fruit produced.²⁵

This leads to a consideration of the nucleus of the faith-assurance dilemma in Calvin: how can Calvin interweave assertions of faith as definable in terms of full assurance while allowing for some possibility of faith lacking conscious assurance? Here lies a set of apparent contradictions. Assurance is free from doubt, yet not always so. It does not hesitate, yet can hesitate. It contains security, but may be beset with anxiety. The faithful have firm assurance, yet waver and tremble.

Making Sense of Apparent Contradictions

How are these paradoxes resolved?²⁶ There are at least four principles out of which Calvin operates in addressing this complex issue. Each of these assists in making sense out of apparent contradictions.

1. *Faith and experience.* Calvin finds it necessary to distinguish between *the definition of faith* and *the reality of the believer's experience*. This sheds considerable light on the dilemma. After expounding faith as embracing "great assurance," Calvin addresses this tension as follows:

Still, someone will say: "Believers *experience* something far different: In recognizing the grace of God toward themselves they are not only tried by disquiet, which often comes upon them, but they are repeatedly shaken by gravest terrors. For so violent are the temptations that trouble their minds as not to seem quite compatible with that certainty of faith." Accordingly, we shall have to solve this difficulty if we wish the above-

²⁵Ibid., 18:250, emphasis added; cf. Inst. 3.2.12.

²⁶Is Cunningham right in asserting that "Calvin never contradicted himself so plainly and palpably as this [when] in immediate connection with the definition given from him of saving faith, he had made statements, with respect to the condition of the mind that may exist in believers, which cannot well be reconciled with the formal definition" (*Reformers* 120)? Cf. Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 25-26; Cornelis Graafland, *De zekerheid van het geloof: Een onderzoek naar de geloofbeschouwing van enige vertegenwoordigers van reformatie en nadere reformatie* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1961) 21-22n.

stated doctrine to stand. Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed.²⁷

This quotation, and more of like nature (most notably when dealing with sacramental strengthening of faith²⁸), indicate that although Calvin is anxious to keep faith and assurance in close proximity by definition, he also recognizes that in actual experience the Christian gradually grows into a more full faith in God's promises.

2. *Flesh versus spirit.* There is a second, interwoven principle by which Calvin aids in grasping his "ought to"/"is" tension in faith, namely, *flesh versus spirit*.²⁹ Christians experience this spirit-flesh tension so acutely because the presence of the Holy Spirit has instigated and maintains it.³⁰ The many paradoxes that permeate experiential faith (e.g., Romans 7:14-25 in the classical Reformed interpretation) find their resolution in this tension: "So then with the mind [spirit] I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (v. 25).³¹

In Calvin, the "sure consolation" of the spirit is side-by-side with "the imperfection" of the flesh, for these are the two principles the believer finds within himself. Since the final victory of the spirit over the flesh is an eschatological hope in Christ, the Christian finds himself in perpetual struggle in this life. The principle of "spirit" fills him "with delight in recognizing the divine goodness"³² even as the principle of flesh activates his natural proneness to unbelief.³³ "Daily struggles of conscience" beset him as long as the "vestiges of the flesh"

²⁷Cf. Inst. 3.2.16-17, emphasis added.

²⁸Inst. 4.14.7.

²⁹Inst. 3.2.17-18.

³⁰Cf. Victor A. Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (Macon: Mercer University, 1983) 24-28.

³¹Hence Calvin can write, "Nothing prevents believers from being afraid and at the same time possessing the surest consolation. . . . Fear and faith [can] dwell in the same mind. . . . Surely this is so: We *ought* not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him. Rather we *ought* to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us" (Inst. 3.2.24, emphasis added).

³²Inst. 3.2.18.

³³Inst. 3.2.20.

remain.³⁴

In short, Calvin teaches that from *the spirit* of faith arise hope, joy, assurance; from *the flesh*, fear, doubt, disillusionment. Though these two principles may operate simultaneously, Calvin maintains that imperfection and doubt are attributable only to the flesh, not to faith. The works of the flesh often attend faith, but do not mix with it. The true believer may lose many spiritual "battles" along the pathway of life, but he shall not lose the ultimate "war" against the flesh. Prayer and the sacraments assist the spirit of faith in gaining the ultimate victory.

3. *Germ of faith versus consciousness of faith.* Despite the tensions between definition and experience, spirit and flesh, Calvin is able to maintain that faith and assurance are not mingled with unbelief so as to result in mere probability rather than certainty.³⁵ Calvin escapes the Roman Catholic conclusion of mere probability by teaching that the smallest germ of faith contains assurance in its very essence, even when the believer is not always able to grasp this assurance because of weakness in being conscious of his faith.³⁶

Consequently, though the Christian is tossed about with doubt and perplexity when faith is not in practical exercise, the seed of faith which the Spirit has planted cannot perish. Precisely because it is the *Spirit's* seed, faith contains and retains the element of assurance. The *sense* or *feeling* of assurance increases and decreases in proportion to the rise and decline of faith's exercises, but *the seed of faith* itself can never change or fluctuate. Thus, assurance is normal, but varies in degree and constancy relative to the believer's consciousness. In responding to weak assurance, according to Calvin, the pastor should not deny the organic tie between faith and assurance, but should urge the pursuit of stronger faith through the use of the means of grace.

4. *Trinitarian framework.* Finally, through a broad sweeping principle, namely, a *Trinitarian framework* for the doctrines of faith and assurance, Calvin intends to spur forward those inclined to doubt. The *election* of the Father must prevail over the works of Satan. The *righteousness* of the Son must prevail over the sinfulness of the believer.

³⁴ *Commentary* (on John 13:9).

³⁵ Cf. Graafland, *Zekerheid van het geloof* 31n.

³⁶ Inst. 3.2.19-21. Also, in 3.2.19 Calvin states that even a little radiance of God's light is sufficient to grant "firm assurance."

The *assuring witness* of the Spirit must prevail over the soul's infirmities. In this manner assured faith must and shall conquer the doubt of unbelief.

For Calvin, a complex set of means establish assurance, not the least of which is *the Father's election and preservation* in Christ. Hence Calvin can write that "predestination duly considered does not shake faith, but rather affords the best confirmation of it,"³⁷ especially when viewed in the context of the believer's daily calling to live by assured faith:

The firmness of our election is joined to our calling [and] is another means of establishing our assurance. For all whom [Christ] receives, the Father is said to have entrusted and committed to Him to keep to eternal life.³⁸

Such undergirding of salvation's certainty by election is possible only in a Christocentric context for Calvin; hence his constant accent on Christ as the mirror of election "wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election."³⁹ Election turns the believer's eyes from the despairing hopelessness of his inability to meet any conditions of salvation to focus on the certainty of Jesus Christ as God's pledge of gratuitous love and mercy.⁴⁰ Through union with Christ "the assurance of salvation becomes real and effective as the assurance of election."⁴¹ Consequently, Christians ought not to think of Christ as "standing afar off, and not dwelling in us."⁴² In this Christological manner Calvin seeks to reduce the "distance" between election as God's decretal, eternal, and hidden act, which is objective from the believer's subjective apprehension of assurance that he is elect. For Calvin, election does not raise the question of assurance; rather, election *answers* it. In Christ the believer

³⁷Inst. 3.24.9.

³⁸Inst. 3.24.6.

³⁹Inst. 3.24.5; cf. John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973) 47, and his sermon on "The Doctrine of Election," in *Sermons from Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 41 ff.; CO 8:318-321; 9:757.

⁴⁰Cf. William Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1961) 66.

⁴¹Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (London: Butterworth, 1956) 196. Cf. Inst. 3.1.1; Shepherd, *Nature and Function of Faith* 51.

⁴²Inst. 3.2.24.

"sees" his election; in the gospel, he "hears" of his election.

For Calvin, however, there is much that resembles faith that lacks a saving character. For example, he speaks of "unformed faith," "implicit faith," "the preparation of faith," "temporary faith," "an illusion of faith," "a false show of faith," "shadow-types of faith," "transitory faith," faith "under a cloak of hypocrisy," and a "momentary awareness of grace."⁴³ Self-deceit is a real possibility. In fact, the reprobate often feel nearly identical to the elect with regard to faith: "There is a great likeness and affinity between God's elect and those who are given a transitory faith."⁴⁴ Consequently, self-examination is essential: "Let us learn to examine ourselves, and to search whether those interior marks by which God distinguishes his children from strangers belong to us, viz., the living root of piety and faith."⁴⁵

Even in self-examination, however, Calvin maintains a Christological emphasis. People must descend into their conscience to examine whether they are placing their trust in Christ alone, because this is the fruit of experience grounded in the Scriptures. "If you contemplate yourself [apart from Christ, the Word, and the Spirit], that is sure damnation."⁴⁶

Thus, Calvin's line of reasoning proceeds like this: (1) The purpose of election embraces salvation. (2) The elect are not chosen for anything in themselves, but only in Christ. (3) Since the elect are in Christ, the assurance of their election and salvation can never be found in themselves apart from Christ, nor in the Father apart from Christ.

⁴³Inst. 3.2.3, 5, 10-11. For Calvin on temporary faith, see David Foxgrover, "'Temporary Faith' and the Certainty of Salvation," *CTJ* 15 (1980):220-32; A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *VE* 11 (1979):45-46. On temporary and unformed faith, see Exalto, *De Zekerheid des Geloofs bij Calvijn* 15-20, 27-30.

⁴⁴Inst. 3.2.11.

⁴⁵*Commentary* (on Ezek 13:9). David Foxgrover has shown with scores of quotations that Calvin firmly believed in the necessity of self-examination and in searching the conscience. Calvin has related the need for self-examination to a great variety of topics: knowledge of God and ourselves, judgment, repentance, confession, affliction, the Lord's Supper, providence, duty, the kingdom of God, etc. ("John Calvin's Understanding of Conscience" 312 ff.). Cf. J. P. Pelkonen, "The Teaching of John Calvin on the Nature and Function of the Conscience," *LQ* 21 (1969):24-88.

⁴⁶Inst. 3.2.24. Many scholars underscore the latter emphasis in Calvin, but neglect the former, leaving the impression that he is against all searching self-examination. E.g., see Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism* 26.

(4) Rather, their assurance is to be had in Christ; hence vital communion with Him is the basis of assurance.⁴⁷ But the questions remain: how do the elect achieve this vital communion? How does such communion impart assurance?

Calvin's answer is pneumatological: the *Holy Spirit* applies Christ and His benefits to the hearts and lives of guilty, elect sinners, through which they are assured that Christ belongs to them and they to Him by saving faith.⁴⁸ The Spirit especially confirms within them the reliability of God's promises in Christ.

Calvin advocates a cardinal and pervasive role for the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. As personal comforter, seal, earnest, testimony, security, and anointing, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the believer's gracious adoption.⁴⁹ *To distinguish the reprobate from the elect*, the Holy Spirit must subjectively seal an objective reliance upon God's promises as the primary ground for assurance. The reprobate may claim God's promises without experiencing the "feeling" (*sensus*) or "consciousness" of those promises.⁵⁰

When distinguishing the elect from the reprobate, Calvin feels compelled to speak more about what the Spirit does *in us* than what Christ does *for us*, for in the subjective aspect the line of demarcation is sharper. He speaks much of inward experience, of feeling, of enlightenment, of perception, even of "violent emotion."⁵¹ Though aware of the dangers of excessive introspection and subjectivity, Calvin also recognizes that the promises of God are sufficient for the

⁴⁷See Inst. 3.24.5.

⁴⁸*Commentary* (on Rom 8:16).

⁴⁹*Commentary* (on 2 Cor 1:21-22). Cf. Inst. 3.2.11, 34, 41; *Commentary* (on John 7:37-39; Acts 2:4; 3:8; 5:32; 13:48; 16:14; 23:11; Rom 8:15-17; 1 Cor 2:10-13; Gal 3:2; 4:6; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30. For Calvin, the "enlightening and sealing work of the Spirit in our heart and understanding also belongs to the essence of faith, hence also to the assurance of faith" (Graafland, "'Waarheid in het Binnenste': Geloofszekerheid bij Calvijn en de Nadere Reformatie," in *Een Vaste Burcht* [ed. by K. Exalto; Kampen: Kok, 1989] 58).

⁵⁰Calvin teaches that the Spirit often does work in the reprobate albeit in an inferior manner. Their minds may be momentarily "illuminated" so that they may seem to have a "beginning of faith"; nevertheless, they "never receive anything but a confused awareness of grace" (Inst. 3.2.11).

⁵¹"Too few scholars have been willing to recognize the intensely experiential nature of Calvin's doctrine of faith" (M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* [Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985] 20).

believer only when the Spirit brings them within the scope and experience of faith.⁵²

By insisting that the Spirit's primary mode of bringing assurance is to direct the believer to embrace the promises of God in Christ, Calvin rejects any confidence being placed in the believer as he is in himself. Nevertheless, Calvin does not deny that a *subordinate means* to bolster assurance is through the Spirit as He works within the believer to bear fruit in good works and various marks of grace. Specifically, the Holy Spirit may assure the believer that he is not a reprobate or temporary believer by revealing to him that he possesses "signs which are sure attestations"⁵³ of faith, such as "divine calling, illumination by Christ's Spirit, communion with Christ, receiving Christ by faith, the embracing of Christ, perseverance of the faith, the avoidance of self-confidence, and fear."⁵⁴ Though never foundational, this secondary support is highly beneficial for the "further establishment" of assurance.⁵⁵

Thus, Calvin does not present a denial of the practical syllogism so much as "a warning against its misuse and misinterpretation."⁵⁶ The real issue at stake in the practical syllogism is not its presence in the thought of Calvin and the Calvinists, but the form it takes within their systems and the message it implies for both doctrine and life. For Calvin the practical syllogism must be in the context of great hallmarks of the Reformation: Scripture alone,⁵⁷ faith alone, Christ alone, and the glory of God alone. Break one of these principles in teaching the practical syllogism, and the whole concept becomes a curse instead of a blessing. At best, works serve as an adjunct to faith in Christ. The practical syllogism may never replace the promises of God as the primary ground of assurance; it must always retain a secondary confirming role. Otherwise, uncertainty will replace certainty. Most major roots of later Calvinistic teaching on faith and assurance thus evidence their presence in Calvin.⁵⁸

ALEXANDER COMRIE (1706-1774)

⁵²Inst. 3.1.1.

⁵³Inst. 3.24.4.

⁵⁴Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* 28.

⁵⁵*Commentary* (on 2 Pet 1:10); cf. *CO* 55:450.

⁵⁶Muller, *Christ and the Decree* 25.

⁵⁷Inst. 3.2.28-29.

⁵⁸Francois Wendel, *Calvin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 276.

Alexander Comrie⁵⁹ was one of the last bright lights of the so-called Dutch Second Reformation (a poor translation of the term, *Nadere Reformatie*, which most literally means "further Reformation").⁶⁰ As a reaction to cold rationalism which had evolved in some circles of orthodoxy, the Dutch Second Reformation aimed to apply Reformed truth to daily life and experience.⁶¹

A native of Scotland, Comrie was converted under the preaching and catechizing of the Erskine brothers, Ebenezer (1680-1754) and Ralph (1685-1752).⁶² After receiving an excellent education,⁶³ he was ordained in a Reformed Dutch church at

⁵⁹For biographical information on Comrie, see *The ABC of Faith* (trans. and intro. by J. Marcus Banfield; Ossett, W. Yorks: Zoar, 1978) 1-15; C. Graafland, "Alexander Comrie," in *De Nadere Reformatie: Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers* (ed. by T. Brienen, et al.; 's-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1986) 315-48; Abraham Kuyper, "Alexander Comrie: His Life and Work in Holland," *Catholic Presbyterian* 7 (1882):20-29, 192-201, 278-84; Geoffrey Thomas, "Alexander Comrie: Contender for the Faith," *Banner of Truth* 65-66 (Feb/Mar 1969):4-8, 29-35; W. Van Gorsel, *De Ijver Zijn Huis: De Nadere Reformatie en haar belangrijkste vertegenwoordigers* (n.p.: Pieters-Groede, 1981) 108-115; A. Vergunst, "Dr. Alexander Comrie," *De Saambinder* 51 (1973):#25, 2; #27, 2; #29, 1; #31, 3; #32, 2, and "Comrie on Faith," *Insight Into* (June 1983) 3-7.

Two dissertations have been published on Comrie: Anthonia Gerrit Honig, *Alexander Comrie* (Utrecht: H. Honig, 1892), which includes an extensive account of his life, 1-182, and J. H. R. Verboom, *Dr. Alexander Comrie, predikant van Woubrugge* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1964), which includes a history of his congregation as well.

⁶⁰For difficulties with the term, *Nadere Reformatie*, as well as the parallels of this movement to English Puritanism and German Pietism, see Beeke, *Assurance of Faith* 383-87.

⁶¹A variety of emphases developed among Dutch Second Reformation leaders, however, as to how this goal could best be achieved. Some, like Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) and Comrie, attempted to coalesce scholastic thinking and godly living on the foundation of the sixteenth-century Reformation; others, such as the Teellincks (Eewout, 1571-1629; Willem, 1579-1629) and the à Brakels (Theodorus, 1608-1669; Wilhelmus, 1635-1711), placed prime emphasis on pietistic inclinations.

⁶²The Erskine brothers were among the most prominent "Marrow Men" in the so-called Marrow Controversy which agitated the Church of Scotland in the early eighteenth century on law and gospel issues related to assurance of faith and the offer of grace (see note 84 below).

⁶³Comrie had to relinquish his studies temporarily at twenty years of age, however, due to economic hardship. Subsequently, he traveled to the Low Countries and matriculated at Groningen University as a student of divinity in order to sit under two champions of Reformed theology, Anthonias Driessen and Cornelius van Velsen. In 1733 he transferred from

Woubrugge, where his thirty-eight-year ministry pioneered a spiritual movement that spread throughout a large portion of the Netherlands.⁶⁴ Throughout his Woubrugge years, Comrie wrote extensively on the doctrine of saving faith and its relationship to justification.⁶⁵ It was especially his contributions to the doctrine of saving faith that gained him renown both among his peers and the "pious" throughout the Netherlands.⁶⁶

In mid-eighteenth-century Holland, the crux of theological debate both within and beyond the boundaries of Reformed thought centered around a scrupulous elucidation of Protestantism's initial tenet—justification by faith alone, and most particularly around the cardinal question, does assurance belong to the essence of faith? Comrie's role in this debate was a critical one—not only because he was a prolific writer on it, but especially because he aimed to play a mediating role which identifies him strikingly with Calvin in several respects.

On one side of the debate were Wilhelmus à Brakel, Jacob Groenewegen, and the German, Friedrich Lampe. These divines

Groningen to Leiden in order to study philosophy under W. J. 's-Gravesande, who had the greatest single influence over him of any of his teachers. After a year at Leiden he received his Doctorate in Philosophy on October 5, 1734 with a dissertation entitled *De Moralitatis Fundamento et Natura Virtutis*—an in-depth study of Rene Descartes, largely critical.

⁶⁴The last twenty months of his life, he spent in Gouda as pastoral supply. It was there that he died and was buried in December 1774. Cf. Verboom, *Dr. Alexander Comrie, predikant van Woubrugge* 176-80.

⁶⁵The following major works of Comrie are abbreviated as follows: *HC = Stellige en Praktikale Verklaringe van den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (Amsterdam: N. Byl, 1753; reprint; Barneveld: G. J. van Horssen, 1976); *LR = Verzameling van Leerredenen* (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1749); *EZG = Verhandeling van eenige Eigenschappen des Zaligmakenden Geloofs* (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1744)—his *magnum opus*, unfortunately translated only piecemeal into English; *Brief = Brief over de Rechtvaardigmakinge des Zondaars door de onmiddelyke Toerekening der Borggerechtigheit van Christus* (Amsterdam: N. Byl, 1761). Two major works not abbreviated are *A. B. C. dess Geloofs* (Sneek: F. Holtkamp, 1860), and *Examen van het Ontwerp van Tolerantie* (Amsterdam: N. Byl, 1753-59).

⁶⁶Hence the focus will be on Comrie in this article rather than on other Dutch theologians, such as Wilhelmus à Brakel or Petrus van Mastricht, who may have been more renowned as practical theologians, but who did not probe the doctrines of faith and assurance as deeply as did Comrie.

argued that assurance must be regarded as a fruit of faith. They regarded hungering and thirsting after Christ as belonging to what the Dutch called "refuge-taking" faith, as distinct from "assured" faith. They deemed refuge-taking faith to be of the essence of faith, and assured faith, of the fruit of faith. They were sure that the attachment of assurance to faith was pastorally injurious because it discouraged "beginners in grace" by causing them to think that their lack of assurance meant that they were as yet unregenerate.

On the other side were Theodore van der Groe and Theodore van Thuyne who maintained that assurance is inseparable from faith. They argued that Calvin maintained that one who lacks assurance of personal salvation lacks saving faith. Moreover, they were insistent on pointing out that the view of à Brakel and Lampe left open a potentially dangerous pastoral condition. Convicted sinners who were hungering for Christ might be encouraged to build their salvation on their hunger without ever receiving Christ with an assured faith.

Comrie argued that both positions contained salvageable elements which could be combined in a right understanding of Calvin. Like Calvin, Comrie maintained that assurance certainly belongs to the essence of faith, but also that the faith of Christians did not always *actively* confirm their personal salvation in Christ.⁶⁷ The dilemma of assurance being both of the essence of faith and yet distinguishable from it, Comrie believed he could best address through a number of theological distinctions, two of which are the following:

The "Habit" (habitus) and "Act" (actus) of Faith

The paramount distinction in Comrie's thought, *habitus* and *actus*, served as the foundation and organizing principle of his doctrine of faith. This distinction was by no means novel,⁶⁸ but did receive fresh treatment at his hands. Comrie believed that a prime cause of

⁶⁷Gerrit H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980-83) 2:404.

⁶⁸Originally a Thomistic notion, several Reformers with scholastic tendencies found it helpful for distinguishing "faith as an infused habit" and "faith as an act arising out of the infused habit" (Zacharias Ursinus, *Opera theologica* [Heidelbergae: Impensis Iona Rosae, 1612] 3:210; Hieronymus Zanchius, *Clariss. Viri D. Hier Zanchii Omnium operum theologorum* [Genevae: Samuelis Crispini, 1619] 4:241-42). Among the Puritans the *habitus-actus* distinction served largely pastoral ends (cf. Edward Reynolds, *Three Treatises of The Vanity of the Creature. The Sinfulness of Sinne. The Life of Christ* [London: R. B. for Rob. Boftocke and George Badger, 1642] 508).

the disharmony on faith among the Dutch Second Reformation theologians was the widespread failure to make this distinction: (1) faith as an "in-wrought *habitus*" coinciding with regeneration; and (2) faith in its various activities (hence, *actus*). The Holy Spirit enables the true believer to perform the acts of faith only when the habit of faith is brought into exercise. By the habit of faith Comrie intends the principle, capacity, ability, and faculty of faith.⁶⁹ By the acts of faith, he means those activities—saving knowledge, saving assent, and saving confidence—that flow forth from the habit of faith.⁷⁰ Thus, the habit of faith is the new quality infused into the soul by God, whereas the acts of faith are its positive exercises, which make faith a practical reality.

Comrie underscored the habit of faith as the accent of historic Protestantism, defining faith as follows:

By faith we understand the habit or principle, which God the Holy Spirit has poured into the hearts of the elect, together with the new nature as its first and most important element, by which they attain out of Christ and passing into them from Christ, the ability to receive all the impressions which the Divine Word makes upon this faculty, and accordingly, to be itself active.⁷¹

From this definition and its subsequent exposition, Comrie brings several salient emphases to the fore:

(1) By placing emphasis on the Spirit-wrought implantation of faith (*habitus*), he seeks to avoid esteeming a particular act of faith so highly (such as "accepting" or "closing with" Christ) that the act itself appears to obtain some degree of justifying power—if not theologically, at least practically. For whenever faith *as an act* justifies us, Comrie argues, justification is of works and of man, rather than of grace and of God.⁷² For Comrie, this danger alone is sufficient reason to regard the habit of faith as foundational and to reject à Brakel's emphasis on the act of faith.

(2) By accenting the habit of faith, therefore, Comrie purposes to exalt divine grace as the sole cause of faith. It is the sole prerogative of the Holy Spirit to implant this habit of faith in the souls of the elect

⁶⁹Trans. by Henri de Vries in Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900) 393. (Cf. *HC*, Lord's Day 7.)

⁷⁰*HC* 429.

⁷¹Personal translation from Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:404; taken from *HC* 428-29.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 429-30.

who altogether lack such spiritual ability, being spiritually dead.⁷³ In this implanting of faith, the spiritually dead sinner is utterly passive. With this implanting, he is incorporated, ingrafted into Jesus Christ. From this implanting, he will necessarily become active in exercising faith.⁷⁴

(3) Comrie parallels a primary emphasis on the habit of faith and a secondary emphasis on the acts of faith with his perception of faith's *union with Christ*. Like Calvin, Comrie taught that the ingrafting into Christ is primary (*het primaire*), for it is through this ingrafting that the believer receives all Christ's benefits (*het secundaire*).⁷⁵ Christ as Benefactor takes priority over His benefits; His Person is greater than His gifts. Indeed, it is faith's union with Christ that confirms the benefits as being genuine.

(4) By accentuating the habit of faith, Comrie also retains absolute dependence on the grace of God in the acts of faith. Though the Spirit-wrought grace of faith (*habitus*) is perfect and abides in the soul in which it is implanted, the activity of faith (*actus*) is not always equally strong, for it has no power to act in and of itself, but must be acted upon by the same Spirit who implants the *habitus*.⁷⁶

Like Calvin, Comrie advocates that all true spiritual exercises flow from a Trinitarian and scriptural framework. Acts of faith flow from the Father's good pleasure through Christ, are activated by the Spirit of Christ, and are inseparable from the Word of God.⁷⁷ Contrary to P. J. Kromigst's objection that Comrie separates the Spirit too much from the Word, at every instance he seems eager to maintain a most intimate Word-Spirit connection.⁷⁸ Comrie writes,

The infused propensity of faith can never be exercised (*ad actum*) except that by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit in and by means of

⁷³Ibid., 381.

⁷⁴Ibid., 383.

⁷⁵Ibid., 377.

⁷⁶Through this distinction, therefore, Comrie could uphold the following tension: "There is no doubt in faith, as there is no darkness in the light of the sun; but the believer is subject to many doubts, since his faith is not always predominant" (Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:404).

⁷⁷HC 433-34.

⁷⁸Johannes DeBoer rejects Kromigst's thesis (*De Verzegeling met de Heilige Geest volgens de opvatting van de Nadere Reformatie* [Rotterdam: Bronder, 1968] 194-99), and conclusively states: "[In Comrie] the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Word. He speaks in, with, and by the Word." Cf. P. J. Kromigst, "Het geloof," *Troffel en Zwaard* 1 (1903):104.

the promise it first receives the gift of divine grace passively, and then becomes active subsequent to and by means of this.⁷⁹

But the means whereby the Spirit accomplishes both this *habitus* and *actus* of faith is the Word of God and those allied channels appointed by God that are Word-centered.⁸⁰

Thus, Comrie never brings the Spirit to the foreground at the expense of the Word.⁸¹ Rather, he maintains the inseparability of the decree of the Father, the union with the Son in His righteousness, the application of the Spirit, and the means of the Word.⁸² In short, if the habit of faith is implanted by the Spirit, the acts of faith must come to fruition through the Word, though such activities may frequently come forth as a slow and gradual process.⁸³

(5) Finally, by distinguishing between the faculty and the act of faith, Comrie was able to preserve his Calvinism from the seeds of neonomianism.⁸⁴ Comrie was well aware of the fact that Calvinism

⁷⁹LR 2:72.

⁸⁰"Faith gradually attains to its perfection from being less to being more, from being weaker to being stronger. And thus all the means of grace the Word, prayer, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and the gatherings of the saints function as means, by the cooperation (*medewerkinge*) of the Holy Spirit, to build us up in the faith" (HC 429-30).

⁸¹DeBoer, *De Verzegeling met de Heilige Geest* 199.

⁸²HC 438.

⁸³The pastoral overtones implicit here are clearly evident in Comrie's correspondence with Rev. J. Verster in the last months of the Woubrugge pastor's life. G. H. Leurdijk shows how Comrie used his habitus-actus distinction to comfort his brother who had been in spiritual darkness for eleven years ("Alexander Comrie: 'Een vaderlijke vriend,'" *De Saambinder* 61 [1983]:3-4 [3 Feb], 2-3 [10 Feb]).

⁸⁴Between 1717-1723 the Church of Scotland was disturbed by a controversy between evangelicals, known as "Marrow Men" (the most renowned being Thomas Boston, and Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine) and the so-called Moderates or Neonomians, over the relationship between law and gospel. When Boston and the Erskines had reprinted *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (probably authored by an Edward Fisher), which maintained an immediate free offer of salvation by looking to Christ in faith, the opposition (i.e., the majority of the church leaders led by Principal James Haddow) rejected *The Marrow* as dangerous teaching. They leaned toward teaching that the gospel is a "new law" (*neonomos*), which demands that the conditions of faith and repentance must be met before the gospel can be freely offered.

Being an avowed disciple of the Marrow Men, Comrie was particularly sensitive to

was often prone to relapse into neonomianism, jeopardizing the concept of justification by faith alone.

The Direct (directus) and Reflex (reflectus) Acts of Faith

When addressing the question of how the elect are gradually brought to full assurance of faith, Comrie makes considerable use of the direct and reflex acts of faith (*directe en reflexive geloofsdaden*), and appeals to the Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 18.2 for support.⁸⁵ From this definition of assurance, Comrie affirms assurance founded upon "the divine truth of the promises" as illustrative of the *direct* act of faith, while assurance founded upon the "inward evidences of graces" and the "testimony of the Spirit" results from *reflexive* acts of faith.⁸⁶

The direct act of faith, according to Comrie, involved an immediate apprehension of the entire revelation of God as sworn truth, though it more specifically addressed itself to the gospel promises, particularly those that encouraged sinners with the promise they would not be cast out if they came to Christ. Comrie felt no difficulty in advocating "a `direct' assurance of faith, an assurance which solely derives its liberty without anything being

neonomian tendencies. When some of his contemporaries stressed the acts of faith while neglecting the *habitus*, and thus seemed to imply that man *first* must repent and believe and that God rewards these acts with acquittal, Comrie viewed this as a dangerous kind of nomism.

By placing initiatory emphasis on *habitus* as the Spirit's infusion, and his accompanying Trinitarian framework for faith's definition, Comrie aimed to underscore the Westminster Confession of Faith's emphases as well as to preserve the Reformed conception of justification from collapsing into such neonomian tendencies for generations to come. For both the Westminster standards and Comrie, *all* acts of faith flow out of the Spirit's implantation; hence, the acts themselves, contrary to Kendall, cannot be voluntaristic. Indeed, not even such confessional terms as "assent" should be so interpreted. Cf. "Calvin and Westminster," *Bulwark* 2 (May-June, 1980):15-16.

⁸⁵In this direct-reflexive distinction Comrie was following the footsteps of such well-known theologians as William Ames (*Marrow of Theology* [trans. from the 3rd Latin ed., ed. by John E. Eusden; Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968] 27:16); Johannes Maccovius (*Loci communes theologici*, editio postrema, Opera & Studio Nicolai Arnoldi [Amstelodami: apud Ludovicum & Danielem Elzevirios, 1658] 765); Petrus van Mastricht (*Beschouwende en praktikale Godgeleerdheit* [Rotterdam: Van Pelt, 1749] I, 1, 25); Brakel (*Redelijke Godsdienst* 34:27); and Turretin ("The Theological Institutes," trans. by George M. Giger [ms., Princeton Seminary, 1954] 437-38). Comrie stressed more strongly than these writers, however, the Spirit's central role in the reflexive act.

⁸⁶LR on Heb 10:22; EZG 345-46.

intermediate from the gospel promise while prayerfully looking unto Jesus."⁸⁷ The certainty resulting from this direct believing in God's promises influences an entire array of soul activities, by which the needy hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ.⁸⁸ The Holy Spirit grants such direct acts by an increasing realization of need until the elect are brought to embrace Christ in His fullness.⁸⁹ When this occurs, the sealing work of the Spirit experientially applies the promises of God to the believer's heart as his own through the sealing work of the Spirit.⁹⁰

Thus, the direct act of faith is occupied with the object presented to it, the promises of the gospel in Christ, and the reflexive act, being of a different nature, is concerned with looking back on the direct act "which assures the soul of personally being a partaker of Christ."⁹¹ This reflexive act of faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit also, and must be ratified by His inward testimony.⁹²

Comrie's distinctions relative to assurance have as the primary goal the leading of true believers to make their calling and election sure by being directed more outside of self to the unconditional grace of God in Jesus Christ. His secondary goals include mediating contemporary Reformed debate, teaching the believer how the Holy Spirit works savingly in his life, and encouraging the struggling believer to press forward for greater degrees of assurance. Through these distinctions and goals, Comrie protects himself from two errors: (1) the error of à Brakel, who states that assurance does not belong to the essence of faith, but is only a fruit of faith,⁹³ and (2) the error of van

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *EZG* 214 where Comrie lists seven activities.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 247-48.

⁹⁰ "In the promise of the gospel, God the Holy Spirit attests to the divine childhood of the soul, assuring and convincing her of the same. He does so by His own divine and immediate voice, announcing to, speaking within, and impressing upon the soul that she is a child of God by His immediate operation, upon the promise of the gospel. He simultaneously gives her so much liberty and assurance in her heart by faith, that she with full trust and being assured within her soul can and may call God my Father" (*LR* 78-79).

⁹¹ Ibid., 249.

⁹² *EZG* 251; *LR* 78 ff. Cf. DeBoer, *De Verzegeling* 185.

⁹³ The dangers Comrie saw in the Brakelian view were not primarily theological, but pastoral: (1) this doctrine would be prone to influence seeking souls to rest in their seeking, i. e., short of Christ Himself; and (2) it would remove the weight of Peter's injunction to the believer to make his calling and election sure (2 Pet 1:10). Cf. Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst*

Thuyne who teaches that an assured confidence of faith is essential to be a partaker of saving faith.⁹⁴ Mediating between these schools of thought, Comrie, like Calvin, maintains that assurance certainly belongs to the essence of faith, but that this assurance may not always be grasped by Christians. In sum, Comrie's position is basically this: the seed of assurance is already present in refuge-taking faith, albeit largely dormant, but the goal of the believer must be to grow in the consciousness of what he already possesses in principle, in order to attain in due season to full assurance in Christ. At every point—whether as seed, or in the growth of assurance, or as full assurance—all assurance is the sovereign gift of the Spirit.

CONCLUSIONS

After a consideration in some detail of the views of John Calvin and Alexander Comrie (as a representative Calvinist) on faith and assurance, it is now possible to draw several conclusions:

First, radical discontinuity between Calvin and the Calvinists with regard to the relationship between faith and assurance, must be rejected. For, despite varying emphases, Calvin and the Calvinists merge at this juncture: *Assurance may be possessed without being known*. That is, the notion that assurance belongs in essence to every believer though he may not always feel the sense of it, is a bridge which unites the two varying emphases qualitatively.⁹⁵ Consequently, when Calvin defines faith in terms that embrace assurance, he is not directly contradicting the Westminster Confession's distinction between faith and assurance, for Calvin and the Confession do not have the same concern in view! Calvin is specifically defining what faith is in its assuring character; the Confession's chapter 18 is specifically describing what assurance is as a self-conscious, experimental phenomenon.⁹⁶

Secondly, the concepts of faith which Calvin and most

984-1002.

⁹⁴VanderGroe in particular was severely attacked by Groenewegen for supporting van Thuyne on this score, and subsequently came to adopt Comrie's mediating position as the only tenable one (cf. *ibid.*, 882 ff.).

⁹⁵Cf. Peter Lewis cited in Errol Hulse, *The Believer's Experience* 128-29. Cf. *Commentary* (on John 20:3).

⁹⁶Cf. Sinclair Ferguson, "The Westminster Conference, 1976," *Banner of Truth* 168 (1977):20.

Calvinists (including Comrie) present, embrace both assurance in the essence of faith and full assurance of faith, without demanding that the believer be able to feel assurance consciously at all times. It is this combination within a single definition that many Calvin scholars, including William Cunningham, have overlooked. Cunningham posits that the only way to remove contradiction from Calvin is to proceed "upon the assumption that the definition was intended not so much to state what was essential to true faith and always found in it, as to describe what true faith is, or includes, in its most perfect condition and its highest exercise."⁹⁷ But for Calvin and most Calvinists assurance is both essential for faith and is contained in all its exercises, regardless of the believer's consciousness of his assurance.

Thirdly, Calvin does differ from Comrie and some Calvinists (including Comrie) by rejecting a two-tier approach to the consciousness of assurance which was frequently distinguished in Puritanism as "faith in exercise" versus "full assurance of faith," and even more commonly denominated by the Dutch Second Reformation divines as "refuge-taking faith" (*toevluchtnemend geloof*) and "assured faith" (*verzekerd geloof*). On this aspect of assurance as realized through a conscious step-up in the life of faith, Calvin differed from some of his followers, although he sympathized with the notion of steps in the knowledge of faith.⁹⁸

Fourthly, though Cunningham may be right in asserting that Calvin had not worked out all the details of the faith/assurance relationship, he, Robert Dabney, and Charles Hodge⁹⁹ certainly go too far in depicting his doctrine as contradictory to or ignorant of the issues that would surface in the post-Reformation era. Though the spiritual milieu of the post-Reformation would vary considerably from the sixteenth-century Reformation, Calvin's stress on assurance throughout his *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons proves that the issue of personal assurance was very much alive in his generation as well. His ongoing emphasis on "this is how to come to assurance," "this is the kind of assurance we have," and "this is where our

⁹⁷ *Reformers* 120.

⁹⁸ *Zekerheid van het geloof* 40-41.

⁹⁹ Cunningham, *Reformers* 120. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* 702: "The proof is so obvious that Calvin is obliged to modify the assertions of which we have seen specimens, to include these cases [i.e., of those who frequently lack assurance], until he has virtually retracted his doctrine"! Cf. his *Discussions* 1:216; Charles Hodge on 2 Cor 13:5, *Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (reprint; Wilmington, Del.: Sovereign Grace, 1972) 367.

assurance rests,"¹⁰⁰ etc., shows that he was speaking to a contemporary situation in which numerous parishioners possessed a scant degree of assurance. Calvin addressed individuals newly delivered from the bondage of Rome which had taught that it was heretical for the typical layman to claim assurance. By teaching that assurance ought to be normative, though unbelief "will not die easily," Calvin's goal was to establish and encourage assurance in the church on solid biblical grounds.

Such was also the goal of Comrie and the vast majority of the post-Reformation Calvinists both in English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation. The terminology developed, the exposition of entire treatises on assurance, the pastoral overtones of compassion for the weak in faith, the pressing admonitions and invitations to grow in faith, the dissecting of temporary faith and other false forms of faith—all of this and much more underscores that these parallel movements relished vital communion with God in Christ. By raising the secondary grounds of assurance to a "mainline" from the "sideline" they occupied in Calvin's thought, the post-Reformers were for fresh pastoral reasons, as Cornelis Graafland asserts, enlarging the "pores" Calvin had opened already in allowing "signs which are sure attestations" of faith.¹⁰¹ These theologians microscopically examined personal, spiritual experience precisely because they were eager to trace the hand of God Triune working in their lives in order to return all glory to the electing Father, redeeming Son, and applying Spirit. Without qualitatively departing from Calvin's teachings on faith and assurance, Calvinistic pastors labored to lead their flocks into a full enjoyment and assurance of the believer's saving union with Jesus

¹⁰⁰Inst. 3.2.22.

¹⁰¹Graafland faults the Second Reformation divines for allowing the subjective line of assurance to "overrule" the objective, but recognizes that this accentuation of subjective assurance was an outgrowth of combatting various forms of pseudo-faith. He asserts that when subjective assurance is prominent as in the Second Reformation, assurance itself becomes problematical and is prone to be viewed as a scarce entity belonging to the quintessence rather than the essence of faith. The post-Reformers, Graafland concludes, "end where Calvin begins" ("Waarheid in het Binnenste," 69 ff.).

Though Graafland's presentation is largely accurate, he overstates his conclusions, since the post-Reformers still retained the priority of the promises of God. He neglects to point out that the post-Reformers made more use of the secondary grounds of assurance than Calvin in order to validate that the promises of God were intended particularly for the believer. Though Graafland asserts that the post-Reformers remain relatively close to Calvin notwithstanding their varying emphases, they are still closer than he is willing to admit.

Christ.

In such an epoch of church history, Calvin and the Calvinists have set before the contemporary church the model needed today: right and rich doctrinal thinking coupled with and leading to sanctified and vibrant living. Today the church is undergoing a crisis of confidence and authority, and therefore of assurance. A renewal of assurance, individual and collective assurance, is a great desideratum. If such assurance were more widely experienced, the church's vitality would be renewed and she would live in all spheres of life "in the strength of the Lord God" (Ps 71:16) for the cause of Christ and the gospel.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEVENTH BOWL OF THE APOCALYPSE

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The extent and structure of the seventh bowl of Revelation have not been completely clear. The angelic agent who shows the new Jerusalem and the structural pattern of the two major intercalations regarding Babylon and the new Jerusalem indicate that the bowl extends from 16:17 all the way through 22:5. A number of miscellaneous indications including two dramatic announcements of the end, the battle of Armageddon, the final judgment of Satan, and the finality of the last of the last plagues confirm this extended nature of the bowl. Potential objections to that conclusion have satisfactory answers. The core happenings of the bowl have their descriptions in eight scenes in 19:11-21:8, with the two major intercalations before and after them. This definition of the seventh bowl allows for it to have a nature similar to the seventh seal and seventh trumpet, provides for a proper literary structure of the book as a whole, and confirms the premillennial return of Christ.

* * * * *

Throughout most of the visional portion of Revelation (4:1-22:5), the prevailing anticipation looks toward the establishment of a kingdom on earth over which God Himself will rule.¹ John reaches the climax of his expectation in a series of bowl judgments that issue from the last of seven trumpet judgments which, in turn, result from the seventh of seven seal judgments.² The spotlight of the present

¹See Robert L. Thomas, "The Kingdom of Christ in the Apocalypse," *TMSJ* 3/2 (Fall 1992):117-40, for details of how this anticipation expresses itself.

²See Robert L. Thomas, "The Structure of the Apocalypse: Recapitulation or Progression?" *TMSJ* 4/1 (Spring 1993):45-66, for an elaboration of the case to support progression as the

study is on the last of the seven bowl judgments with the goal of discovering the extent of the account describing that bowl, examining the structure of that special part, and deriving implications based on what is discovered.

THE EXTENT OF THE SEVENTH BOWL

overarching scheme of Revelation's structure. The present discussion of the seventh bowl does not depend solely on conclusions of this earlier study, but assumptions based on it will inevitably surface here and there.

The earliest word about the seventh bowl is in Rev 16:17-21. The pouring of that bowl in the air leads to a loud voice out of the temple from the throne, proclaiming, "It is done," or better, "It has been and remains done" (Ggönen [*gegönen*]). The action with its announcement indicates that the climax has come to be and remains so now and forever.³ The storm theophany, including the greatest earthquake yet, follows the utterance of that voice (cf. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19).⁴ The great city, probably Jerusalem,⁵ undergoes a division into three parts, and the cities of the Gentiles fall. But an announcement that God has appointed Babylon to incur His intense wrath is the worst news of all for the earth. The flight of the islands and the disappearance of the mountains along with a pelting by unbelievably large hailstones conclude the initial announcement. The result is human blasphemy against God because of the plague of hailstones.

Most exegetes feel that the seventh-bowl description does not terminate at the end of chap. 16, but continues into chaps. 17-18 with a detailing of Babylon's downfall.⁶ Just how far it continues beyond that is, however, a point of obscurity. A definitive analysis of this issue from any perspective is hard to come by, so the present investigation, rather than evaluating several proposals to reach a decision, will advance what is hopefully an exegetically cogent theory with its supporting argumentation.

The thesis to be defended is that *the text all the way from 16:17 through 22:5 constitutes a description of the seventh bowl judgment*. The following rationale supports this thesis.

The Angelic Agent for Showing the New Jerusalem

The angel delegated to reveal special features of the descending holy city in 21:9-10 is one of the angels of the seven last plagues, another name for the seven bowls.⁷ The same identity holds for the angelic revealer in 17:1 where some would like to see him as the seventh of the seven bowl-angels because of the relevance of his revelation to Babylon, the main object of the seventh bowl.⁸ The wording does not provide sufficient information to tell which of the

³R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935) 482.

⁴Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1906) 210.

⁵James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (W. Robertson Nicoll, ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 5:449; J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16," *ExpTim* 98/11 (August 1987):329.

⁶E.g., Swete, *Apocalypse* p. 213; Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Swengel, Pa.: Bible Truth Depot, n.d.) 340; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1940) 337; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 248; Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *EBC* (Frank E. Gaebelen, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12:554; Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (in New International Biblical Commentary, W. Ward Gasque, ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991) 204.

⁷M. Robert Mulholland, *Revelation, Holy Living in an Unholy World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 276.

⁸Friedrich Dsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, in Meyer's Commentary (Henry E. Jacobs, trans. and ed.; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887) 428; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (4 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, 1903) 4:704.

seven it was in 17:1 or in 21:9, however. Nor does it identify the two with each other. The information can only tie these two revealers to the seven last plagues in a general way.

As noted above, the vast majority have endorsed that tie-in for the angel of 17:1 because of the immediate context.⁹ Those willing to attach the account of the new Jerusalem in 21:9`22:5 as part of the seventh bowl have been more scarce, however, probably because of the contextual distance between 16:17 and 21:9.¹⁰ Nevertheless, one of the angels commissioned to dispense the seven last plagues also had the charge of portraying divine love and fellowship in the heavenly city upon the new earth.¹¹

This forges a strong link in the chain connecting the end with the beginning in the larger context of 16:17`22:5.

The Structural Pattern of the Two Major Intercalations

Few if any have overlooked the major antithesis between two women in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse.¹² The harlot Babylon receives detailed treatment in 17:1`18:24, and the bride of the Lamb in 21:9`22:5. Another element, a structural one, also marks the two major sections as parallel to one another, however. The wording of the introductory and concluding formulas for the two intercalations are to a remarkable degree either identical or nearly identical. These striking correspondences have been largely unnoticed or inoperative in analyses of the last chapters of the book.¹³

The introductory formulas to the sections contain twenty identical words in the same order and then five identical words in the same order followed by an analogous antithetical development: *prnh* (*porn*, "harlot")` *gyn* (*gyn*, "woman") / *pliw* (*polis*, "city"); *nmfh* (*nymph*, "bride")` *gyn* (*gyn*, "wife") / *pliw* (*polis*, "city").¹⁴ The extreme similarity of the introductions is evident in the following alignments of texts:

⁹See note 6 above.

¹⁰E.g., William Lee, "The Revelation of St. John," in *The Holy Bible* (F. C. Cook, ed.; London: John Murray, 1881) 4:819; Mulholland, *Revelation*, p. 276.

¹¹Lee, "Revelation" 4:819.

¹²Lee ("Revelation" 4:820), A. T. Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament* [6 vols.; Nashville: Broadman, 1933] 6:470), and Mulholland (*Revelation* 293) are among many who comment on the contrast between the two women. Richard Bauckham has also noted this contrast as well as the broad structural conclusions reached in this section ("The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18," in *Images of Empire* [Loveday Alexander, ed.; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991] 47-48).

¹³Cf. Charles H. Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16`22," *Bib* 55/4 (1974):488-89. Most have noted some of the similarities, but only with isolated comments (e.g., Alford, *Greek Testament*, 4:739; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977] 307 n. 1; Mulholland, *Revelation* 26-30, 276). It has been extremely rare for any to trace the extent and implications of these correlations.

¹⁴Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations" 489; cf. Lee, "Revelation" 4:735; Wall, *Revelation* 205. The statistics pertain to the Greek text, of course.

Rev 17:1 Ka luen ew k tn pt gglvn tn xntvn tw

Rev 21:9 Ka luen ew k tn pt gglvn tn xntvn tw

(Kai lthen heis ek tn hepta angeln tn echontn tas

(Kai lthen heis ek tn hepta angeln tn echontn tas

(And one of the seven angels who had the

(And one of the seven angels who had the

pt filaw, ka llhsen met' mo lgvn, Dero, dejv soi

pt filaw, . . . ka llhsen met' mo lgvn, Dero, dejv soi

hepta phialas, kai elalsen met' emou legn, Deuro, deix soi

hepta phialas, . . . kai elalsen met' emou legn, Deuro, deix soi

seven bowls came, and spoke with me, saying, "Come, I will show

you

seven bowls came, and spoke with me, saying, "Come, I will show

you

t krma tw prnhw tw meglhw tw kauhmnhw p dtvn polln,

tn nmfhn tn gynaka to rnoy.

to krima ts porns ts megals ts kathmens epi hydatn polln

tn nymphn tn gynaika tou arniou

the judgment of the great harlot who sits beside many waters"

the bride, the wife of the Lamb"

. . . Rev 17:3 ka pnegkn me ew rhmon n pnemati.

Rev 21:10 ka pnegkn me n pnemati p row mga ka chl,

kai apnegken me eis ermon en pneumat,

kai apnegken me en pneumat epi oros mega kai hypslon,

and he carried me away into the wilderness in the spirit)

**and he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high moun-
tain)**

As apparent, the first twenty words of 17:1 are the same as the first twenty of 21:9. Five words agree in form and order between 17:3 and 21:10, with the prepositional phrase ew rhmon (*eis ermon*, "into the wilderness") preceding n pnemati (*en pneumat*, "in the spirit") in 17:3 and p row (*epi oros*, "upon a mountain") following the same phrase in 21:10.

Certain parts of the concluding formulas exhibit a similarity almost as striking. Both have beatitudes, though the substance of the two is different (19:9a; 22:7b). The following layout reflects verbal concurrences of the Greek text:

Rev 19:9 . . . ka lgei moi, Otoi o lgoi lhuino to ueo esin.

Rev 22:6a Ka epn moi, Otoi o lgoi pisto ka lhuino,

(kai legei moi, Houtoi hoi logoi alethinoi tou theou esin

(Kai eipen moi, Houtoi hoi logoi pistoi kai althinoi

(and he says to me, "These words are the true [ones] of God."

(and he said to me, "These words are faithful and true."

Rev 19:10 ka pesa mprosuen tn podn ato proskynsai

**Rev 22:8 . . . pesa proskynsai mprosuen tn podn to ggloy
to deiknontw moi tata.**

kai epesa emprosthen tn podn autou proskynsai

**... *epesa proskynsai emprosthen tn podn tou angelou
tou deiknyontos moi tauta***

and I fell before his feet to worship

**... I fell to worship before the feet of the angel who
showed me these things**

ka lgei moi, 6Ora m< sndoylw so emi ka tn

Rev 22:9 ka lgei moi, 6Ora m< sndoylw so emi ka tn

kai legei moi, Hora m; syndoulos sou eimi kai tn

kai legei moi, Hora m; syndoulos sou eimi kai tn

and he says to me, "See that you do not [do this]; I am the
fellow-slave of you and

**and he says to me, "See that you do not [do this]; I am the
fellow-slave of you and**

delfn soy tn xntvn tn martyran 1lho<
delfn soy tn profhtn ka tn throntvn tow Igoyw to bibloy toto<
adelphn sou tn echontn tn martyrian Isou
adelphn sou tn profhtn kai tn trountn tous logous tou bibliou
toutou
 your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus;
your brethren the prophets and of those who keep the words of
this book;

t ue prosknhson.
t ue prosknhson.
t the proskynson.
t the proskynson.
 worship God."
worship God."

gr martyra 1lho1 stin t pnema tw profhteaw.
22:6b ka kriow, uew tn pneymtvn tn profhtn
h gar martyria Isou estin to pneuma ts propheteias.)
kai ho kyrios, ho theos tn pneumatn tn profhtn.)
 for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.)
and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets.)

The first five words of 19:9b and 22:6a agree exactly with the subsequent concurrence of *lhuino* (*althinoi*, "true"). Five words of 19:10a are the same as five words of 22:8b, with a variation of word order. The first thirteen words of 19:10b and 22:9a are identical. Three words of 19:10c and 22:9b coincide exactly, and "the spirit of prophecy" in 19:10d is conceptually similar to "the spirits of the prophets" in 22:6b. The summation of 22:6 ff. appropriately concludes 21:1-8 and its elaboration in 21:9`22:5, just as 19:9b-10 summarizes and concludes 17:1`19:8.¹⁵

The resemblances are too close and too many to be accidental. Of course, the tactic of attributing the similarity to a later editor who copied one or the other from its companion passage¹⁶ is a way to explain the correspondences, but endorsing the whole book to be the work of John as historically received has much greater plausibility than differing theories that partition the book into segments assigned to different scribes or editors. Those who respect the integrity of the Apocalypse must recognize the introductory and concluding formulas as intended to mark off the antithetical sections that elaborate on the background and destiny of the two women, both of whom relate to the seventh last plague.

In the closing formula of 22:6-9 two main obstacles seem to impede this otherwise clear-cut structural arrangement, however. The first consists of elements in the formula that make it a conclusion to the whole book rather than to just the vision of the heavenly city. To list a few, these include the expression *dejai tow doloiw ato*

¹⁵Cf. Moffatt, "Revelation" 5:478.

¹⁶Moffatt, "Revelation" 5:489; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (2 vols., ICC; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1920) 2:128-29.

JOB 19:25 AND JOB 23:10 REVISITED AN EXEGETICAL NOTE

David C. Deuel
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Job 19:25 and 23:10 are subjects of these notes because a misunderstanding of the court theme in Job has been the source of confusion for both of them. In the context of both passages Job confidently maintains his forensic innocence, innocence confirmed by God. The LORD inquires of the adversary, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8b).

In fact, it is precisely the juridical nature of the passages that gives rise to the confusion. In part three, the first number of Handel's *Messiah*, the air (soprano) sings several lines which link Job 19:26 with 1 Cor 15:20, a connection based on a misconception of the court metaphor:

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them that sleep.

The NASB differs only slightly in its rendering of Job 19:25: "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth."

Both translations focus on the identity of Job's "redeemer" in that verse. Many take the redeemer to be Job's salvific deliverer, Jesus Christ. In juxtaposing the Job and Corinthian passages, Handel clearly made this connection in his majestic masterpiece. But in the context of the whole book, Job is looking for the one who will declare his innocence (as in court) *before his accusers*. The Hebrew word for *redeemer* is the same as that used in a similar context that has a forensic setting:

Do not move the ancient boundary,
Or go into the fields of the fatherless;

For their *Redeemer* is strong;
He will *plead their case* against you"
(Prov 23:10-11, emphasis added).

The emphasized words in the Proverbs passage, occurring in a parallel structure, bring clarity to the redeemer's role in the Job passage. A redeemer/court defender would dispute accusations against Job's integrity. Job's accusers, based on their rigid perception of the retribution principle, extrapolate that Job must have sinned. According to their narrow perception of God's retributive activity, no one suffers for being innocent`Job must be guilty. The righteous sufferer admits to having sinned, yet he disagrees with his comforters on the issue of equating the measure of suffering *to the degree of his sin*. To push the analogy, the punishment does not fit the crime, according to Job.

Following through with the above interpretation, one concludes from the words of Job 19:26b that many use to argue for Job's resurrection hope`"yet without my flesh I shall see God" do not prove that at all. They rather mean, "From my flesh I shall see God," a statement meaning that Job will see God while still alive. Job's confident expectation is that God will "clear him of all charges" before his death. This is the same confidence he expresses in 13:18: "Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be vindicated."

This proposed interpretation does not dispute messianic "interpretations" of the Job passage. It merely explains the verse in its more immediate context.

Job 23:1-10 follows similar lines. The oft misunderstood line comes in v. 10: "But He knows the way I take; *when* He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The usual interpretation of this verse has it saying that Job will emerge victorious from his sufferings`he will get through the testing without failure. Taken in the context of this verse, however much like Job 19:25 f.`it focuses on Job's confidence in his innocence as well as God's ability to vindicate him. The term "tried" has no direct reference to trials in suffering, but is a court term for action taken for or against a defendant. One might refer to it as "due process" or court procedures.

In both passages under consideration, Job demands to "see" God (in court). In Job 29:23 ff. the righteous sufferer laments that his faithful deeds have not been written down, in which case he would

bring them in as court evidence; but he knows that his vindicator will defend him regardless. In Job 23:1-10 Job desires to speak face-to-face with God in a trial setting. At that time, God would declare his innocence, not his sinlessness.

For Job to concede that he had sinned would be to admit to deserving his suffering. For Job to deny sinning entirely would be claim a level of innocence attainable by no man. Job demands to see God, for only God can pronounce innocence on a righteous sufferer. Put slightly differently, no one suffers as absolutely innocent. The book of Job views suffering on a relative scale whose reference point is the wisdom behind God's retribution.

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Barnett. *Behind the Scenes of the New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990. 247 pp. \$11.99 (paper). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Adjunct Professor of Bible Exposition.

Barnett has written *Behind the Scenes of the New Testament* to acquaint his readers with the wealth of solid historical information within the NT and to reconstruct the NT story along historical lines. The purpose of this information is to verify the historical elements in the NT so as to keep critics from easily dismissing the relevancy of the theological content. So Barnett's purpose in the book is not just an educational one. He also has apologetic and evangelistic designs.

To accomplish his purpose, the author tells the story of the NT, beginning at Bethlehem and concluding at Patmos. He concentrates on the history of the first century A.D., blending extrabiblical history with the record of the NT. The first half of the book surveys the story of Jesus as recorded in the gospels from 7 B.C. to A.D. 33 (the dates Barnett chooses for the birth and death of Jesus). The last half of the book is a historical reconstruction of the apostolic age.

Barnett writes with conviction, insight, and simplicity. The book is not musty, but is gripping in its presentation. After telling the story of Jesus, the author summarizes His teaching, concluding,

The sayings of Jesus, read in the context of his actions, reveal him to have been a man powerfully convinced that he was God's Son, sent by God into the world, with divine authority, to fulfill a God-given mission to call and to save the lost (104).

The claims of Jesus clearly confront the book's readers in fulfillment of the book's purpose.

Although the work has a great deal of good historical data, Barnett adopts a number of unique viewpoints. He sees a major development in the strong division in the early church into two racial branches, one Gentile`led by Paul`and the other Jewish`led by James. In time, the Jewish branch itself divided into the Palestinian`led by James`and the non-Palestinian`led by Peter and John. On the contrary, the NT sees no such division, but rather emphasizes the unity of the ministry of these men, not the diversity. Moreover, Jas 1:1 shows that letter to be addressed to Jews in the dispersion (i.e., non-Palestinian Jews), and Gal 2:9 reflects the unity of James with Peter and John. Both biblical and extrabiblical information call Barnett's strict distinction

into question.

Barnett's espousal of the four-source origin of the Synoptic Gospels will be a disappointment to *TMSJ* readers. So will his favoring of a preterist/idealist interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

These criticisms should not overshadow the strengths of Barnett's book, however. He has sought to defend the historicity of the NT and its message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet many, including this reviewer, will question some of Barnett's historical reconstructions in the presentation of his case for the historical veracity of the NT record.

David S. Dockery, gen. ed. *Holman Bible Handbook*. Nashville: Holman, 1992. 894 pp. \$29.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Irvin A. Busenitz, Professor of Bible and Old Testament.

Intended to be a companion to the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, the *Holman Bible Handbook* is a "user-friendly Bible handbook for the graphically and visually oriented contemporary Bible student" (dust cover). And that it is. Almost every page has a color picture or chart to accent and illustrate the meaning of the text. Succinct but thorough feature articles accompany the more significant events of history. Coupled with numerous maps, tables, sketches, graphs, and outlines, the volume furnishes an informative basic introduction to the Bible.

The contents follow canonical order, interspersed with helpful feature articles and charts covering topics such as the Apocrypha, Herod's ancestry, the early Caesars of Rome, and many more. They conclude with a section on the Bible and Christian Faith, which gives a brief explanation of the basic Christian doctrines, church history, and today's world religions.

While the editors are generally successful in their attempt to remain neutral in controversial matters, discernment is advisable. For example, when commenting on biblical criticism and the literary sources for the Synoptic Gospels, they give the priority of Mark and Q as "the most common explanation," with the conclusion that "these theories do not necessarily compete with belief in biblical inspiration" (544). For the most part, however, they have achieved their goal of offering an unbiased presentation of differing points of view.

A vast array of scholars have researched and written the material, but they have communicated it in an easy-to-read style with "laypeople, Sunday School teachers, and beginning Bible students primarily in view" (Foreword). Its easy-to-use and easy-to-find format is attractive and will make it an excellent resource for its intended audience.

Paul Ellingworth. *The Epistle To The Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, gen. eds. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. xcvi + 764 pp. \$44.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Irvin A. Busenitz, Professor of Bible Exposition and Old Testament.

Paul Ellingworth, translation consultant for the United Bible Societies in the United Kingdom and honorary lecturer in NT at the University of Aberdeen, commences with an exhaustive (seventy-five page) listing of commentaries, reference works, and related articles on Hebrews. From there he proceeds with an excellent treatment of the book's authorship, date, setting, literary structure and genre, and theology (3-80). He notes thirteen individuals to whom the authorship has been attributed and provides a thorough review of each possibility, concluding that internal evidence is largely lacking and external evidence is unreliable and divided (3). For numerous reasons he doubts it was Paul. He suggests the book was written to "a predominantly, but not exclusively Jewish-Christian group" (27) who were probably living in Rome (29), not long before the fall of Jerusalem (33). He argues that "it is extremely likely that gnostic currents of thought were circulating, perhaps in oral form, during the NT period and even earlier" (42-43), but firmly maintains that there are striking "differences between the teaching of Hebrews and gnosticism as we know it from a later period" (44).

The writer attacks the difficult passages with technical depth and precision, but frequently fails to tie the research together into a conclusion. Though a vast amount of research is evident, he does not always effectively blend the individual parts into the whole. In Hebrews 6:4, he suggests that "enlightened" connotes instruction, not baptism. Nor does "tasted the heavenly gift" depict the eucharist. In both cases, he maintains, the language is figurative (320). Regarding 6:6 he concludes that "once the grace of God in Christ has been received, continued sin is a fatal reversal of faith which puts a person on the side of those responsible for Christ's humiliation and death" (322).

Ellingworth treats the identity of Melchizedek (type of Christ or christophany) only briefly. He concludes that the relationship cannot be typological, since both Christ and Melchizedek are priests forever. Rather, he likes the idea that Melchizedek was a christophany, but finds it unprovable. Ultimately he concludes that the author of Hebrews chooses not to elaborate on the thought of "made like the Son of God" (7:3) "because Christ, not Melchizedek, is his main interest" (351). He provides excellent thoughts on the great faith

chapter`Hebrews 11`especially those about the faith of Abraham.

The commentary contributes to an understanding of the epistle, especially from the technical side. The stated purpose of the series is to provide "something less technical than a full-scale critical commentary" (vii), but the author excludes few critical or technical matters. He directs considerable attention to the matters of textual variants, manuscript evidence, and extra-biblical documents, with a resultant interruption of the flow of both text and context. The work's contribution can be significant, but probably only to more serious students.

David M. Howard, Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*. Chicago: Moody, 1993. 394 pp. \$21.99 (cloth). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

David Howard is Associate Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. His present work invites the reading of the OT historical books and purposes to serve as a guide in elucidating their contents and messages (16).

The author's purpose in guiding the reader is very deliberate. He does not wish the present work to be used in place of Scripture, but wants it to facilitate the reading of Scripture. In following its guidelines, the reader must pay attention both to microscopic details and to macroscopic structures, because "it is in the details as well as the large-scale sweeps, that we learn about the messages of the biblical books and, ultimately, about God" (16). The details are more important for interpretation than is the overall message. The focus on God is evident if the reading exercise proceeds along the lines that the Bible's authors intended: "A reading from start to finish will yield the most coherent picture of the biblical books" (16). The reading of each book in one sitting opens up the messages simply because the authors intended them to be read as coherent wholes (17).

Howard carefully articulates the use and abuse of history in Bible interpretation. History, though a legitimate study in and of itself, does not yield the theological messages that writers of historical books intended to convey. Further, historical reconstructions are, at best, only hypothetical. "Thus, the Scriptures themselves are the proper focus of our study, not the hypothetical re-creations of the events behind these Scriptures" (38).

Is the Bible historical, theological, or literary? It is all three, but the theological message is attainable only if both the historical and the literary character of Scripture exercise their proper hermeneutical control. The tendency to over-historicize brings the focus of the book's

message down to human heroes and their great examples and exploits in the Bible's history. Either an emphasis on history behind the text or a neglect to take the book in its entire context leads to distortions of the message—the spotlight comes to be on God's instruments rather than on God Himself. Conversely, Howard believes that the messages tend to focus on God rather than on His servants:

They [God's servants] are an important repository of God's revelation of Himself. In the details of the stories, as well as (or perhaps especially) at the higher levels of groups of stories, we see great themes unfolded—themes that tell us about God and His love for His people and the world, His holiness, His worthiness, and His unfolding plans for His people and the world. In the end, these things are much more important than the fortunes or foibles of individual characters. These larger themes bring the OT historical books into proper focus and into harmony with the other books of the Bible (15-16).

Reading the book for its entire message not only will focus the reader's attention on the unifying major themes, but also will help him avoid getting bogged down in minute details instead of capturing the larger theological message.

Above all we must remember that the Bible is a "theological" work, i.e., it deals with God. In the end, God is the subject and the hero of the Bible. Even in works that emphasize human individuals, such as 1 and 2 Samuel, which highlight David, these individuals are important only as they are instruments in God's plan. . . . David is much more important as a theological symbol—as one whom God chose and blessed and as one who was attuned to God—than he ever was a "historical" figure—one who was, say, a great military leader, administrator, and musician (48; cf. also the author entry "David" in vol. 2 of the *AB*).

It is all too easy to strip the narrative of its God-honoring, even doxological character in order to build popular "how to be" or "how to do" sermons and biblical lessons. This practice has the effect on God's people of reinforcing the "me-centered" (anthropocentric) approach to the Christian life and of robbing them of another opportunity to hear "the mighty acts of God" (Acts 2:11). It exchanges attention to God's mighty deeds for a focus upon the spiritually heroic deeds of men. Howard illustrates his method with several examples from Ruth and Ezra-Nehemiah.

It is tempting to interpret the message of Ruth by highlighting the virtues of the woman from whom the book takes its name or those of her kinsman-redeemer Boaz (exacerbated by typological presightings of Christ). But in the narratives even these characters focus the story on God.

There is a special focus on God Himself in the book, particularly by the

characters. Of its eight-five verses, twenty-three mention God; of these, only two are the narrator's comments (1:6 and 4:13 bracket the book); the rest are from the mouths of the protagonists. The characters themselves are conscious that God sovereignly orders events, and they depend on Him to do so (133).

The focus on God's steadfast nature is also maintained in that "He is seen as acting continually throughout the book" (*ibid.*) and "in His refusal to abandon them, and in His rewarding their faithfulness to Him" (*ibid.*).

In another account of OT characters, Ezra and Nehemiah must yield the spotlight to the Lord of the second Exodus. The purpose of Ezra-Nehemiah is clear:

They are written . . . to show that God was still faithful and gracious to His people and that this people, who had their origins centuries earlier, still was alive and attempting to continue in the faithful traditions laid down by Moses (274).

From the standpoint of human agency, gifted (by God) men led the second Exodus. Yet like Moses their prototype, they pale into insignificance as God shines through; thus, whatever giftedness the characters Ezra or Nehemiah demonstrated in the books is itself subsumed under God's character and mighty acts: God was still faithful and gracious to His people, even to the extent of using Persian rulers to help His people. To demonstrate God's control, the biblical author uses the expressions "good hand" or "mighty hand" six times in Ezra (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) and three times in Nehemiah (1:10; 2:8, 18). Howard aptly summarizes,

The references to God's good hand would then function as a low-key reminder that God himself is still King and that the Persian kings' bounty was in reality the bounty coming from the "king of kings" to His people (310).

Howard has written a helpful tool in a challenging portion of Scripture, the historical books. Pastors and Bible teachers will find it a source of informative discussions on each of the historical books as well as a guide for interpreting these important but often neglected or misunderstood portions of Scripture.

Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. by David S. Dockery et al.. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992. 352 pp. \$19.95 (cloth).
Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The editorial staff projects the NAC series to reach forty volumes in all. The earlier American Commentary, edited by Alvah Hovey, appeared around the beginning of the twentieth century. A notable contribution of that earlier series was John Broadus' work on Matthew, still available and helpful in reprint form today. The NAC's claim is that its authors and editors are scholars committed to the "divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible" (Editor's Preface, 1). The Bible is "a sure, safe guide even in issues that touch on history and related issues of truth" (239). In vol. 34, the writers bear down on the practical implications of the Pastoral Epistles for the believer's experience and growth and for church leaders' guidance. The intended audience is primarily pastors, students, and Christians in general.

Lea who wrote 1 and 2 Timothy (1 Timothy, 61-178; 2 Timothy, 179-261) is Professor of New Testament, Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Fort Worth. Griffin, a layman with an MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a PhD in NT from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, has written on Titus (263-333).

The work is succinct and to the point and has a flowing, readable style. It omits lengthy comments on exegetical details, theology, and word studies. An aim is to crystalize the doctrinal import of each section. Frequent footnotes reflect literature well through the late 1980's, often containing choice insights. The writers sum up the argument at the outset of each major section so as to draw things into focus.

This survey of the three epistles is knowledgeable and faithful in helping understand the progression of thought as well as specific matters of Christian concern. The comments reflect broad reading and careful inquiry done by the authors.

The introductions handle some key issues that arise frequently in scholarly discussions. An example is Lea's refutations of five reasons advanced against the Pauline authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy. He examines the theory of a pseudonymous writer and concludes that the early church would have resoundingly rejected such a possibility. A section of "Theological Themes of the Pastorals" (45-51) covers the Trinity, Gospel, Christian Life, Eschatology, Church Government, and Salvation. On eschatology, Lea argues that Paul did not change from his earlier epistles in his expectation of an imminent return of Christ to an anticipation of death in these epistles (cf. 2 Tim 4:8) and a prolonged period before that return (48-49). Brief summaries of all three epistles and a one-page outline of each will be useful to expositors (54-60). Among other aids are a selected subject index, person index, and Scripture index.

Compacted comments often cover the most crucial views and relevant details. Examples of such include comments on 1 Tim 1:4,

"myths and endless genealogies"; 2:2, exclusion of women from formal structured teaching in the church, as in the senior-pastor role (100, 104); 3:2, a "one-woman kind of man" faithful to his wife; and 4:16, the relation between lifestyle and salvation by grace. Sometimes comments do not explain clearly, but take the form of vague generalities provoking more perplexity. One instance of this is 1 Tim 1:8 where an explanation of why the law was not made for the righteous is missing. Another is 2 Tim 4:8 which lacks clarification of why Kelly's cited view (i.e., a "crown in recognition of a righteous life") is preferred as "more convincing" than Fee's (i.e., a crown as a gift consisting of ultimate righteousness awarded by Christ the Judge).

Inadvertent errors sometimes occur in a work such as this, errors such as pointing readers to "Excursus 5" on the inspiration of Scripture, etc. (235) and then later changing that to "Excursus 6" (238).

Remarks on women in Tit 2:4-5 are fairly clear. Griffin comments judiciously on seven characteristics of women, four implicitly presupposing their being married and raising a family. He is helpful both on the equality of the sexes and women's not being inferior (Gal 3:28) and on distinctive features marking the sexes as to God-given order and responsibility, with wives in subjection to their own husbands in the home. He also gives good comments on God's grace teaching believers along lines of godliness (Tit 2:12).

All in all, this is a brief but lucid product, among the top three or four popular expositions. In survey form it packs in enough competent remarks on leading issues to make it worth frequent reading. It will be particularly useful for pastors, Bible study leaders, students, and lay readers.

John Piper. *Let The Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993. 240 pp. \$12.99 (paper). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Professor of Pastoral Ministries.

John Piper has served readers well with the reminder that worship, not missions, should be their focus with regard to spiritual priorities. He writes,

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever (11).

In this thoroughly biblical treatment of missions, John Piper really focuses on the kinds of spiritual priorities that have always marked

great redemptive movements of God in history.

This reviewer was particularly impressed by Piper's willingness to saturate the book with Scripture. For instance, he surveys all that the Bible says about God's glory (17-22). Then, he surveys the various biblical appeals in prayer (57-62). Next, without flinching he surveys what the Scripture says about hell and how that relates to the preaching of Christ (120-26). He then surveys the phrase "all the nations" in the NT (177-81). He concludes with a good discussion of the great commission as rendered in Matt 28:18-20 (203-18).

Tom Stellar, who serves as pastor for missions at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, the church pastored by John Piper, provides an excellent Afterword. In this addendum, Stellar addresses the crucial issue of "the supremacy of God in going and in sending." This by itself could be the subject of an entire volume.

The author did not intend to make this an unabridged treatment on missions. He rather chose to focus on the primary issues behind missions, which are glorifying and exalting God.

The reviewer highly commends this book to any pastor who desires to raise the level of missions in his church, to any Christian who is considering missions as a ministry vocation, and to every missions executive who wants to refocus the vision of his ministry to make it God-centered.

John Polhill. *Acts*, vol. 26 in The New American Commentary, ed. by David S. Dockery et al. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992. 574 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This is one of the best evangelical commentaries on Acts in recent years. Polhill is Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean for the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Volumes in the NAC series have been appearing since the early 1990's, continuing the biblical-inerrancy stance of the American Commentary published around the beginning of the twentieth century.

Through his footnotes and awareness of issues on which scholars differ, Polhill reflects a thorough familiarity with literature on Acts. He acknowledges the influence of Ernst Haenchen's work on Acts in tracing the literary flow of the book and its major themes. Yet he disagrees with Haenchen's views that oppose historical reliability. He likewise acknowledges his debt to F. F. Bruce in the latter's revised contribution to the NIC series.

Nearly sixty pages are in the introduction. Polhill argues for Lukan authorship in the A.D. 70's and for the reliability of the twenty-

four speeches that comprise nearly one-third of Acts (46). Acts' themes are world mission, God's providence, the power of the Spirit, and restored Israel. In his amillennial view, all real Christians are "the true or 'restored' Israel" (67). Other themes are the inclusive gospel, faithful witness, the relationship to the world, and the triumph of the gospel. Acts 2 refers to earthly languages and 1 Corinthians 12-14 to ecstatic languages (99). His discussion of how the signs of Joel 2 relate to Jesus' passion and to Pentecost lacks clarity (109-10). In Acts 2:38 the word for "for" (ἐἰς [eis]) means that water baptism is "on the ground, basis of" forgiveness, and not "for" baptismal regeneration, i.e., to secure forgiveness.

Polhill handles most problems well, even though concisely in some cases. He has devoted much thought to the issues. Discussions at 9:7-9; 19:11, 12; 22:16 exemplify this. Sometimes, however, thoroughness is not evident. In 8:14-17, why was the reception of the Spirit delayed at Samaria after baptism? In 15:13-18, in viewing Amos 9:11-15 as fulfilled in the church in an amillennial sense (330), he does not do justice to the land aspects of the promise to Israel in Amos 9:13-15 or to the ultimate fulfillment of the words *to Israel* in the future. On 19:1-7, he is unclear as to whether the twelve "disciples" are saved in the OT sense or unsaved until they responded to Paul's more complete message.

Whatever shortcomings the work may have, its benefits far outweigh its lacks. A user can be confident of finding help in its careful handling of many verses. Teachers, students, preachers, and Christians in general will enjoy its readable flow that includes a fairly vigorous effort to elucidate the most crucial issues.

Robert L. Saucy. *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993. 336 pp. \$19.99 (paper). Reviewed by George J. Zemek, Professor of Theology.

This long-awaited volume from Robert Saucy, a respected author who has a reputation for being progressively dispensational "before progressive dispensationalism was cool" (to borrow some phraseology from the pop music world), is not disappointing. Its pages are worthy of attention from all students committed to the authority of God's Word, no matter where they might currently light along the theological continuum between continuity and discontinuity. To be sure, some non-dispensationalists will cast its messages as another chorus of the same old song, and some coming from a "traditional" or "classical" dispensational heritage will express alarm over what they perceive to be further "concessions" to the tenets

of nondispensational theology. Even within the progressive "camp," some unashamed label-wearers will think that Saucy has gone too far on such-and-such an issue, with others (and possibly even some of the aforementioned "some!") will look upon the author as exhibiting signs of retrogressional dispensationalism in reference to other important issues. None of these challenges or concerns will diminish the valuable contribution of *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*.

Regardless of the potential for reactionary critiques, Saucy has crystallized the major issues and has done so through an admirable methodology. Consequently, this treatise makes significant advancements beyond that proof-texting *modus operandi* so characteristic of most systematic-theological interchanges, especially in the polemical arena of dispensationalism. He has caused a salient data-reservoir to surface in presenting his case quite inductively. Through enlisting even those who do not hold the high view of Scripture held in common by conservative dispensational and nondispensational proponents, he has skillfully woven together the best exegetical notations from all camps. The well researched substructure of the volume is undoubtedly its greatest strength. This will hopefully produce as a byproduct another significant toning down of the emotionally charged atmosphere that has historically characterized these debates. The author has done all that could be expected of him in bringing this normally heated "interface" onto the more fertile ground of biblical exegesis.

Most of the data *presentations* in this work are quite good. In relation to the larger issue of premillennialism, chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 12, dealing respectively with the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, the Kingdom, and "The Future Purpose of Israel," are especially good in that though compressed, they are yet quite comprehensive.

For the most part, Saucy's data *interpretations* are credible and commendable (in the estimate of this reviewer, 95% plus). On the negative side of this overwhelmingly positive contribution, an example of an apparent weakness manifested itself in the discussion of the Kingdom (e.g., 84, 98-110). At times the author seems to support the exegetical inferences of both reign and realm nuances for the Kingdom, i.e., the already-but-not-yet motif or inaugurated but yet-to-be fulfilled perspective, but at other junctures his arguments and subconclusions seemed to be driven by a controlling mediatorial presupposition. For most readers this shift will leave an impression of ambivalence at best and of contradiction at worst. Or could it be (for those familiar with Saucy's primary pedagogical procedure) that this section is purposely dialectical?

Two issues deserve further treatment. There *was* need to treat the issues of conditionality and unconditionality in reference to the "promissory" and "administrative" covenants more thoroughly (cf. 59 n. 1). Another omission is certainly not unique to Saucy's writings; a

desert drought condition prevails regarding the role of the Holy Spirit throughout the epochs of salvation history. Although references to the Holy Spirit are not totally absent from *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, several of its systematic-theological generalizations (e.g., 17, 57, 116-18, 167 ff.) need to be tested at the presuppositional level by that same thoroughly exegetical methodology that characterizes the majority of its discussions.

Organizationally, the argument progresses well, especially in light of the need to address so many different but yet interrelated topics. The titles of chap. 10, "The Pauline Prophecies about Israel," and chap. 11, "Other New Testament Prophecies," need at least a mental note of revision, however, since significant Pauline overflow appears in the discussion of the latter chapter.

Overall, high-protein theological nutrients pack this book's 315 pages of text. Consequently, Saucy's expressed hope for this volume will be actualized among all who come to it with open Bibles and open minds: "It is hoped that this [book] will both give traditional dispensationalists a greater understanding of what some of their colleagues are saying, and aid the ongoing dialogue with non-dispensationalist" (8).

F. La Gard Smith. *Sodom's Second Coming: What You Need to Know About the Deadly Assault*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993. 252 pp. \$8.99 (paper). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Professor of Pastoral Ministries.

F. La Gard Smith, who serves as Professor of Law at Pepperdine University in Southern California, pulls no punches in dealing with the issue of homosexuality. He strongly recognizes that the homosexual community is waging an all out war to have the government legalize homosexuality as a civil right, for the church to legitimize homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle, for the public to recognize the homosexual community as normal, and for the medical community to neutralize the debilitating results of the homosexual lifestyle, especially as it relates to AIDS.

For the preacher who is looking for good illustrative material or the Christian who has not kept current on a "less than attractive" subject, the book is replete with helpful information.

For instance, consider this discussion:

Perhaps the most macabre rebuttal to the '10 percent gay' propaganda lies in the silent coffins of the 100,000 gays who have died from AIDS since it was first reported in 1981. That's approximately 60 percent of the total 171,890 AIDS-related deaths reported as of December 1992 by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Based on studies of transmission by the

National Center for Health Statistics as of September 1991, 60 percent of the AIDS-related deaths resulted from homosexual or bisexual activity.)

While gays themselves are the first to admit that AIDS has had a devastating impact on male homosexuals, that tragic statistic itself calls into question the size of the overall gay population. Some simple calculations will demonstrate what I mean.

Because female homosexuals are not affected as a particular class by AIDS, it is necessary first of all to take them out of the gay population group. Then, assuming that gay men outnumber their lesbian counterparts three to one (the estimate cited by pro-gay literature), the number of gay men in America using the 10 percent figure would be something over 15 million. Now we are set for the startling result. If there were really 15 million practicing male homosexuals in this country, the percentage among them of AIDS-related deaths would be no more than .007 percent! (48-49).

Then, consider this:

As Mono Charen reports, 'In the 10 years since the AIDS epidemic began, about 120,000 Americans have died from the disease. During the same period, 40 times that many have succumbed to cancer.' And heart disease kills five times as many as AIDS in a single year!

To put it into perspective, AIDS-related deaths are not even in the top ten killers, but we pour more government money into AIDS than any other illness, despite its comparatively narrow impact. AIDS research funding is already 10 times that of cancer on a per-death basis, and 20 times on a per-patient basis (228).

These samples should whet the reader's appetite to purchase the book and read it cover to cover. The author writes with an irenic spirit, but communicates forthrightly in his discussion. Facts, common sense, and a biblical reference point make the title, *Sodom's Second Coming*, most appropriate.

Robert H. Stein. *Luke*, vol. 24 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. by David S. Dockery et al. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992. 642 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The NAC series gains more stature with this work to join such efforts as Craig Blomberg on Matthew (reviewed in *TMSJ* 4/1 [Spring 1993]) and John Polhill on Acts. Stein is well-known recently through his *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) and *Difficult Passages in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

1990). He is professor of New Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN.

Luke is readable and often communicates the benefit of much research, in many cases offering rich explanations. For each set of verses, Stein gives a summary of the context with comments on words or phrases and on the message in that section that he feels appropriate for readers.

The New American Commentary series has a commitment to biblical inerrancy, so Stein defends the virgin birth in Luke 1:34 (84) and offers several possibilities of how the census in 2:2 could fit between 7 and 4 B.C. On the latter point he awaits new evidence to show more conclusively how the verse fits into history (105-6). The manger in 2:7 "was no doubt a feeding trough" (107), but *why* this is so he does not explain. True repentance in 3:8 will produce fruit as in 3:10-14 (132). He separates into two groups those baptized "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:16) because of the context. Believers (wheat) will receive blessing by the Spirit, and the unrepentant (chaff) will face judgment in fire (135). He often comments on verb tenses, as in 5:16 where the text notes Jesus' regular practice of withdrawing to lonely places for prayer. He understands the Sermon on the Plain (6:17-49) to be parallel with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29) (197).

Stein's introduction (19-60) bases Lukan authorship on internal evidence, church tradition, and the "we" sections of Acts because of the common authorship of Luke and Acts (see his seven reasons, 21 n. 9). He dates the gospel's writing between A.D. 70 and 90, assuming Luke's use of Mark (25). Not everyone will concur with his assessment (25) that Luke wrote passages about Jerusalem's destruction in light of his knowledge of that destruction (13:35a; 19:43-44; 21:30; 23:28-31). He does hold that Jesus predicted these things in advance (37-39). The introduction also includes a four-page outline of the gospel (31-35) and a very good discussion of Luke's purposes in writing (35-44). In his helpful words on theological emphases (45-46) he elaborates on God's sovereign rule, the kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, Christology, "the last shall be first," call to salvation, Christian life, and atonement.

Sometimes Stein lists viewpoints, yet does not tell why he favors one of them. For instance, he has 9:27 referring to the transfiguration, because it is the next event in the context, but he does not explain "some of those standing here . . . will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God" (280). Questions about the identity of the "some," the meaning of seeing the kingdom of God, and their relation to Christ's "coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28) go unanswered.

The author's treatment of some matters is skimpy. He races through the 11:5-7 parable on prayer, skipping much that is significant. He favors the idea of "persistence" for the Greek word *anaideian* (v. 8),

without alluding to a major view preferred by some in recent years (cf. I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 1978, 463-65; K. E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 125-33; Alan F. Johnson, "Assurance for Man: The Fallacy of Translating *Anaideia* by 'Persistence' in Luke 11:5-8," *JETS* 22/2 [June 1979]:123-31). The ignored view proposes the idea of "shamelessness," blamelessness in having a good name, applying it to the man in bed who gets up to answer the door to protect his reputation even though other motives do not rouse him. Even an evil man (cf. v. 13) will respond with goodness to uphold his honor. How much more will God, whose nature and motives are entirely good, encourage prayer (its persistence, etc.) by His honor that assures what is good.

Some statements such as at 15:20 are puzzling. The father of the prodigal saw this son "a long way off." Stein comments, "The question of how the father could have seen his son a long way off can be answered easily. Jesus, the teller of the parable, wanted him to." What does this imply and why is it necessary? A father *could* see his son a long way off (*how far* is not stipulated), and detect something about his figure, manner of walking, or the like, or watch him until he drew close enough to recognize, then race to welcome him. Does Stein hint that Jesus stretches things, that He simply makes it so by wanting it to be so, or neither of the above? *What* Stein means is uncertain.

The part on salt losing its savor (14:34) needs rewriting to remove its vagueness. Also, it is unclear *why* early readers would understand the punishment of enemies in 19:27 to refer to the events of A.D. 70, at least in part (472, 474). If the nobleman's return pictures Jesus' parousia, as Stein holds, why cannot the judgment on the enemies be at that time also, in full, rather than both at the parousia and doubling back through the centuries to A.D. 70?

The theological tension connected with 14:26 ff. is unresolved. *How* do the stringent conditions for discipleship, equated with becoming a Christian, allow for a salvation that is totally of grace without works being required?

Despite its weaker parts, this work has much to offer and ranks among the top half dozen commentaries on Luke. Like other commentaries, its best use is in conjunction with other helpful sources. For the pastor-teacher, Stein's effort easily has enough high points to make it a frequent help.

Wayne Strickland, ed. *The Law, the Gospel and the Modern Christian: Five Views*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993. 416 pp. \$17.99 (paper). Reviewed by George J. Zemek, Professor of Theology.

Theological discussions relating to the general topic of continuity and/or discontinuity are "in." Both historically and

currently, the debate over Law/Gospel has been among the "top ten" theological "tunes." As a matter of fact, it has quite consistently been the number one "hit" (especially since 1980). It is not difficult to see why, because anyone's perspective on this issue relates vitally to his theology of salvation and sanctification.

Consequently, the time seemed right for a contemporary "view book" on this multifaceted debate. The present work with its contributions by Van Gemeren ("The Non-Theonomic Reformed View"), Bahnsen ("The Theonomic Reformed View"), Kaiser ("The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness"), Strickland ("A Dispensational View"), and Moo ("A Modified Lutheran View") fills that bill.

As "view books" go, this one ranks among the best. For example, the bibliographical resources supplied by its five contributors are invaluable. Furthermore, most volumes of this kind contain extremist representations at their respective poles, but that is not true here. For example, Bahnsen on the continuity side is not as theonomic as others in his camp, and Strickland in the discontinuity camp is not as radical as some from the classically dispensational school have been. This "evening out" of the positions is perhaps an indication that iron has been sharpening iron in this arena of exegesis and theology recently.

Though view books sometimes do not address key issues and sketch out various perspectives, this one does. No contribution is void of noteworthy exegetical observations and key affirmations. A degree of predictability does mark the basic methodology of each contributor, however. Van Gemeren relies heavily on historical theology from the Reformed tradition, Bahnsen on logical constructs, Kaiser on exegetical/theological presentations of his key passages, Strickland on discontinuity texts, and Moo on a dialectical approach which at times reflects the diversity of biblical data.

The essays are generally good, but the responses are particularly excellent. Van Gemeren's historical responses and Bahnsen's logical responses to the essays by Strickland and Moo are full of insight. Yet Kaiser's critiques are especially perceptive, and his exegetical and polemical pursuits of the two discontinuity models are relentless. Unlike most view books that all too frequently make some general and rather superficial observations about the other perspectives before rehashing their own views, this compendium's greatest strength lies in its intense critiques.

This interchange has not led to a decisive victory of one of the "combatants," not too surprising in light of the exegetical and theological complexity of the issue. Moo's introductory words to his own article would have served as a good preface for the whole volume:

Christians disagree about the place of the Mosaic law in the life of the

believer because the New Testament itself contains statements that appear to support opposite conclusions. . . . Such diverse statements [i.e., previously cited samples of texts emphasizing continuity and others discontinuity] about the Mosaic law have both fascinated and frustrated theologians since the inception of the church. And at no time has this been more the case than in the last two decades, which have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in the theology of the Mosaic law. A deluge of books and articles has examined virtually every bit of evidence and from almost every conceivable perspective. Yet nothing even approaching a consensus has emerged. Several factors account for the radically different conclusions reached by biblical scholars and theologians, the most important of which is the diverse theological and hermeneutical frameworks that are used to order and arrange the various texts. Theological and confessional allegiances`Lutheran, Reformed, dispensational, etc.` thus dictate which texts are given precedence and used to interpret others (319-20).

For these reasons (*some* of which are virtually inescapable realities), not one of these contributors has thrown the knock-out punch, even though one or two of them may have accumulated more exegetical and theological points in their sparrings. Nevertheless, this book will help clarify the salient texts and sub-issues, thereby both moderating extremism and advancing theological precision.