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# THE BLUE BANNER

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## In this Issue.

**Precursory Considerations to the Doctrine of Justification, Part Two, by John Owen** ❀ **Dating: Courtship and Covenant, by Richard Bacon** ❀ **Historical Review of the Stage** ❀ **Musical Instruments in Psalm 150**

*by Richard Bacon*

his issue of *The Blue Banner* is the final issue of the year 2002. One article should not be controversial among Reformed Protestants, but sadly could be regarded as being the Reformed response to some who have adopted a view of justification that is less than Reformed. The doctrine to which Dr. Owen spoke in this second part of his Precursory Considerations (part 1 appeared in v. 11 #1), is one that has come under repeated attack in the history of the church, even since the Protestant Reformation, *viz.* that of justification by faith alone. The “alone” seems to be the point at which this doctrine is generally attacked.

The first of the admittedly “controversial” articles is the third installment of a series of sermons I preached nearly seven years ago on the subject of dating and the Christian. It begins on page 19, and contains a certain amount of review, so if this is the first of the installments one has read, he may still be able to follow the “flow” of the four sermons by taking careful note of the introductory comments. This article attempts to help young people distinguish between a romantic or emotional approach to finding a life partner and a biblical, or covenantal approach.

The second is, perhaps, even more controversial. It comes from John Carstares’ introduction to James Durham’s *Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (Naphtali Press, 2002). What is controversial is *not* whether the church has historically and fairly evenly opposed stage plays. The controversial aspect lies in the fact that much wickedness passes among Christians in the name of “poetic or artistic license.” It is better to call such things exactly what they are: license, artistic or otherwise. The word of God, however, calls us away from such (2 Peter 2:18-19). The very things demonstrated by Mr. Carstares regarding stage plays could also be said about similar diversions today such as movies and television.


Another article answers the question of whether the musical instruments of Psalm 150 should be regarded as circumstantial or as commanded. If the latter, then they are clearly part of the ceremonies of the Old Testament temple worship. ❀



# Precursory Considerations to an Explanation of the Doctrine of Justification Part Two.

From “General Considerations, Previously Necessary Unto The Explanation Of The Doctrine Of Justification,” *Works*, vol. 5. Continued from *The Blue Banner*, v.11 #1.

By John Owen

his blessed permutation as unto sin and righteousness is represented unto us in the Scripture as a principal object of our faith, — as that whereon our peace with God is founded. And although both these (the imputation of sin unto Christ, and the imputation of righteousness unto us) be the acts of God, and not ours, yet are we by faith to exemplify them in our own souls, and really to perform what on our part is required unto their application unto us; whereby we receive “the atonement,” Romans 5:11. Christ calls unto him all those that “labor and are heavy laden,” Matthew 11:28. The weight that is upon the consciences of men, wherewith they are laden, is the burden of sin. So the psalmist complains that his “sins were a burden too heavy for him,” Psalm 38:4. Such was Cain’s apprehension of his guilt, Genesis 4:13. This burden Christ bare, when it was laid on him by divine estimation. For so it is said, וְיִשָּׂא אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁוּבוּן הוּא יִסְבֵּל Isaiah 53:11, — “He shall bear their iniquities” on him as a burden. And this he did when God made to meet upon him “the iniquity of us all,” verse 6. In the application of this unto our own souls, as it is required that we be sensible of the weight and burden of our sins and how it is heavier than we can bear; so the Lord Christ calls us unto him with it, that we may be eased. This he does in the preaching of the gospel, wherein he is “evidently crucified before our eyes,” Galatians 3:1. In the view which faith has of Christ crucified (for faith is a “looking unto him,” Isaiah 45:22; 65:1, answering their looking unto the brazen serpent who were stung with fiery serpents, John 3:14, 15), and under a sense of his invitation (for faith is our coming unto him, upon his call and invitation) to come unto him with our burdens, a believer considers that God has laid all our iniquities upon him; yea, that he has done so, is

an especial object whereon faith is to act, which is faith in his blood. Hereon does the soul approve of and embrace the righteousness and grace of God, with the infinite condescension and love of Christ himself. It gives its consent that what is thus done is what becomes the infinite wisdom and grace of God; and therein it rests. Such a person seeks no more to establish his own righteousness, but submits to the righteousness of God. Herein, by faith, does he leave that burden on Christ which he called him to bring with him, and complies with the wisdom and righteousness of God in laying it upon him. And herewith does he receive the everlasting righteousness which the Lord Christ brought in when he made an end of sin, and reconciliation for transgressors.

The reader may be pleased to observe, that I am not debating these things argumentatively, in such propriety of expressions as are required in a scholastic disputation; which shall be done afterwards, so far as I judge it necessary. But I am doing that which indeed is better, and of more importance, — namely, declaring the experience of faith in the expressions of the Scripture, or such as are analogous unto them. And I had rather be instrumental in the communication of light and knowledge unto the meanest believer, than to have the clearest success against prejudiced disputers. Wherefore, by faith thus acting are we justified, and have peace with God. Other foundation in this matter can no man lay, that will endure the trial.

Nor are we to be moved, that men who are unacquainted with these things in their reality and power do reject the whole work of faith herein, as an easy effort of fancy or imagination. For the preaching of the cross is foolishness unto the best of the natural wisdom of men; neither



can any understand them but by the Spirit of God. Those who know the terror of the Lord, who have been really convinced and made sensible of the guilt of their apostasy from God, and of their actual sins in that state, and what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, — seeking thereon after a real solid foundation whereon they may be accepted with him, — have other thoughts of these things, and do find believing a thing to be quite of another nature than such men suppose. It is not a work of fancy or imagination unto men, to deny and abhor themselves, to subscribe unto the righteousness of God in denouncing death as due to their sins, to renounce all hopes and expectations of relief from any righteousness of their own, to mix the word and promise of God concerning Christ and righteousness by him with faith, so as to receive the atonement, and wherewithal to give up themselves unto a universal obedience unto God.

Sixthly. We can never state our thoughts aright in this matter, unless we have a clear apprehension of, and satisfaction in, the introduction of grace by Jesus Christ into the whole of our relation unto God, with its respect unto all parts of our obedience. There was no such thing, nothing of that nature or kind, in the first constitution of that relation and obedience by the law of our creation. We were made in a state of immediate relation unto God in our own persons, as our creator, preserver, and rewarder. There was no mystery of grace in the covenant of works. No more was required unto the consummation of that state but what was given us in our creation, enabling us unto rewardable obedience. “Do this, and live,” was the sole rule of our relation unto God. There was nothing in religion originally of that which the gospel celebrates under the name of the grace, kindness, and love of God, whence all our favorable relation unto God does now proceed, and whereinto it is resolved; nothing of the interposition of a mediator with respect unto our righteousness before God, and acceptance with him; — which is at present the life and soul of religion, the substance of the gospel, and the center of all the truths revealed in it. The introduction of these things is that which makes our religion a mystery, yea, a “great mystery,” if the apostle may be believed, 1 Timothy 3:16.

All religion at first was suited and commensurable unto reason; but being now

become a mystery, men for the most part are very unwilling to receive it. But so it must be; and unless we are restored unto our primitive rectitude, a religion suited unto the principles of our reason (of which it has none but what answer that first state) will not serve our turns. Wherefore, of this introduction of Christ and grace in him into our relation unto God, there are no notions in the natural conceptions of our minds; nor are they discoverable by reason in the best and utmost of its exercise, 1 Corinthians 2:14.

For before our understanding were darkened, and our reason debased by the fall, there were no such things revealed or proposed unto us; yea, the supposition of them is inconsistent with, and contradictory unto, that whole state and condition wherein we were to live to God, — seeing they all suppose the entrance of sin. And it is not likely that our reason, as now corrupted, should be willing to embrace that which it knew nothing of in its best condition, and which was inconsistent with that way of attaining happiness which was absolutely suited unto it: for it has no faculty or power but what it has derived from that state; and to suppose it is now of itself suited and ready to embrace such heavenly mysteries of truth and grace as it had no notions of, nor could have, in the state of innocence, is to suppose that by the fall our eyes were opened to know good and evil, in the sense that the serpent deceived our first parents with an expectation of. Whereas, therefore, our reason was given us for our only guide in the first constitution of our natures, it is naturally unready to receive what is above it; and, as corrupted, has an enmity thereunto.

Hence, in the first open proposal of this mystery, — namely, of the love and grace of God in Christ, of the introduction of a mediator and his righteousness into our relation unto God, in that way which God in infinite wisdom had designed, — the whole of it was looked on as mere folly by the generality of the wise and rational men of the world, as the apostle declares at large, 1 Corinthians 1; neither was the faith of them ever really received in the world without an act of the Holy Ghost upon the mind in its renovation. And those who judge that there is nothing more needful to enable the mind of man to receive the mysteries of the gospel in a due manner but the outward proposal of the doctrine thereof, do not only deny the depravation of our nature by the



fall, but, by just consequence, wholly renounce that grace whereby we are to be recovered.

Wherefore, reason (as has been elsewhere proved), acting on and by its own innate principles and abilities, conveyed unto it from its original state, and as now corrupted, is repugnant unto the whole introduction of grace by Christ into our relation unto God, Romans 8:7. An endeavor, therefore, to reduce the doctrine of the gospel, or what is declared therein concerning the hidden mystery of the grace of God in Christ, unto the principles and inclinations of the minds of men, or reason as it remains in us after the entrance of sin, — under the power, at least, of those notions and conceptions of things religious which it retains from its first state and condition, — is to debase and corrupt them (as we shall see in sundry instances), and so make way for their rejection.

Hence, very difficult it is to keep up doctrinally and practically the minds of men unto the reality and spiritual height of this mystery; for men naturally do neither understand it nor like it: and therefore, every attempt to accommodate it unto the principles and inbred notions of corrupt reason is very acceptable unto many, yea, unto the most; for the things which such men speak and declare, are, without more ado, — without any exercise of faith or prayer, without any supernatural illumination, — easily intelligible, and exposed to the common sense of mankind. But whereas a declaration of the mysteries of the gospel can obtain no admission into the minds of men but by the effectual working of the Spirit of God, Ephesians 1:17-19, it is generally looked on as difficult, perplexed, unintelligible; and even the minds of many, who find they cannot contradict it, are yet not at all delighted with it.

And here lies the advantage of all them who, in these days, do attempt to corrupt the doctrine of the gospel, in the whole or any part of it; for the accommodation of it unto the common notions of corrupted reason is the whole of what they design. And in the confidence of the suffrage hereof, they not only oppose the things themselves, but despise the declaration of them as enthusiastic ranting. And by nothing do they more prevail themselves than by a pretense of reducing all things to reason, and contempt of what they oppose, as unintelligible fanaticism. But I am not more satisfied in any thing of the most

uncontrollable evidence, than that the understandings of these men are no just measure or standard of spiritual truth. Wherefore, notwithstanding all this fierceness of scorn, with the pretended advantages which some think they have made by traducing expressions in the writings of some men, it may be improper, it may be only not suited unto their own genius and capacity in these things, we are not to be “ashamed of the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

Of this repugnancy unto the mystery of the wisdom and grace of God in Christ, and the foundation of its whole economy, in the distinct operations of the persons of the holy Trinity therein, there are two parts or branches:

1. That which would reduce the whole of it unto the private reason of men, and their own weak, imperfect management thereof. This is the entire design of the Socinians. Hence:

(1.) The doctrine of the Trinity itself is denied, impugned, yea, derided by them; and that solely on this account. They plead that it is incomprehensible by reason; for there is in that doctrine a declaration of things absolutely infinite and eternal, which cannot be exemplified in, nor accommodated unto, things finite and temporal. This is the substance of all their pleas against the doctrine of the holy Trinity, that which gives a seeming life and sprightly vigor to their objections against it; wherein yet, under the pretense of the use and exercise of reason, they fall, and resolve all their reasonings into the most absurd and irrational principles that ever the minds of men were besotted withal. For unless you will grant them that what is above their reason, is, therefore, contradictory unto true reason; that what is infinite and eternal is perfectly comprehensible, and in all its concerns and respects to be accounted for; that what cannot be in things finite and of a separate existence, cannot be in things infinite, whose being and existence can be but one; with other such irrational, yea, brutish imaginations; all the arguments of these pretended men of reason against the Trinity become like chaff that every breath of wind will blow away.

Hereon they must, as they do, deny the distinct operations of any persons in the Godhead in the dispensation of the mystery of grace; for if there



are no such distinct persons, there can be no such distinct operations. Now, as upon a denial of these things no one article of faith can be rightly understood, nor any one duty of obedience be performed unto God in an acceptable manner; so, in particular, we grant that the doctrine of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ cannot stand.

(2.) On the same ground the incarnation of the Son of God is rejected as ἀτόπων ἀτοπώτατον, — the most absurd conception that ever befell the minds of men. Now it is to no purpose to dispute with men so persuaded, about justification; yea, we will freely acknowledge that all things we believe about it are γραῶδεις μύθοι, — no better than old wives' tales, — if the incarnation of the Son of God be so also. For I can as well understand how he who is a mere man, however exalted, dignified, and glorified, can exercise a spiritual rule in and over the hearts, consciences, and thoughts of all the men in the world, being intimately knowing of and present unto them all equally at all times (which is another of their fopperies), as how the righteousness and obedience of one should be esteemed the righteousness of all that believe, if that one be no more than a man, if he be not acknowledged to be the Son of God incarnate.

Whilst the minds of men are prepossessed with such prejudices, nay, unless they firmly assent unto the truth in these foundations of it, it is impossible to convince them of the truth and necessity of that justification of a sinner which is revealed in the gospel. Allow the Lord Christ to be no other person but what they believe him to be, and I will grant there can be no other way of justification than what they declare; though I cannot believe that ever any sinner will be justified thereby. These are the issues of an obstinate refusal to give way unto the introduction of the mystery of God and his grace into the way of salvation and our relation unto him.

And he who would desire an instance of the fertility of men's inventions in forging and coining objections against heavenly mysteries, in the justification of the sovereignty of their own reason, as unto what belongs to our relation unto God, need go no farther than the writings of these men against the Trinity and incarnation of the eternal Word. For this is their fundamental rule, in things divine and doctrines of religion, — That not what

the Scripture says is therefore to be accounted true, although it seems repugnant unto any reasoning of ours, or is above what we can comprehend; but what seems repugnant unto our reason, let the words of the Scripture be what they will, that we must conclude that the Scripture does not say so, though it seem never so expressly so to do.

*“Itaque non quia utrumque Scripture dicat, propterea haec inter se non pugnare concludendum est; sed potius quia haec inter se pugnant, ideo alterutrum a Scriptura non dici statuendum est,”* says Schlichting *ad Meisn. Def. Socin.* p.102;<sup>1</sup> — “Wherefore, because the Scripture affirms both these” (that is the efficacy of God's grace and the freedom of our wills), “we cannot conclude from thence that they are not repugnant; but because these things are repugnant unto one another, we must determine that one of them is not spoken in the Scripture:” — no, it seems, let it say what it will. This is the handsomest way they can take in advancing their own reason above the Scripture; which yet savors of intolerable presumption.

So Socinus himself,<sup>2</sup> speaking of the satisfaction of Christ, says, in plain terms: *“Ego quidem etiamsi non semel sed saepius id in sacris monumentis scriptum extaret, non idcirco tamen ita prorsus rem se habere crederem, ut vos opinamini; cum enim id omnino fieri non possit non secus atque in multis llis Scripturae Testimoniis, una cum caeteris omnibus facio; aliqua, quae minus incommode videretur, interpretatione adhibita, eum sensum ex ejusmodi verbis elicere qui sibi constaret;”* — “For my part, if this (doctrine) were extant and written in the holy Scripture, not once, but often, yet would I not therefore believe it to be so as you do; for where it can by no means be so (whatever the Scripture says), I would, as I do with others in other places, make use of some less incommodious interpretation, whereby I would draw a sense out of the words that should be consistent with itself.”

<sup>1</sup> [Jonas Schlichting (1592-1661). Chief commentator defending Socinianism. The work is most likely: *Disputatio pro Socino contra Meisnerum. Quaestiones duae: una Num in evangelicorum religione dogmata habeantur ... ut qui ea[s] amplectatur, nullo in peccato perseveret? altera Num in eadem religione quaedam con[n]cedantur Christi legibus inconcessa? contra Balthasarem Meisnerum ... a Jona Schlichtingio ... disputatae* (Rakov?: Typis Pauli Sternacii, 1636).

<sup>2</sup> [Faustus Socinus (Sozzini) (1539-1604), *De Jesu Christu Servatore* (1578).]



And how he would do this he declares a little before: “*Sacra verba in alium sensum, quam verba sonant, per inusitatos etiam tropos quandoque explicantur.*”

He would explain the words into another sense than what they sound or propose, by unusual tropes. And, indeed, such uncouth tropes does he apply, as so many engines and machines, to pervert all the divine testimonies concerning our redemption, reconciliation, and justification by the blood of Christ.

Having therefore fixed this as their rule, constantly to prefer their own reason above the express words of the Scripture, which must, therefore, by one means or other, be so perverted or wrested as to be made compliant therewith, it is endless to trace them in their multiplied objections against the holy mysteries, all resolved into this one principle, that their reason cannot comprehend them, nor does approve of them. And if any man would have an especial instance of the serpentine wits of men winding themselves from under the power of conviction by the spiritual light of truth, or at least endeavoring so to do, let him read the comments of the Jewish rabbins on Isaiah, chap. 53, and of the Socinians on the beginning of the Gospel of John.

2. The second branch of this repugnancy springs from the want of a due comprehension of that harmony which is in the mystery of grace, and between all the parts of it. This comprehension is the principal effect of that wisdom which believers are taught by the Holy Ghost. Our understanding of the wisdom of God in a mystery is neither an art nor a science — whether purely speculative or more practical — but a spiritual wisdom. And this spiritual wisdom is such as understands and apprehends things, not so much, or not only in the notion of them, as in their power, reality, and efficacy, towards their proper ends. And, therefore, although it may be very few, unless they be learned, judicious, and diligent in the use of means of all sorts, do attain unto it clearly and distinctly in the doctrinal notions of it; yet are all true believers, yea, the meanest of them, directed and enabled by the Holy Spirit, as unto their own practice and duty, to act suitably unto a comprehension of this harmony, according to the promise that “they shall be all taught of God.” Hence, those things which appear unto others contradictory and inconsistent one with another,

so as that they are forced to offer violence unto the Scripture and their own experience in the rejection of the one or the other of them, are reconciled in their minds and made mutually useful or helpful unto one another, in the whole course of their obedience. But these things must be farther spoken unto.

Such a harmony as that intended there is in the whole mystery of God. For it is the most curious effect and product of divine wisdom; and it is no impeachment of the truth of it, that it is not discernible by human reason. A full comprehension of it no creature can in this world arise unto. Only, in the contemplation of faith, we may arrive unto such an understanding admiration of it as shall enable us to give glory unto God, and to make use of all the parts of it in practice as we have occasion. Concerning it the holy man mentioned before cried out, ὁ ἀνεξιχνιάστου δημιουργίας — “O unsearchable contrivance and operations.” And so is it expressed by the apostle, as that which has an unfathomable depth of wisdom in it, ὅ βάθος πλούτου, etc. — “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Romans 11:33-36. See to the same purpose, Ephesians 3:8-10.

There is a harmony, a suitableness of one thing unto another, in all the works of creation. Yet we see that it is not perfectly nor absolutely discoverable unto the wisest and most diligent of men. How far are they from an agreement about the order and motions of the heavenly bodies, of the sympathies and qualities of sundry things here below, in the relation of causality and efficiency between one thing and another! The new discoveries made concerning any of them, do only evidence how far men are from a just and perfect comprehension of them. Yet such a universal harmony there is in all the parts of nature and its operations, that nothing in its proper station and operation is destructively contradictory either to the whole or any part of it, but every thing contributes unto the preservation and use of the universe. But although this harmony be not absolutely comprehensible by any, yet do all living creatures, who follow the conduct or instinct of nature, make use of it, and live upon it; and without it neither their being could be preserved, nor their operations continued.



But in the mystery of God and his grace, the harmony and suitableness of one thing unto another, with their tendency unto the same end, is incomparably more excellent and glorious than that which is seen in nature or the works of it. For whereas God made all things at first in wisdom, yet is the new creation of all things by Jesus Christ ascribed peculiarly unto the riches, stores, and treasures of that infinite wisdom. Neither can any discern it unless they are taught of God; for it is only spiritually discerned. But yet is it by the most despised. Some seem to think that there is no great wisdom in it; and some, that no great wisdom is required unto the comprehension of it: few think it worth the while to spend half that time in prayer, in meditation, in the exercise of self-denial, mortification, and holy obedience, doing the will of Christ, that they may know of his word, to the attaining of a due comprehension of the mystery of godliness, as some do in diligence, study, and trial of experiments, who design to excel in natural or mathematical sciences. Wherefore there are three things evident herein:

1. That such a harmony there is in all the parts of the mystery of God, wherein all the blessed properties of the divine nature are glorified, our duty in all instances is directed and engaged, our salvation in the way of obedience secured, and Christ, as the end of all, exalted. Wherefore, we are not only to consider and know the several parts of the doctrine of spiritual truths but their relation, also, one unto another, their consistency one with another in practice, and their mutual furtherance of one another unto their common end. And a disorder in our apprehensions about any part of that whose beauty and use arises from its harmony, gives some confusion of mind with respect unto the whole.

2. That unto a comprehension of this harmony in a due measure, it is necessary that we be taught of God; without which we can never be wise in the knowledge of the mystery of his grace. And herein ought we to place the principal part of our diligence, in our inquiries into the truths of the gospel.

3. All those who are taught of God to know his will, unless it be when their minds are disordered by prejudices, false opinions, or temptations, have an experience in themselves and their own practical obedience, of the consistency of all parts of the mystery of God's grace and truth in Christ

among themselves, — of their spiritual harmony and cogent tendency unto the same end. The introduction of the grace of Christ into our relation unto God, makes no confusion or disorder in their minds, by the conflict of the principles of natural reason, with respect unto our first relation unto God, and those of grace, with respect unto that whereunto we are renewed.

From the want of a due comprehension of this divine harmony it is, that the minds of men are filled with imaginations of an inconsistency between the most important parts of the mystery of the gospel, from whence the confusions that are at this day in Christian religion do proceed.

Thus the Socinians can see no consistency between the grace or love of God and the satisfaction of Christ, but imagine if the one of them be admitted, the other must be excluded out of our religion. Wherefore they principally oppose the latter, under a pretense of asserting and vindicating the former. And where these things are expressly conjoined in the same proposition of faith, — as where it is said that “we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,” Romans 3:24, 25, — they will offer violence unto common sense and reason, rather than not disturb that harmony which they cannot understand. For although it be plainly affirmed to be a redemption by his blood, as he is a propitiation, as his blood was a ransom or price of redemption, yet they will contend that it is only metaphorical, — a mere deliverance by power, like that of the Israelites by Moses. But these things are clearly stated in the gospel; and therefore not only consistent, but such as that the one cannot subsist without the other. Nor is there any mention of any especial love or grace of God unto sinners, but with respect unto the satisfaction of Christ as the means of the communication of all its effects unto them. See John 3:16; Romans 3:23-25; 8:30-33; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Ephesians 1:7; etc.

In like manner, they can see no consistency between the satisfaction of Christ and the necessity of holiness or obedience in them that do believe. Hence they continually clamor, that, by our doctrine of the mediation of Christ, we overthrow all obligations unto a holy life. And by their sophistical reasoning unto this purpose,



they prevail with many to embrace their delusion, who have not a spiritual experience to confront their sophistry withal. But as the testimony of the Scripture lies expressly against them, so those who truly believe, and have real experience of the influence of that truth into the life of God, and how impossible it is to yield any acceptable obedience herein without respect thereunto, are secured from their snares.

These and the like imaginations arise from the unwillingness of men to admit of the introduction of the mystery of grace into our relation unto God. For suppose us to stand before God on the old constitution of the covenant of creation, which alone natural reason likes and is comprehensive of, and we do acknowledge these things to be inconsistent. But the mystery of the wisdom and grace of God in Christ cannot stand without them both.

So, likewise, God's efficacious grace in the conversion of sinners, and the exercise of the faculties of their minds in a way of duty, are asserted as contradictory and inconsistent. And although they seem both to be positively and frequently declared in the Scripture, yet, say these men, their consistency being repugnant to their reason, let the Scripture say what it will, yet is it to be said by us that the Scripture does not assert one of them. And this is from the same cause; men cannot, in their wisdom, see it possible that the mystery of God's grace should be introduced into our relation and obedience unto God. Hence have many ages of the church, especially the last of them, been filled with endless disputes, in opposition to the grace of God, or to accommodate the conceptions of it unto the interests of corrupted reason.

But there is no instance more pregnant unto this purpose than that under our present consideration. Free justification, through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, is cried out against, as inconsistent with a necessity of personal holiness and obedience: and because the Socinians insist principally on this pretense, it shall be fully and diligently considered apart; and that holiness which, without it, they and others deriving from them do pretend unto, shall be tried by the unerring rule.

Wherefore I desire it may be observed, that in pleading for this doctrine, we do it as a principal

part of the introduction of grace into our whole relation unto God. Hence we grant:

1. That it is unsuited, yea foolish, and, as some speak, childish, unto the principles of unenlightened and unsanctified reason or understandings of men. And this we conceive to be the principal cause of all the oppositions that are made unto it, and all the deprivations of it that the church is pestered withal. Hence are the wits of men so fertile in sophistical cavils against it, so ready to load it with seeming absurdity, and I know not what unsuitableness unto their wondrous rational conceptions. And no objection can be made against it, be it never so trivial, but it is highly applauded by those who look on that introduction of the mystery of grace, which is above their natural conceptions, as unintelligible folly.

2. That the necessary relation of these things, one unto the other, — namely, of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and the necessity of our personal obedience, — will not be clearly understood, nor duly improved, but by and in the exercise of the wisdom of faith. This we grant also; and let who will make what advantage they can of this concession. True faith has that spiritual light in it, or accompanying of it, as that it is able to receive it, and to conduct the soul unto obedience by it. Wherefore, reserving the particular consideration hereof unto its proper place, I say, in general:

(1.) That this relation is evident unto that spiritual wisdom whereby we are enabled, doctrinally and practically, to comprehend the harmony of the mystery of God, and the consistency of all the parts of it, one with another.

(2.) That it is made evident by the Scripture, wherein both these things — justification through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and the necessity of our personal obedience — are plainly asserted and declared. And we defy that rule of the Socinians, that seeing these things are inconsistent in their apprehension or unto their reason, therefore we must say that one of them is not taught in the Scripture: for whatever it may appear unto their reason, it does not so to ours; and we have at least as good reason to trust unto our own reason as unto theirs. Yet we absolutely acquiesce in neither, but in the authority of God in the Scripture; rejoicing only in this, that we can





set our seal unto his revelations by our own experience. For:

(3.) It is fully evident in the gracious conduct which the minds of them that believe are under, even that of the Spirit of truth and grace, and the inclinations of that new principle of the divine life whereby they are acted; for although, from the remainders of sin and darkness that are in them, temptations may arise unto a continuation in sin because grace has abounded, yet are their minds so formed and framed by the doctrine of this grace, and the grace of this doctrine, that the abounding of grace herein is the principal motive unto their abounding in holiness, as we shall see afterward.

And this we aver to be the spring of all those objections which the adversaries of this doctrine do continually endeavor to entangle it withal. As: 1. If the passive righteousness (as it is commonly called), that is, his death and suffering, be imputed unto us, there is no need, nor can it be, that his active righteousness, or the obedience of his life, should be imputed unto us; and so on the contrary: for both together are inconsistent. 2. That if all sin be pardoned, there is no need of the righteousness; and so on the contrary, if the righteousness of Christ be imputed unto us, there is no room for, or need of, the pardon of sin. 3. If we believe the pardon of our sins, then are our sins pardoned before we believe, or we are bound to believe that which is not so. 4. If the righteousness of Christ be imputed unto us, then are we esteemed to have done and suffered what, indeed, we never did nor suffered; and it is true, that if we are esteemed ourselves to have done it, imputation is overthrown. 5. If Christ's righteousness be imputed unto us, then are we as righteous as was Christ himself. 6. If our sins were imputed unto Christ, then was he thought to have sinned, and was a sinner subjectively. 7. If good works be excluded from any interest in our justification before God, then are they of no use unto our salvation. 8. That it is ridiculous to think that where there is no sin, there is not all the righteousness that can be required. 9. That righteousness imputed is only a putative or imaginary righteousness, etc.

Now, although all these and the like objections, however subtly managed (as Socinus boasts that he had used more than ordinary subtlety in this cause, — *"In quo, si subtilius aliquanto quam opus*

*esse videretur, quaedam a nobis disputate sunt," De Servat., par. 4, cap. 4),<sup>3</sup> are capable of plain and clear solutions, and we shall avoid the examination of none of them; yet at present I shall only say, that all the shades which they cast on the minds of men do vanish and disappear before the light of express Scripture testimonies, and the experience of them that do believe, where there is a due comprehension of the mystery of grace in any tolerable measure.*

Seventhly. There are some common prejudices that are usually pleaded against the doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; which, because they will not orderly fall under a particular consideration in our progress, may be briefly examined in these general previous considerations:

1. It is usually urged against it, that this imputation of the righteousness of Christ is nowhere mentioned expressly in the Scripture. This is the first objection of Bellarmine against it. *"Hactenus,"* says he, *"nullum omnino locum invenire putuerunt, ubi legeretur Christi justitiam nobis imputari ad justitiam; vel nos justos esse per Christi justitiam nobis imputatam," De Justificat., lib. 2 cap. 7;*<sup>4</sup> — an objection, doubtless, unreasonably and immodestly urged by men of this persuasion; for not only do they make profession of their whole faith, or their belief of all things in matters of religion, in terms and expressions nowhere used in the Scripture, but believe many things also, as they say, with faith divine, not at all revealed or contained in the Scripture, but drained by them out of the traditions of the church. I do not, therefore, understand how such persons can modestly manage this as an objection against any doctrine, that the terms wherein some do express it are not ῥητῶς — found in the Scripture just in that order of one word after another as by them they are used; for this rule may be much enlarged, and yet be kept strait enough to exclude the principal concerns of their church out of the confines of Christianity. Nor can I apprehend much more equity in others, who reflect with severity on this expression of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as unscriptural, as if those who make use thereof were criminal in no small degree,

<sup>3</sup> [Faustus Socinus, *Ibid.*]

<sup>4</sup> [Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). *Disputationum Roberti Bellarmini ... de controversiis christianae fidei* (1628).]



when themselves, immediately in the declaration of their own judgment, make use of such terms, distinctions, and expressions, as are so far from being in the Scripture, as that it is odds they had never been in the world, had they escaped Aristotle's mint, or that of the schools deriving from him.

And thus, although a sufficient answer has frequently enough (if any thing can be so) been returned unto this objection in Bellarmine, yet has one of late amongst ourselves made the translation of it into English to be the substance of the first chapter of a book about justification; though he needed not to have given such an early intimation unto whom he is beholding for the greatest part of his ensuing discourse, unless it be what is taken up in despicable revilings of other men. For take from him what is not his own, on the one hand, and impertinent cavils at the words and expressions of other men, with forged imputations on some of them, on the other, and his whole book will disappear. But yet, although he affirms that none of the Protestant writers, who speak of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto us (which were all of them, without exception, until of late), have precisely kept to the form of wholesome words, but have rather swerved and varied from the language of the Scripture; yet he will excuse them from open error, if they intend no more thereby but that we are made partakers of the benefits of the righteousness of Christ. But if they intend that the righteousness of Christ itself imputed unto us (that is, so as to be our righteousness before God, whereon we are pardoned and accepted with him, or do receive the forgiveness of sins, and a right to the heavenly inheritance), then are they guilty of that error which makes us to be esteemed to do ourselves what Christ did; and so on the other side, Christ to have done what we do and did, chapter 2,3. But these things are not so. For, if we are esteemed to have done any thing in our own persons, it cannot be imputed unto us as done for us by another; as it will appear when we shall treat of these things afterwards. But the great and holy persons intended, are as little concerned in the accusations or apologies of some writers, as those writers seem to be acquainted with that learning, wisdom, and judgment, wherein they did excel, and the characters whereof are so eminently conspicuous in all their writings.

But the judgment of most Protestants is not only candidly expressed, but approved of also by Bellarmine himself in another place. "*Non esset,*" says he, "*absurdum, si quis diceret nobis imputari Christi justitiam et merita; cum nobis donentur et applicentur; ac si nos ipsi Deo satisfacissemus.*" *De Justif.*, lib. 2, cap. 10;<sup>5</sup> — "It were not absurd, if any one should say that the righteousness and merits of Christ are imputed unto us, when they are given and applied unto us, as if we ourselves had satisfied God." And this he confirms with that saying of Bernard,<sup>6</sup> *Epist. ad Innocent.* 190, "*Nam 'si unus pro omnibus mortuus est, ergo omnes mortui sunt,' ut videlicet satisfactio unius omnibus imputetur, sicut omnium peccata unus ille portavit.*" And those who will acknowledge no more in this matter, but only a participation "*quovis modo,*" one way or other, of the benefits of the obedience and righteousness of Christ, wherein we have the concurrence of the Socinians also, might do well, as I suppose, plainly to deny all imputation of his righteousness unto us in any sense, as they do, seeing the benefits of his righteousness cannot be said to be imputed unto us, what way so ever we are made partakers of them. For to say that the righteousness of Christ is imputed unto us, with respect unto the benefits of it, when neither the righteousness itself is imputed unto us, nor can the benefits of it be imputed unto us, as we shall see afterward, does minister great occasion of much needless variance and contests. Neither do I know any reason why men should seek countenance unto this doctrine under such an expression as themselves reflect upon as unscriptural, if they be contented that their minds and sense should be clearly understood and apprehended; — for truth needs no subterfuge.

The Socinians do now principally make use of this objection. For, finding the whole church of God in the use of sundry expressions, in the declaration of the most important truths of the gospel, that are not literally contained in the Scripture, they hoped for an advantage from thence in their opposition unto the things themselves. Such are the terms of the Trinity, the incarnation, satisfaction, and merit of Christ, as this also, of the imputation of his righteousness.

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<sup>5</sup> [Bellarmine, *Ibid.*]

<sup>6</sup> [Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters*. For a translation in English, See *Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, transl. Bruno Scott James (London, 1953).]



How little they have prevailed in the other instances, has been sufficiently manifested by them with whom they have had to do. But as unto that part of this objection which concerns the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto believers, those by whom it is asserted do say:

(1.) That it is the thing alone intended which they plead for. If that be not contained in the Scripture, if it be not plainly taught and confirmed therein, they will speedily relinquish it. But if they can prove that the doctrine which they intend in this expression, and which is thereby plainly declared into the understandings of men, is a divine truth sufficiently witnessed unto in the Scripture; then is this expression of it reductively scriptural, and the truth itself so expressed a divine verity. To deny this, is to take away all use of the interpretation of the Scripture, and to overthrow the ministry of the church. This, therefore, is to be alone inquired into.

(2.) They say, the same thing is taught and expressed in the Scripture in phrases equipollent. For it affirms that “by the obedience of one” (that is Christ), “many are made righteous,” Romans 5:19; and that we are made righteous by the imputation of righteousness unto us, “Blessed is the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” chap. 4:6. And if we are made righteous by the imputation of righteousness unto us, that obedience or righteousness whereby we are made righteous is imputed unto us. And they will be content with this expression of this doctrine, — that the obedience of Christ whereby we are made righteous, is the righteousness that God imputes unto us. Wherefore, this objection is of no force to disadvantage the truth pleaded for.

2. Socinus objects, in particular, against this doctrine of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and of his satisfaction, that there is nothing said of it in the “Evangelists,” nor in the “report of the sermons of Christ unto the people, nor yet in those of his private discourses with his disciples;” and he urges it vehemently and at large against the whole of the expiation of sin by his death, *De Servator.*, par. 4, cap. 9. And as it is easy “*malis inventis pejora addere,*” this notion of his is not only made use of and pressed at large by one among ourselves, but improved also by a dangerous comparison between the writings of the evangelists and the other writings of the New Testament. For to

enforce this argument, that the histories of the gospel, wherein the sermons of Christ are recorded, do make no mention of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (as in his judgment they do not), nor of his satisfaction, or merit, or expiation of sin, or of redemption by his death (as they do not in the judgment of Socinus), it is added by him, that for his part he is “apt to admire our Savior’s sermons, who was the author of our religion, before the writings of the apostles, though inspired men.” Whereunto many dangerous insinuations and reflections on the writings of St. Paul, contrary to the faith and sense of the church in all ages, are subjoined. See pp.240, 241.

But this boldness is not only unwarrantable, but to be abhorred. What place of Scripture, what ecclesiastical tradition, what single precedent of any one sober Christian writer, what theological reason, will countenance a man in making the comparison mentioned, and so determining thereon? Such juvenile boldness, such want of a due apprehension and understanding of the nature of divine inspiration, with the order and design of the writings of the New Testament, which are the springs of this precipitate censure, ought to be reflected on. At present, to remove this pretense out of our way, it may be observed:

(1.) That what the Lord Christ taught his disciples, in his personal ministry on the earth, was suited unto that economy of the church which was antecedent unto his death and resurrection. Nothing did he withhold from them that was needful to their faith, obedience, and consolation in that state. Many things he instructed them in out of the Scripture, many new revelations he made unto them, and many times did he occasionally instruct and rectify their judgments; howbeit he made no clear, distinct revelation of those sacred mysteries unto them which are peculiar unto the faith of the New Testament, nor were to be distinctly apprehended before his death and resurrection.

(2.) What the Lord Christ revealed afterward by his Spirit unto the apostles, was no less immediately from himself than was the truth which he spoke unto them with his own mouth in the days of his flesh. An apprehension to the contrary is destructive of Christian religion. The epistles of the apostles are no less Christ’s



sermons than that which he delivered on the mount. Wherefore:

(3.) Neither in the things themselves, nor in the way of their delivery or revelation, is there any advantage of the one sort of writings above the other. The things written in the epistles proceed from the same wisdom, the same grace, the same love, with the things which he spoke with his own mouth in the days of his flesh, and are of the same divine veracity, authority, and efficacy. The revelation which he made by his Spirit is no less divine and immediate from himself, than what he spoke unto his disciples on the earth. To distinguish between these things, on any of these accounts, is intolerable folly.

(4.) The writings of the evangelists do not contain the whole of all the instructions which the Lord Christ gave unto his disciples personally on the earth. For he was seen of them after his resurrection forty days, and spoke with them of “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,” Acts 1:3; and yet nothing hereof is recorded in their writings, but only some few occasional speeches. Nor had he given before unto them a clear and distinct understanding of those things which were delivered concerning his death and resurrection in the Old Testament; as is plainly declared, Luke 24:25-27. For it was not necessary for them, in that state wherein they were. Wherefore:

(5.) As to the extent of divine revelations objectively those which he granted, by his Spirit, unto his apostles after his ascension, were beyond those which he personally taught them, so far as they are recorded in the writings of the evangelists. For he told them plainly, not long before his death, that he had many things to say unto them which “then they could not bear,” John 16:12. And for the knowledge of those things, he refers them to the coming of the Spirit to make revelation of them from himself, in the next words, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you,” verses 13,14. And on this account he had told them before, that it was expedient for them that he should go away, that the Holy Spirit might come unto them, whom he would send from the Father, verse 7. Hereunto

he referred the full and clear manifestation of the mysteries of the gospel. So false, as well as dangerous and scandalous, are those insinuations of Socinus and his followers.

(6.) The writings of the evangelists are full unto their proper ends and purposes. These were, to record the genealogy, conception, birth, acts, miracles, and teachings of our Savior, so far as to evince him to be the true, only-promised Messiah. So he testifies who wrote the last of them: “Many other signs truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” John 22:30, 31. Unto this end every thing is recorded by them that is needful unto the ingenerating and establishing of faith. Upon this confirmation, all things declared in the Old Testament concerning him — all that was taught in types and sacrifices — became the object of faith, in that sense wherein they were interpreted in the accomplishment; and that in them this doctrine was before revealed, shall be proved afterward. It is, therefore, no wonder if some things, and those of the highest importance, should be declared more fully in other writings of the New Testament than they are in those of the evangelists.

(7.) The pretense itself is wholly false; for there are as many pregnant testimonies given unto this truth in one alone of the evangelists as in any other book of the New Testament, — namely, in the book of John. I shall refer to some of them, which will be pleaded in their proper place, chapter 1:12, 17; 3:14-18, 36; 5:24.

But we may pass this by, as one of those inventions concerning which Socinus boasts, in his epistle to Michael Vajoditus, that his writings were esteemed by many for the singularity of things asserted in them.

3. The difference that has been among Protestant writers about this doctrine is pleaded in the prejudice of it. Osiander,<sup>7</sup> in the entrance of the reformation, fell into a vain imagination, that we were justified or made righteous with the essential righteousness of God, communicated unto us by Jesus Christ. And whereas he was opposed herein with some severity by the most

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<sup>7</sup> [Andreas Osiander, German Reformer (1498-1552). Osiander opposed forensic justification but his views were rejected in the Formula of Concord (1577), article III.]



learned persons of those days, to countenance himself in his singularity, he pretended that there were “twenty different opinions amongst the Protestants themselves about the formal cause of our justification before God.” This was quickly laid hold on by them of the Roman church, and is urged as a prejudice against the whole doctrine, by Bellarmine, Vasquez, and others.<sup>8</sup> But the vanity of this pretense of his has been sufficiently discovered; and Bellarmine himself could fancy but four opinions among them that seemed to be different from one another, reckoning that of Osiander for one, *De Justificat.*, lib. 2, cap. 1. But whereas he knew that the imagination of Osiander was exploded by them all, the other three that he mentions are indeed but distinct parts of the same entire doctrine. Wherefore, until of late it might be truly said, that the faith and doctrine of all Protestants was in this article entirely the same. For however they differed in the way, manner, and methods of its declaration, and too many private men were addicted unto definitions and descriptions of their own, under pretense of logical accuracy in teaching, which gave an appearance of some contradiction among them; yet in this they generally agreed, that it is the righteousness of Christ, and not our own, on the account whereof we receive the pardon of sin, acceptance with God, are declared righteous by the gospel, and have a right and title unto the heavenly inheritance. Hereon, I say, they were generally agreed, first against the Papists, and afterwards against the Socinians; and where this is granted, I will not contend with any man about his way of declaring the doctrine of it.

And that I may add it by the way, we have herein the concurrence of the fathers of the primitive church. For although by justification, following the etymology of the Latin word, they understood the making us righteous with internal personal righteousness, — at least some of them did so, as Austin in particular, — yet that we are pardoned and accepted with God on any other account but that of the righteousness of Christ, they believed not. And whereas, especially in their controversy with the Pelagians, after the rising of that heresy, they plead vehemently that we are made righteous by the grace of God changing our hearts and natures, and creating in us a principle of spiritual

life and holiness, and not by the endeavors of our own free will, or works performed in the strength thereof, their words and expressions have been abused, contrary to their intention and design.

For we wholly concur with them, and subscribe unto all that they dispute about the making of us personally righteous and holy by the effectual grace of God, against all merit of works and operations of our own free will (our sanctification being every way as much of grace as our justification, properly so called); and that in opposition unto the common doctrine of the Roman church about the same matter: only they call this our being made inherently and personally righteous by grace, sometimes by the name of justification, which we do not. And this is laid hold on as an advantage by those of the Roman church who do not concur with them in the way and manner whereby we are so made righteous. But whereas by our justification before God, we intend only that righteousness whereon our sins are pardoned, wherewith we are made righteous in his sight, or for which we are accepted as righteous before him, it will be hard to find any of them assigning of it unto any other causes than the Protestants do. So it is fallen out, that what they design to prove, we entirely comply with them in; but the way and manner whereby they prove it is made use of by the Papists unto another end, which they intended not.

But as to the way and manner of the declaration of this doctrine among Protestants themselves, there ever was some variety and difference in expressions; nor will it otherwise be whilst the abilities and capacities of men, whether in the conceiving of things of this nature, or in the expression of their conceptions, are so various as they are. And it is acknowledged that these differences of late have had by some as much weight laid upon them as the substance of the doctrine generally agreed in. Hence some have composed entire books, consisting almost of nothing but impertinent cavils at other men’s words and expressions. But these things proceed from the weakness of some men, and other vicious habits of their minds, and do not belong unto the cause itself. And such persons, as for me, shall write as they do, and fight on until they are weary. Neither has the multiplication of questions, and the curious discussion of them in the handling of this doctrine, wherein nothing ought to be diligently insisted on but what is

<sup>8</sup> [Gabriel Vasquez (1551-1604). Probably, *Commentariorum ac disputationum in primam partem Sancti Thomae* (Lugduni, 1620). Bellarmine, *Ibid.*]



directive of our practice, been of much use unto the truth itself, though it has not been directly opposed in them.

That which is of real difference among persons who agree in the substance of the doctrine, may be reduced unto a very few heads; as:

(1.) There is something of this kind about the nature of faith whereby we are justified, with its proper object in justifying, and its use in justification. And an instance we have herein, not only of the weakness of our intellects in the apprehension of spiritual things, but also of the remainders of confusion and disorder in our minds; at least, how true it is that we know only in part, and prophesy only in part, whilst we are in this life. For whereas this faith is an act of our minds, put forth in the way of duty to God, yet many by whom it is sincerely exercised, and that continually, are not agreed either in the nature or proper object of it. Yet is there no doubt but that some of them who differ amongst themselves about these things, have delivered their minds free from the prepossession of prejudices and notions derived from other artificial reasonings imposed on them, and do really express their own conceptions as to the best and utmost of their experience. And notwithstanding this difference, they do yet all of them please God in the exercise of faith, as it is their duty, and have that respect unto its proper object as secures both their justification and salvation. And if we cannot, on this consideration, bear with, and forbear, one another in our different conceptions and expressions of those conceptions about these things, it is a sign we have a great mind to be contentious, and that our confidences are built on very weak foundations. For my part, I had much rather my lot should be found among them who do really believe with the heart unto righteousness, though they are not able to give a tolerable definition of faith unto others, than among them who can endlessly dispute about it with seeming accuracy and skill, but are negligent in the exercise of it as their own duty. Wherefore, some things shall be briefly spoken of in this matter, to declare my own apprehensions concerning the things mentioned, without the least design to contradict or oppose the conceptions of others.

(2.) There has been a controversy more directly stated among some learned divines of the

Reformed churches (for the Lutherans are unanimous on the one side), about the righteousness of Christ that is said to be imputed unto us. For some would have this to be only his suffering of death, and the satisfaction which he made for sin thereby, and others include therein the obedience of his life also. The occasion, original, and progress of this controversy, the persons by whom it has been managed, with the writings wherein it is so, and the various ways that have been endeavored for its reconciliation, are sufficiently known unto all who have inquired into these things. Neither shall I immix myself herein, in the way of controversy, or in opposition unto others, though I shall freely declare my own judgment in it, so far as the consideration of the righteousness of Christ, under this distinction, is inseparable from the substance of the truth itself which I plead for.

(3.) Some difference there has been, also, whether the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us, or the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, may be said to be the formal cause of our justification before God; wherein there appears some variety of expression among learned men, who have handled this subject in the way of controversy with the Papists. The true occasion of the differences about this expression has been this, and no other: Those of the Roman church do constantly assert, that the righteousness whereby we are righteous before God is the formal cause of our justification; and this righteousness, they say, is our own inherent, personal righteousness, and not the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us: wherefore they treat of this whole controversy — namely, what is the righteousness on the account whereof we are accepted with God, or justified — under the name of the formal cause of justification; which is the subject of the second book of Bellarmine concerning justification. In opposition unto them, some Protestants, contending that the righteousness wherewith we are esteemed righteous before God, and accepted with him, is the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us, and not our own inherent, imperfect, personal righteousness, have done it under this inquiry, — namely, What is the formal cause of our justification? Which some have said to be the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, some, the righteousness of Christ imputed. But what they designed herein was, not to resolve this controversy into a philosophical inquiry about the



nature of a formal cause, but only to prove that that truly belonged unto the righteousness of Christ in our justification which the Papists ascribed unto our own, under that name. That there is a habitual, infused habit of grace, which is the formal cause of our personal, inherent righteousness, they grant: but they all deny that God pardons our sins, and justifies our persons, with respect unto this righteousness, as the formal cause thereof; nay, they deny that in the justification of a sinner there either is, or can be, any inherent formal cause of it. And what they mean by a formal cause in our justification is only that which gives the denomination unto the subject, as the imputation of the righteousness of Christ does to a person that he is justified.

Wherefore, notwithstanding the differences that have been among some in the various expression of their conceptions, the substance of the doctrine of the reformed churches is by them agreed upon and retained entire. For they all agree that God justifies no sinner, — absolves him not from guilt, nor declares him righteous, so as to have a title unto the heavenly inheritance, — but with respect unto a true and perfect righteousness; as also, that this righteousness is truly the righteousness of him that is so justified; that this righteousness becomes ours by God's free grace and donation, — the way on our part whereby we come to be really and effectually interested therein being faith alone; and that this is the perfect obedience or righteousness of Christ imputed unto us: in these things, as they shall be afterwards distinctly explained, is contained the whole of that truth whose explanation and confirmation is the design of the ensuing discourse. And because those by whom this doctrine in the substance of it is of late impugned, derive more from the Socinians than the Papists, and make a nearer approach unto their principles, I shall chiefly insist on the examination of those original authors by whom their notions were first coined, and whose weapons they make use of in their defense.

Eighthly. To close these previous discourses, it is worthy our consideration what weight was laid on this doctrine of justification at the first Reformation and what influence it had into the whole work thereof. However the minds of men may be changed as unto sundry doctrines of faith among us, yet none can justly own the name of Protestant, but he must highly value the first Reformation: and they cannot well do otherwise

whose present even temporal advantages are resolved thereinto. However, I intend none but such as own an especial presence and guidance of God with them who were eminently and successfully employed therein. Such persons cannot but grant that their faith in this matter, and the concurrence of their thoughts about its importance, are worthy consideration.

Now it is known that the doctrine of justification gave the first occasion to the whole work of reformation, and was the main thing whereon it turned. This those mentioned declared to be "*Articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*," and that the vindication thereof alone deserved all the pains that were taken in the whole endeavor of reformation. But things are now, and that by virtue of their doctrine herein, much changed in the world, though it be not so understood or acknowledged. In general, no small benefit redounded unto the world by the Reformation, even among them by whom it was not, nor is received, though many bluster with contrary pretensions: for all the evils which have accidentally ensued thereon, arising most of them from the corrupt passions and interests of them by whom it has been opposed, are usually ascribed unto it; and all the light, liberty, and benefit of the minds of men which it has introduced, are ascribed unto other causes. But this may be signally observed with respect unto the doctrine of justification, with the causes and effects of its discovery and vindication. For the first reformers found their own, and the consciences of other men, so immersed in darkness, so pressed and harassed with fears, terrors, and disquietments under the power of it, and so destitute of any steady guidance into the ways of peace with God, as that with all diligence (like persons sensible that herein their spiritual and eternal interest was concerned) they made their inquiries after the truth in this matter; which they knew must be the only means of their deliverance.

All men in those days were either kept in bondage under endless fears and anxieties of mind upon the convictions of sin, or sent for relief unto indulgences, priestly pardons, penances, pilgrimages, works satisfactory of their own, and supererogatory of others, or kept under chains of darkness for purgatory unto the last day. Now, he is no way able to compare things past and present, who sees not how great an alteration is



made in these things even in the papal church. For before the Reformation, whereby the light of the gospel, especially in this doctrine of justification, was diffused among men, and shone even into their minds who never comprehended nor received it, the whole almost of religion among them was taken up with, and confined unto, these things. And to instigate men unto an abounding sedulity in the observation of them, their minds were stuffed with traditions and stories of visions, apparitions, frightful spirits, and other imaginations that poor mortals are apt to be amazed withal, and which their restless disquietments gave countenance unto. "*Somnia, terrors magici, miracula, sagae Nocturni lemures, ortentaque Thessala,*" — (*Hor., Ep. 202, 209.*) were the principal objects of their creed, and matter of their religious conversation. That very church itself comparatively at ease from these things unto what it was before the Reformation; though so much of them is still retained as to blind the eyes of men from discerning the necessity as well as the truth of the evangelical doctrine of justification.

It is fallen out herein not much otherwise than it did at the first entrance of Christianity into the world. For there was an emanation of light and truth from the gospel which affected the minds of men, by whom yet the whole of it, in its general design, was opposed and persecuted. For from thence the very vulgar sort of men became to have better apprehensions and notions of God and his properties, or the original and rule of the universe, than they had arrived unto in the midnight of their paganism. And a sort of learned speculative men there were, who, by virtue of that light of truth which sprung from the gospel, and was now diffused into the minds of men, reformed and improved the old philosophy, discarding many of those falsehoods and impertinencies wherewith it had been encumbered. But when this was done, they still maintained their cause on the old principles of the philosophers. And, indeed, their opposition unto the gospel was far more plausible and pleadable than it was before. For after they had discarded the gross conceptions of the common sort about the divine nature and rule, and had blended the light of truth which brake forth in Christian religion with their own philosophical notions, they made a vigorous attempt for the reinforcement of heathenism against the main design of the gospel. And things

have not, as I said, fallen out much otherwise in the Reformation. For as by the light of truth which therein brake forth, the consciences of even the vulgar sort are in some measure freed from those childish affrightments which they were before in bondage unto; so those who are learned have been enabled to reduce the opinions and practices of their church into a more defensible posture, and make their opposition unto the truths of the gospel more plausible than they formerly were. Yea, that doctrine which, in the way of its teaching and practice among them, as also in its effects on the consciences of men, was so horrid as to drive innumerable persons from their communion in that and other things also, is now, in the new representation of it, with the artificial covering provided for its former effects in practice, thought an argument meet to be pleaded for a return unto its entire communion.

But to root the superstitions mentioned out of the minds of men, to communicate unto them the knowledge of the righteousness of God, which is revealed from faith to faith, and thereby to deliver them from their bondage, fears, and distress, directing convinced sinners unto the only way of solid peace with God, did the first reformers labor so diligently in the declaration and vindication of the evangelical doctrine of justification; and God was with them. And it is worth our consideration, whether we should, on every cavil and sophism of men not so taught, not so employed, not so tried, not so owned of God as they were, and in whose writings there are not appearing such characters of wisdom, sound judgment, and deep experience, as in theirs, easily part with that doctrine of truth wherein alone they found peace unto their own souls, and whereby they were instrumental to give liberty and peace with God unto the souls and consciences of others innumerable, accompanied with the visible effects of holiness of life, and fruitfulness in the works of righteousness, unto the praise of God by Jesus Christ. In my judgment, Luther spoke the truth when he said, "*Amisso articulo justificationis, simul amissa est tota doctrina Christiana.*" And I wish he had not been a true prophet, when he foretold that in the following ages the doctrine thereof would be again obscured; the causes whereof I have elsewhere inquired into.

Some late writers, indeed, among the Protestants have endeavored to reduce the controversy about justification with the Papist unto an appearance





of a far less real difference than is usually judged to be in it. And a good work it is, no doubt, to pare off all unnecessary occasions of debate and differences in religion, provided we go not so near the quick as to let out any of its vital spirits. The way taken herein is, to proceed upon some concessions of the most sober among the Papists, in their ascriptions unto grace and the merit of Christ, on the one side; and the express judgment of the Protestants, variously delivered, of the necessity of good works to them that are justified, on the other. Besides, it appears that in different expressions which either party adhere unto, as it were by tradition, the same things are indeed intended. Among them who have labored in this kind, Ludovicus le Blanc,<sup>9</sup> for his perspicuity and plainness, his moderation and freedom from a contentious frame of spirit, is "*pene solus legi dignus.*" He is like the ghost of Tiresias in this matter. But I must needs say, that I have not seen the effect that might be desired of any such undertaking. For, when each party comes unto the interpretation of their own concessions, which is, "*ex communi jure,*" to be allowed unto them, and which they will be sure to do in compliance with their judgment on the substance of the doctrine wherein the main stress of the difference lies, the distance and breach continue as wide as ever they were. Nor is there the least ground towards peace obtained by any of our condescensions or compliance herein. For unless we can come up entirely unto the decrees and canons of the Council of Trent, wherein the doctrine of the Old and New Testament is anathematized, they will make no other use of any man's compliance, but only to increase the clamor of differences among ourselves. I mention nothing of this nature to hinder any man from granting whatever he can or please unto them, without the prejudice of the substance of truths professed in the protestant churches; but only to intimate the uselessness of such concessions, in order unto peace and agreement with them, whilst they have a Procrustes' bed to lay us upon, and from whose size they will not recede.

Here and there one (not above three or four in all may be named, within this hundred and thirty years) in the Roman communion has owned our doctrine of justification, for the substance of it. So

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<sup>9</sup> [Louis Le Blanc de Beaulieu (1604-1675), *Theses Theologicae* (London, 1675).

did Albertus Pighius,<sup>10</sup> and the Antitagma Coloniense, as Bellarmine acknowledges. And what he says of Pighius is true, as we shall see afterwards; the other I have not seen. Cardinal Contarinus, in a treatise of justification, written before, and published about the beginning of the Trent Council, delivers himself in the favor of it. But upon the observation of what he had done, some say he was shortly after poisoned; though I must confess I know not where they had the report. But do what we can for the sake of peace, as too much cannot be done for it, with the safety of truth, it cannot be denied but that the doctrine of justification, as it works effectually in the church of Rome, is the foundation of many enormities among them, both in judgment and practice. They do not continue, I acknowledge, in that visible predominancy and rage as formerly, nor are the generality of the people in so much slavish bondage unto them as they were; but the streams of them do still issue from this corrupt fountain, unto the dangerous infection of the souls of men. For missatical expiatory sacrifices for the tiring and the dead, the necessity of auricular confession, with authoritative absolution, penances, pilgrimages, sacramentals, indulgences, commutations, works satisfactory and supererogatory, the merit and intercession of saints departed, with especial devotions and applications to this or that particular saint or angel, purgatory, yea, on the matter, the whole of monastic devotion, do depend thereon. They are all nothing but ways invented to pacify the consciences of men, or divert them from attending to the charge which is given in against them by the law of God; sorry supplies they are of a righteousness of their own, for them who know not how to submit themselves to the righteousness of God. And if the doctrine of free justification by the blood of Christ were once again exploded, or corrupted and made unintelligible, unto these things, as absurd and foolish as now unto some they seem to be, or what is not one jot better, men must and will again betake themselves. For if once they are diverted from putting their trust in the righteousness of Christ, and grace of God alone, and do practically thereon follow after, take up with, or rest in, that which is their own, the first impressions of a sense of sin which shall befall their consciences


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10. [Albert Pighius, Roman Catholic apologist (1490-1542), *Controversiarum quibus nunc exagitur Christi fides* (1542)].



will drive them from their present hold, to seek for shelter in any thing that tenders unto them the least appearance of relief. Men may talk and dispute what they please, whilst they are at peace in their own minds, without a real sense either of sin or righteousness, yea, and scoff at them who are not under the power of the same security; but when they shall be awakened with other apprehensions of things than yet they are aware of, they will be put on new resolutions. And it is in vain to dispute with any about justification, who have not duly been convinced of a state of sin, and of its guilt; for such men neither understand what they say, nor that whereof they dogmatize.

We have, therefore, the same reasons that the first reformers had, to be careful about the preservation of this doctrine of the gospel pure and entire; though we may not expect the like success with them in our endeavors unto that end. For the minds of the generality of men are in another posture than they were when they dealt with them. Under the power of ignorance and superstition they were; but yet multitudes of them were affected with a sense of the guilt of sin. With us, for the most part, things are quite otherwise. Notional light, accompanied with a senselessness of sin, leads men unto a contempt of this doctrine, indeed of the whole mystery of the gospel. We have had experience of the fruits of the faith which we now plead for in this nation, for many years, yea, now for some ages; and it cannot well be denied, but that those who have been most severely tenacious of the doctrine of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, have been the most exemplary in a holy life: I speak of former days. And if this doctrine be yet farther corrupted, debased, or unlearned among us, we shall quickly fall into one of the extremes wherewith we are at present urged on either side. For although the reliefs provided in the church of Rome, for the satisfaction of the consciences of men, are at present by the most disliked, yea, despised, yet, if they are once brought to a loss how to place their whole trust and confidence in the righteousness of Christ, and grace of God in him, they will not always live at such an uncertainty of mind as the best of their own personal obedience will hang them on the briers of; but betake themselves unto somewhat that tenders them certain peace and security, though

at present it may seem foolish unto them. And I doubt not but that some, out of a mere ignorance of the righteousness of God, which either they have not been taught, or have had no mind to learn, have, with some integrity in the exercise of their consciences, betaken themselves unto that pretended rest which the church of Rome offers unto them. For being troubled about their sins, they think it better to betake themselves unto that great variety of means for the ease and discharge of their consciences which the Roman church affords, than to abide where they are, without the least pretense of relief; as men will find in due time, there is no such thing to be found or obtained in themselves. They may go on for a time with good satisfaction unto their own minds; but if once they are brought unto a loss through the conviction of sin, they must look beyond themselves for peace and satisfaction, or sit down without them to eternity. Nor are the principles and ways which others take up withal in another extreme, upon the rejection of this doctrine, although more plausible, yet at all more really useful unto the souls of men than those of the Roman church which they reject as obsolete, and unsuited unto the genius of the present age. For they all of them arise from, or lead unto, the want of a due sense of the nature and guilt of sin, as also of the holiness and righteousness of God with respect thereunto. And when such principles as these do once grow prevalent in the minds of men, they quickly grow careless, negligent, secure in sinning, and end for the most part in atheism, or a great indifference, as unto all religion, and all the duties thereof. 

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# Dating: Courtship and Covenant.

This is the third of a four part series of lectures on the subject of finding a life partner and the dangers and evils of dating. The first part, *Dangers of Dating*, appeared in v7#12 (1998) and the second, *Finding a Life Partner*, in v9#4-6 (2000). The fourth part, *Practicing for Divorce*, may appear in a future issue, Lord willing, as Blue Banner staff has time to edit the text from the audio. All four are a subset of the 25 lecture series, A Directory for Domestic Duties.

By *Richard Bacon*



This is our third lesson in our study of dating. God has given us instructions on how we should find that one with whom He would have us spend the rest of our lives. Obviously, because of the nature of such a subject, we are speaking primarily to those who are not yet married; and yet, because of the covenantal nature of the family, we also are speaking to fathers and mothers. In the Biblical understanding of this subject, fathers and mothers are to have a part in finding spouses for their sons and daughters. Lest I be misunderstood, I am not suggesting that the covenant community ought to follow the pattern of pagan nations and have arranged marriages. I do believe that arranged marriages would be a step far more righteous than what we presently have in this country, but that is not at all what I am advocating. What I am advocating is what you might call “overseen courtship:” a courtship that is overseen by the parents of the young men and women who are looking for a spouse. This is foreign in today’s society, but it is not foreign in the history of the church. We are going back a hundred to a hundred and fifty years to reclaim those things that the church has lost, and as a result we are having to “re-dig wells” that have been stopped up (Genesis 26:18). We are having to be somewhat opposed to the culture of this day. There is an antithesis between the wheat and the tares; there is an antithesis between the sheep and the goats; there is an antithesis between those who are called by God and those who are passed over by him in his sovereign election. There is, in fact, a great gulf fixed between the two peoples on the earth — the children of God and those that are not his children. God has called us to holiness, righteousness, and to live in a way separate from the world. He instructs us to come

out from among the heathen. It therefore follows logically that we would have a world and life view — a culture — that is different from the world. Because our world and life view is centered upon God’s law and his righteousness, this effects every area of our lives. It even affects the way that we go about finding a spouse for ourselves or for our children. Even in this task, our main goal must be to glorify God and to obey his commands.

We have looked at the current method of teenage dating in the previous lessons. We have discussed four things that we find contrary to our goal.

First of all, today’s dating system minimizes and sometimes eliminates parental oversight. Therefore, even though it is the world’s culture, we have to stand opposed to it. We believe firmly that parental oversight is key: it is an essential element of biblical overseen courtship. We believe in the solidarity of the family. We do not just give lip service to it: we attempt to live it. And therefore, the family — particularly the fathers — must have a key role in the choosing of their child’s spouse.

Secondly we noted that dating promotes or even encourages sexual promiscuity. The Scriptures are very clear, that “this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” We often hear people of all different ages asking these questions, “Who is it God wills for me to marry?” “How will I know?” “How will I know what is the will of God?” None of us here are so old that we do not remember asking that same question. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 gives us the answer to those questions. “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel [that is his body, the earthen vessel in which we live] in sanctification and honour.” When Hebrews 13:4



says that “the marriage bed is honorable in all,” it is speaking of abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against our souls. We sin against our bodies and we also sin against our souls when we allow our desires to have full reign. Therefore, as we consider the question of how we go about finding a life partner, we must always remember that this is the will of God: that you abstain from fleshly lusts and from fornication, and that the will of God for you is your sanctification. Whatever way we go about finding a life partner, it must involve purity; it must involve chastity; it must involve a greater sanctification. When God first brought Eve to Adam, his purpose in bringing her to him was not as a temptation to see if he could withstand fleshly lusts. God gave Eve to Adam to be a help meet for him: to be a help face to face with him, that corresponded to him, as none of the animals did. Just prior to that God had Adam name all the animals. Adam did not have to go hunt out the animals. God brought the animals to him and Adam named them. He gave them appropriate names; he categorized them. He was doing zoology and biology. He was, in fact, engaging himself in his occupation commanded by God to subdue the earth to the glory of God. But God recognized that Adam needed a helper who could stand face to face with him. He needed a helper who could be a partner. Finding a partner in any way that promotes sin in our lives is doing exactly the opposite of what that partner is supposed to do. Our partner is to help us in our occupation commanded by God to subdue the earth to the glory of God.

The third thing is that dating has a tendency to depend on romantic ideas rather than covenantal considerations. Dating causes a young man and a young woman to be attracted to one another. Then they make decisions based upon that attraction rather than basing their decisions upon covenantal considerations. We characterized it this way: Dating has a tendency to choose who we love whereas covenantal considerations require us to love the one we choose. We should make our choices not based on romantic considerations, but based upon what God’s word says we should be looking for in a spouse.

Finally, the fourth thing we saw wrong with dating is that it trains us to have casual relationships that are easily broken. Dating trains us by experience in the same way an athlete practices to do something again and again.

Promiscuous dating teaches our young people to break up again and again. It is an alarming fact that the countries which involve themselves in dating have a much higher rate of divorce than those which do not. I may be committing a *post hoc* fallacy, but we do see again and again in countries where dating becomes the normal way of finding a spouse that the divorce rate soars.

### I. Feelings (The Romantic Approach)

In this lesson I want us to look at dating and romance versus courtship and covenant: two different approaches to finding a spouse. Romance is based upon feelings, affection and emotions. We become emotionally involved with someone. And, because we become emotionally involved, we believe then that the next logical step is to make that person our life partner. Nowhere in the Bible are we instructed to base any decision of this magnitude on something like an emotion or a feeling. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that romance is the basis for marriage. The idea of basing such a major decision on mere feelings is relatively new. Let me suggest to you that those who do get married for reasons of emotional attachment are asking for trouble. I did not say that their marriage will never work. I said that they are asking for trouble. This is just like a child is asking for trouble when he plays with matches. He may not burn the house down the first time, but we still do not encourage him to play with matches. In fact, we tell him, “don’t play with matches, because you could burn the house down.” And so it is with our emotions. I warn you much the same way that the Bible warns in Proverbs 6:27, “Can a man take coals to his bosom and his clothes not be burned?” If we continue to act in an ungodly way, we are placing ourselves at risk. If we play with sin, we are apt to get burned.

The Bible teaches that feelings are the *byproduct* of covenantal commitment. A byproduct is something that is in addition to; it is not an essential part or main function, it is something extra that results as an happenstance of the main purpose. First we have a covenantal commitment. First we commit ourselves to the one that we believe God would have us to marry, and then the emotions follow as a byproduct of that commitment. Because God is satisfied with us; because God delights in what we have done, he grants to us the right feeling about our life-long



mate. Dating, on the other hand, places feelings as a precursor or even the foundation for the commitment to a marriage. But what happens when those feelings change? Then the foundation or the precursor or the presupposition has gone away and the entire marriage is ready to collapse. I don't listen to modern music, but I am sure that you are as aware as I am of the fact that most modern songs are about relationships that have ended because somebody's feelings changed. It is a part of our culture. Not only is dating a part of our culture, but the outcome of dating is a part of our culture. In our culture today, we are very used to the idea of relationships ending. Many times, because the marriage was founded upon emotions, the marriage quickly ends in divorce when those emotions change. Pastors and the worldly marriage counselors see couples whose relationships are not only fragile but cracking, ready to break apart. Note that it is very interesting that very few people have time for marriage counseling *before* marriage but many seek counseling *only after the marriage begins to fail*. It is like the old saying that there is never time to do it right, but there is always time to do it twice. And so it is in a marriage: if we get the counseling ahead of time, if we know where we are going before we do it, then we can expect success. Ephesians 5:25 speaks about how a husband is to love his wife. In the Greek language, there are three key words that mean love. The word "*eros*" is the word one would expect to find for a husband and wife: it is the word from which we get the word "erotic." It means a passionate desire for someone. In Ephesians 5:25 where Paul is telling the husband to love his wife, we would anticipate that he would be referring to that kind of love. But the love of which Paul speaks, in Ephesians 5:25 is the Greek word "*agapao*." "*Agapao*" is a volitional love. It is a love that I have decided to feel. It is a love to which I can be commanded and to which I can command others. It is not a love that I have to crank up emotions to feel: it is a love that I can begin doing immediately. Just as I am called upon to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and my neighbor as myself, I also am called upon to love my wife as Christ loved the church. Paul does not require us to love our wives in an erotic way, but rather he requires us to love our wives with *agapao* love. We are required to love our wives with the same kind of love with which we are to love God. It is a volitional love: it is a love that we

have determined we will do. Does that mean that we are not to have feelings for our wives? Of course not! But we are to get the volitional love going first, then the feelings will follow as a natural byproduct of the volitional love.

## II. Commitment (The Biblical Approach)

Secondly in our discussion of dating and romance versus courtship and covenant we need to look at commitment. Feelings are not what we are to base a marriage on. We are to base our marriage on commitment. We began our discussions on the directory of domestic duties by discussing the fact that God calls us to a task and that task is best carried out in a family setting. In Genesis chapter one God called us to the task of subduing the world to His glory, of replenishing the earth, of filling the earth with children. In Genesis chapter two, we saw that this is carried out in a marriage context. Filling the earth with children presupposes that we have a mate. We must look back to our purpose as we think of marriage. God has designed marriage to give us a partner in life to help us in our occupation to subdue the earth to the glory of God.

A few weeks ago I went to Des Moines, Iowa. I was in the airport terminal. I knew I wanted to go to Des Moines, but I could not just get on any airplane to get there. I had a purpose, a destination in mind, but there was only one airplane that would take me where I wanted to go. We need to apply this same principle in our desire to find a spouse. If we know the purpose of marriage, it is going to influence how we go about getting married. What is it that I am looking for when I am considering getting married? Am I just looking for someone to share my bed? I should be looking for someone who is going to be a help to me in subduing the earth to God's glory and in filling it up with children. Ultimately that is my purpose in getting married: that is the task God designed for marriage.

By the time we begin to look for a spouse we ought to know what our kingdom chores are going to be. We should already know what our calling is. We should already be participating in our occupation. What I am going to say next may at first offend some of our young people, but when I explain it in light of Scriptures, I hope you will realize that it is a compliment instead of a derogatory remark. Basically, when we start off looking for a mate, it should not be significantly



different from the way we would go about buying a horse. Do not be offended by that. In fact, Solomon considered it to be a high compliment to compare his love in Song of Solomon to a horse, because a horse is beautiful. A horse exudes the glory of God. So I do not want you to be offended by that statement. There are several things you need to consider. When you think about buying a horse, you do not just buy the first horse you find. The first thing you do is determine ahead of time the purpose of the horse. There are several items to consider before deciding on what horse to pick. Do you want a horse that can race a mile, or a quarter mile? Then you would look at a thoroughbred. Am I going to buy this horse to cut cattle out from among other cattle? Then you might choose a Mustang. If you wanted the horse to pull a heavy wagon then a Clydesdale would suit your purposes. Once you have decided the purpose of the horse that is going to be a large part of deciding what kind of horse you should buy. Using the same principle we must first determine what kind of helper we need and that will aid us in deciding what kind of wife would be fitting for us. Then we go about looking for a wife that meets those requirements.

There is no verse in the Bible that explains exactly how to go about finding a spouse. But I do believe we can find Scriptural principals that will aid us in our search. The Bible speaks of love as being a command. We have already discussed Ephesians 5:25. In that verse, men are commanded to love their wives. In Titus 2:4, women are commanded to love their husbands. In this passage the older women are to teach the younger women to "... love their husbands." How can a feeling be taught? Can feeling, in fact, be taught? No. What the older women are to teach the younger women is their *duty* that we have toward one another. Love is something that we *do*. Love is not a feeling, love is an action. Just as men are called upon to love their wives as Christ loved the church, so also women are to learn to love their husbands. What is the best time to learn to love your husband? The answer is before you marry him. Let me explain that I am not talking about loving just anyone, and maybe even, more than one, before you choose who you intend to marry. In fact, nowhere in Scripture (apart from the brotherly love that we are to have for all men) are we told to have anything that approaches the love that a man has for his wife or a woman has

for her husband for anyone other than our own spouse. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded or even allowed to have that kind of love toward someone to whom we are not married. That kind of thing is reserved only for marriage. In time, passions will bloom. If the men are doing what the men are called upon to do and the women are doing what the women are called upon to do and if we are treating one another as the Bible teaches us to treat one another, the passions themselves will bloom. Passion will come along; they will arise as we are actively doing what God commands. Let me illustrate this for you. Some of us began singing the Psalms before we learned to love them. We had the same kind of love for the Psalms that we had for the rest of God's Word, but we began singing the Psalms more from a sense of duty than from a sense of love. We didn't know how to do it, and we didn't do it very well, but we believed that it was our duty to sing the Psalms. But, isn't it the case, that as you sang the Psalms week after week here in public worship, and in your homes day after day, your attachment to the Psalms grew as you sang them more and more? Why? Because passion is in the way of duty. As we learn to do what we are commanded to do, and begin to do it, God causes the passion to flower. Let me add a caution here. For this very reason, couples who are in a courtship relationship ought not to become romantically involved until after there is a betrothal. There is a time for romantic involvement later. Before betrothal we ought not to be romantically involved with any other person so that this passion will not have an occasion to arise prior to the biblically appropriate time.

Thus far we have discussed that feelings, or romantic affections, should not be the basis for our choosing of our life partners. In contrast, we saw that commitment was the right thing upon which to base a marriage. With those two facts as a guideline, let me make some applications. The first application is for those of us who are already married. The commitment is there; we made that commitment already. The application for us is to continue in the way of our commitment: we need to continue to keep our covenant obligations to those marriages. There are going to be times when you are unsure of your feelings toward your partner. That is the problem with feelings: they can change very easily. One day you may feel very close to your partner, and then the next day you may be feeling like you have had just too much of



that person. The feelings are going to change. Do not count on the feeling. You cannot base your marriage on the basis of your feelings; because the one thing that you can be sure of about feelings is that they will change. Rather, cultivate a commitment to your covenantal obligation to your marriage and pray that God would cause the feelings to be what they ought to be.

To those of you who are not yet married, let me give you the soundest piece of advice that you will ever get: be willing to wait. If that means being willing to wait until you are eighteen, till you are twenty-five, till you are thirty-eight, till you are forty-nine, till you are fifty-six, even if it means that you never find someone with whom you are willing to spend your life, be willing to wait. Place it in God's hands, knowing this: that it is not for us to find somebody. In the course of our lives, in the course of his providence, God will reveal to us who He will have us to marry. One of the difficulties of choosing a life partner is that we get impatient. We begin to be too concerned with being single for "too long." We fear a life without a partner. But it is far worse to get married to the wrong person. It is far worse to get married for the wrong reason. It is far worse to get married at the wrong time. The most important advice I can possibly give you is to be willing to wait upon the will of God in finding a life partner.

My second application is for those young people who are still unmarried. What should you be doing while you are waiting upon the will of God? Should you be doing nothing, waiting indifferently, saying, "Someday my prince will come?" Of course not. You have a responsibility to prepare for your task of finding a life partner. First you must prepare yourself. You must prepare your "wanter." How do we make decisions? How do we determine what it is we desire? The Word of God must determine it for us. Our "wanters" — our wills — must be informed by the Word of God. As we seek to do the will of God, he will show us that person that he has chosen for us to fulfill the desires of our heart. When we set our hearts upon Jesus Christ; when we set our hearts upon His righteousness; when we desire nothing more than we desire His holiness, then God will show us who that person is that will help us perform the tasks that He has for us in His kingdom. God has promised to reward our obedience. We understand by faith in the love God has for His people that God who loved us and gave

his Son for us will surely with his Son give us everything else we need. You might be afraid that some event in your life will prevent your finding the right person. But that event came into your life because of God's providence, and we know from Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose." We know these things by faith. Patience is an outworking of faith. First you must prepare your "wanter" to wait upon the Lord.

The second application to those who are still unmarried is to prepare by developing family skills. For young men that means that you primarily develop your vocation and the skills you will need for your vocation *prior* to marriage. You need to accomplish this primarily before you are married. You will, of course, be honing your skills all the days of your life, but primarily, you should determine your vocation while you are single. You should find out what it is that God would have you to do for the rest of your life before you are married. You should not take your wife into some adventurous trip to the poor house. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, "But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." This is the key to our vocations, men. If a man does not provide for his own family, he is worse than an infidel. If you are not prepared to support your family; if you are not financially prepared to support a wife and children, you have no business getting married. If you get married before you can financially support a family, you are making presumptions that even infidels do not make. Get your college education or your trade training before you get married. Whatever your chosen vocation requires of you in way of preparation, do that before you get married. Learn to become practically minded. Think in terms of how to get things done and what your goals are in life. Develop skills that will enable you to instruct your children. Do not wait until you have children to try to learn how to be a good father. Develop those skills now as you prepare for your future duties as a husband and father.


There is also an application for the single young ladies as well. Learn home management skills. In the Titus 2:4 passage that we already discussed, the older women are commanded to teach the younger women to be "keepers at home." Does that mean that the only thing that a young women



needs to learn is how to keep a house clean? That they are never to go out of the front door and interact with the world? That is not what that means at all. It means that they are to be the managers of the household: they are to be the guardians of the homes. We ought to just take the word “housewife” out of our vocabulary all together, and replace it with the proper word “homemaker.” Our wives are “homemakers.” They are not wives to the house. The older ladies are to teach the younger ladies how to love their husbands and how to love their children. Paul is instructing them to teach them how to keep a home. That is what it means to be “keepers at home.” It does not mean they can never leave the house. In fact, in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs, we see numerous examples of that wife who is more precious than rubies, doing many things outside the home. I do not believe that means that she is a career woman, but it does mean that she is quite capable of managing her household. Proverbs 31:27 reads, “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.” This is not the image of a woman who is just sitting in her house, waiting for her husband to bring home the bread so she can eat it. She is not to eat the bread of idleness; rather, she is to be engaged in making that house into a home for her family. She is the home manager. She looks well to the ways of her household. She watches over it: she guards it. Because she does that, Proverbs 31:28 says that “Her children arise up, and call her blessed: and her husband also, and he praiseth her.” Develop your skills of home management.

Titus 2:4 also instructs the young women to develop the trait of sober-mindedness. Young women in our culture seem to be overtaken with flighty imaginations. This is a real short-coming very evident among young women today. There is just a giddiness — a capriciousness, a frivolousness — about the young women of the world that ought not to characterize our covenant young women. It ought not to characterize our daughters and it ought not to characterize our wives. Rather, our wives and our daughters should be sober minded. All the young women of the covenant community who are preparing themselves for lifelong partnerships should be characterized by sober-mindedness. This sober mindedness is not somber-mindedness. The Lord

does not require our women to be constantly morose or sad. To be sober minded means that they are realistic. They are not flighty. They understand and choose to do their duty. They think in practical terms regarding their life and their future as keepers at homes. They make preparations toward that goal, keeping always in mind that their main objective is to become the kind of person who will make a godly partner to her future husband in their task to subdue the earth to the glory of God. They are serious-minded about what God has called them, especially as it relates to being a help fit for that one God has chosen for them.

Finally, we must confess that we are altogether unworthy and undeserving of such mates as God has given us. We should pray that God would make us thankful for giving us the mate which we have. We should pray for our children, that God would give them and us wisdom in choosing life-long partners for them. It should not be done with haste; it should not be done because of feelings or romance. Rather, we should base this life effecting decision upon the commitment that we have to God and his word. 

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# Review: The Pastoral Epistles by Clark.

*The Pastoral Epistles*, (The Trinity Foundation, 1998), paperback, 233 pages. *Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*, v. 15.

By W. Gary Crampton, Th.D

 r. Gordon Clark was a scholar of high repute. He is considered to be “one of the profoundest evangelical Protestant philosophers of our time” (Carl Henry), and “one of the greatest Christian thinkers of our century” (Ronald Nash). It is no exaggeration to say that “his philosophy is the most consistently Christian philosophy yet published” (John Robbins).<sup>1</sup> The system of philosophy elaborated by Dr. Clark is best known as “Scripturalism,” a system that insists that the starting point of Biblical Christianity is that the Bible alone is the infallible, inerrant Word of God, and it has a monopoly on truth.<sup>2</sup> This view, as admirably expressed in the words of the Lutheran theologian Quenstedt, maintains that:

The canonical Holy Scriptures in the original text are the infallible truth and are free from every error; in other words, in the canonical sacred Scriptures there is found no lie, no falsity, no error, not even the least, whether in subject matter or expressions, but in all things and all the details that are handed down in them, they are most certainly true, whether they pertain to doctrines or morals, to history or chronology, to topography or nomenclature. No ignorance, no thoughtlessness, no forgetfulness, no lapse of memory can dare be ascribed to the amanuenses of the Holy Ghost in their penning of the sacred writings.

The Scripturalist view espoused by Dr. Clark adheres to the Biblical teaching of sola Scriptura (“by Scripture alone”), which is aptly summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1:6), as follows: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either explicitly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary

consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Thus, as the Larger Catechism (Q. 3) teaches; “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.” Dr. Clark’s uncompromising devotion to the truth of God’s Word as “the only rule of faith and obedience” is what makes his many volumes so refreshing to read.

In *The Pastoral Epistles*,<sup>3</sup> which is Volume 15 of *The Works of Gordon H. Clark* (published by The Trinity Foundation), Gordon Clark gives us his commentary on Paul’s three letters to Timothy and Titus. These letters, he opined, are the Holy Spirit’s divine instructions for the management of Christ’s church: “Paul wrote these pastoral epistles to instruct ministers how to live and serve” (61). The Apostle wants us “to know how to conduct [ourselves] in church affairs, and how the church should be conducted. The church is the house of God, and God gives it direction” (64). This is what the pastoral epistles are about.

In his analysis of these epistles, Gordon Clark deals with a number of issues, to include: the proper means of worship in the life of the church, the proper view of the sacraments, the proper view of the gospel and its relationship to the law, the church’s responsibility to care for souls, the combating of error which might threaten the church, the stark contrast between Roman Catholicism and Biblical Christianity, the importance of logic and rational thought in the Christian life, the difference between subjective faith and objective faith, Paul’s five “faithful sayings,” the difference between orthodox and neo-orthodox (and liberal) doctrine, the teaching that love is defined Biblically (not as an emotion,

<sup>1</sup> John Robbins, “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark,” *The Trinity Review* (July 1993).

<sup>2</sup> For more on this, see W. Gary Crampton, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark* (The Trinity Foundation, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (The Trinity Foundation, [1983], 1998). The pagination in this review is from Dr. Clark’s book.



but) as obedience to God's commandments, and so forth. All of these are worthy of further study. But only two major issues will be covered in this review.

First and foremost, recognizing that "Paul wrote these pastoral epistles to instruct ministers how to live and serve" (61), throughout the commentary Dr. Clark stresses that the primary duty of pastors is to preach and teach the Word of God. This was the focus of the Apostle Paul, and it should also be the focus of pastors today: "First...let us note that Paul's main concern was the true doctrine. Correct theology has first place. Today some seminary professors would insist that a young minister's first duty is to be a marriage counselor. Theology, doctrine, intelligible teaching are held in low repute now. But it was not so with Paul" (5). According to the Scriptures "God administers His household [the church] by means of faith. False doctrine is the contrary of faith. God guards His church by true doctrine" (7).


It must be understood, Dr. Clark goes on to say, that Scripture teaches that the church is "the pillar and seat, the mainstay, the bulwark, the support of the truth." A true church is one that "proclaims, defends, and propagates the gospel. Its task is to declare all of God's revealed truth...If the church is not the bulwark of the truth, there is no church" (46). Because of this, "Timothy, and his conscientious successors, must preach the doctrine, in season and out of season, i.e., always. That is their main duty" (135).

Second, Gordon Clark calls on "conscientious" ministers to teach that a faithful church is bound to follow the form of government established by the teaching of the apostles in Holy Scripture.<sup>4</sup> This form of government is that of Presbyterianism, wherein the government of the church rests with the elders (or bishops), who are to rule according to Biblical law. This is true on the local level as well as in the broader court system established by Scripture (119, 127, passim).

Further, according to the New Testament, within the Presbyterian form of church government, there are three church officers: teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons (38-45, 69-70), all of

whom are to be ordained (194-210). The primary duty of the teaching elder (pastor/teacher), as noted, is that of the ministry of the Word of God, along with the administration of the sacraments, and prayer for the church. The ruling elder, on the other hand, has the primary responsibility of ruling (ministerially) or governing the church with the teaching elders. And the deacons of the church are to be involved chiefly with the help and welfare aspect of church ministry.

Dr. Clark also stressed that all of the church officers are to be men; godly men to be sure, but men. It is the "left wing position" of the liberal church which has opted for women elders and deacons (179-193). Having studied the Biblical data on the subject, Dr. Clark concluded: "Since Scripture explicitly forbids women to teach or exercise authority, it is a violation of divine law to ordain a woman" (210). Gordon Clark would fully agree with the comment of Robert Reymond, that "a church that would ordain a woman to the eldership is flying in the face of the consistent testimony of Scripture opposing such an action as well as thirty-five hundred years of Biblical and church history."<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, we should note that the church at the beginning of the twenty-first century, like the church in its earliest years, is (sadly) beset with various heresies. All too frequently today, the alleged church of Jesus Christ is not concerned for the truth. But Paul was concerned for the truth. And he gave instructions to Timothy and Titus as to how to combat the heresies, and how to apply God's Word in the battle. Christian ministers are to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Paul's message is clear; it could hardly be more clear. May the pastors and teachers of our day pay heed to the teaching of the Apostle. Dr. Clark, himself a teaching elder in Christ's church, did understand and obey Paul's message. And he has given us a commentary that will help us to do the same. 

**Built Upon The Rock:** *A Study of the Doctrine of the Church.* By W. Gary Crampton, Th.D. & Pastor Richard Bacon Single Copy \$3.95ea. 2-24 Copies \$2.40ea. 25 Copies & up \$1.95ea. See Order Form on back page for shipping costs and instructions.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the doctrine of the church, see W. Gary Crampton and Richard E. Bacon, *Built Upon the Rock* (Blue Banner Ministries, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 901n.



# Historical Review of the Stage as Entertainment.

This text comes from *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, by James Durham (Naphtali Press, 2002), and is a postscript to the Epistle to the Reader by John Carstares. Copyright © 2002 Chris Coldwell.

By John Carstares



You see that in this epistle, which for the most part of it was written above two years ago, I have spoken a word of *stage-plays*, *profane interludes*, *comedies*, etc, at that time, and several years before, much in use amongst us. Whereto I would now add a few words more, and deduce a little their infamous, idolatrous, devilish, and damnable pedigree and original, and give you a brief account of the judgment of the ancient Christian church about them — that the actors in them, with the patrons and haunTERS of them, may with the greater dissatisfaction reflect on their own bypassed unsuitable and disconform practice; and that all others may forever hereafter learn to fear, and to do no more so unchristianly. To which I am the rather induced, that the worthy author of this treatise has only in passing made mention of them as a breach of the seventh command, they being then utterly in desuetude with us, and it having not so much as once entered into his thoughts, that, after so bright and glorious a sunshine of gospel-light, the generation would ever, let be so quickly, have so far degenerated as to suffer themselves to be tempted to have any *fellowship with such unfruitful works of darkness*.

I say then, that *stage-plays*, in their several sorts, were prohibited, reprobated, and condemned, and the actors in them appointed to be excommunicated, by the canons of several more particular, and of some general councils (which canons I forbear, for brevity's sake, to set down at length) as namely:

By the 5<sup>th</sup> canon of the 1<sup>st</sup> council at Arles in France, 314, in the time of Constantine the great.

By the twentieth canon of the second council held there, Anno 326, or more probably 389, as Franciscus Longus à Coriolano reckons in his sum of all the councils.<sup>1</sup>

By the 57<sup>th</sup>, 62<sup>nd</sup>, and 67<sup>th</sup> canons of the Eliberine council in Spain, Anno 305.

By the 11<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> canons of the third (to wit,

from Constantine's time, as Spondanus<sup>2</sup> reckons) councils of Carthage, Anno 397, the very same with the thirteenth and thirty-fifth canons of the council of Hippo in Africa, held Anno 393, as Longus à Coriolano shows, who sets down the sum of the canons framed at Hippo, at the close of the canons made in this third council of Carthage.

By the twelfth canon of the African council held Anno 408, where Augustine was present; the canons of both which councils suppose persons to have been excommunicated on this account, and provide for their reconciliation to the church, in case of repentance, and turning from these practices to the Lord.

And by the fifty-first and sixty-second canons of the sixth general council (called by some the fifth) held at Constantinople, Anno 680, the canons whereof were renewed in that council held at Constantinople, Anno 692, which is called *Quinisextum*; these two canons are very express and peremptory in this thing.

And can any Christians warrantably, and without sin, recreate themselves with beholding such plays, the actors wherein deserve to be excommunicated? What? Is there no better, no more innocent and inoffensive way? Or, is this the only, or the best way, to recreate men — to refine, sharpen, and polish their wits; to persuade and prevail with them to hate and flee vice, and to love and follow virtue; to acquaint them from history with, to impress on them the remembrance, and to excite them to the imitation, of the noble and truly imitable actions of illustrious heroes, and other great men; to breed them to a suitable confidence; to make them eloquent and fine spokesmen; and to help them to a becoming gest [*carriage*] in all actions, places and societies? The grave seers and great lights of the church did never see any such thing in them. But, on the contrary, have with common suffrage judged them to be the most effectual and compendious way to make men soft, dissolute, and sensual; nay, even in a manner quite to emasculate, if not to brutify them; and have without any discord declared that

<sup>1</sup> Franciscus Longus à Coriolano, *Summa conciliorum omnium* (Antwerp, 1623).

<sup>2</sup>Ed. Henri Spondanus (1568-1643), *Annales ecclesiastici Cæsaris Baronii in Epitomen redacti* (Paris, 1612).



the lightness, lasciviousness, and lewdness that in these plays were couched under, and covered over with such shreds and pieces of learning, history, eloquence, invention, wit and art, were thereby only made the more dangerous. And that Satan showed his pernicious and pestilent policy not a little, in thus tincturing, sugaring, and gilding these poisonous pills, that they might go the better down, diffuse themselves the less sensibly, and operate the more strongly.

And however some empty and effeminate, vain and vicious Roman emperors reduced such plays; yet some of the gravest and soberest, manliest and bravest, even heathen emperors, did oppose and exterminate them (so that Guevara notes it to have been one of the tokens and characteristics to know a virtuous or vicious prince of Rome by,<sup>3</sup> to wit, whether he maintained players, jesters and jugglers among the people, or not) as did also many senators, Christian emperors, and well-regulated republics, both pagan and Christian; *as unbeseeming exercises, and effeminate arts, which did much dishonor and corrupt the state; and as seminaries of all vices and intolerable mischiefs in the commonwealth.* And no doubt, whatever good is pretended to be got in a play-house, or at the stage (hardly without a predominant mixture of evil) may be learned as well, as easily, and much more safely, if not more cheap too, elsewhere.

As they have been thus forbidden and censured by *councils*, so I say more particularly, they have been very unanimously condemned by the Fathers, on these and other such like grounds:

1. As being a breach of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, wherein a multitude of modern divines, writing on this command, accord with them.

2. As being a conforming to, and participating with, pagans in their idolatrous and superstitious practices, expressly forbidden to the people of God in the Scripture; which put Cyprian,<sup>4</sup> peremptorily to conclude, 'That the Scripture has everlastingly condemned all sorts of such spectacles and stage-plays, when it took away idolatry, the mother of them, whence all these monsters of vanity, lightness and lewdness did proceed.'

3. As being cross to, and a practical renunciation of, the baptismal vow of Christians, wherein they engage to renounce the devil and all

his pomps and works, of which sort they account the acting and beholding popular stageplays to be.

4. As being the removal of a distinguishing character of Christians from heathen Gentiles, *Who* (as Tertullian says, lib. *de spectaculis*, cap. 24.) *did most of all discern men by this, that they abandoned and renounced all stage-plays.*

5. As being unsuitable to, if not inconsistent with, the gospel; which forbids Christians to make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, to be caterers for their corruptions, and to be conformed to the world; and commands them to *walk circumspectly*, accurately, even with spiritual preciseness and strictness, *not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time*, woefully wasted away, and miserably misspent this way; to *abstain from all appearance of evil*; to *rejoice in the Lord*; and, when they are *merry*, to *sing psalms*, and to vent and express their mirth in songs of praise to God, and not in this wanton way; and assures them withal, that *evil communications corrupt good manners.*

6. As being a corruption of manners, incentives to lightness and lust, and seminaries and nurseries of wantonness and uncleanness.

And 7. As holding their pedigree, original and institution from the devil, the inventor of them; and being at first idolatrously and superstitiously celebrated to the honor, and for many hundreds of years together, dedicated, devoted, and appropriated to the worship and service of the heathen devil-gods. 'Who' (as Augustine affirms) 'did themselves importunately demand these plays to be exhibited to them for their honor, fiercely and cruelly command them, denounce calamities if they were not exhibited, avenge most severely if anything about them was neglected, and, if they amended what was formerly omitted or neglected in them, show themselves pacified and well pleased.'<sup>5</sup>

Which may further appear by these few instances taken out of famous writers:

Whereof the *first* may be that which is mentioned by Polydore Vergil, where he says, that plays were *chiefly celebrated for the health and safety of men with lectisterns* (that is, beds that were dressed up in their temples for lulling and rocking, as it were, their gods asleep when they raged with anger) *the beginning of which plays* (he says) *it is manifest was the work of the devil.* For (he says) *there was one Valesius a wealthy Roman* (sometime before the institution of the consular office) *who had three sons desperately sick of the*

<sup>3</sup>Ed. Bishop Antonio de Guevara (d. 1545). *Una Decada de los diez Cesares. A chronicle, containing the lives of ten emperors of Rome* (London, 1577).

<sup>4</sup>*de spectaculis*. Ed. Cyprian, *On Public Shows*. For the citations of church fathers and others which follow, see Migne's *Patrologiae cursus completus*. For those of Augustine, Chrysostom, Clemens, Jerome, Lactantius, and Tertullian, in English, see Schaff's *Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post Nicene Fathers*. Many if not all of these quotations appear to be paraphrases rather than strict translations.

<sup>5</sup>lib. 4. *de Civitate Dei* [City of God], cap. 36. entitled, *De laudis scenecis*, etc. that is, *Concerning stage-plays*, which the gods required to be celebrated to them by their worshippers.



pestilence, for whom, when he prayed to his household-gods, he was by them bidden go to Tarentum, and take water from before, or from beside the altar of Pluto and Proserpina, and give them to drink (or, as others, to wash them in) which he having done, they were restored to health, and in gratitude commanded by these infernal spirits to celebrate night-plays to them, which he and they accordingly did for three nights together.<sup>6</sup>

The next may be that which is reported by Titus Livius<sup>7</sup> and by Augustine (*lib. 4. de civ. Dei, cap. 26*), and by Lud. Vives, in his notes upon that chapter, concerning one Titus Latinus, or Larimus, who in the second consulship of M. Minutius and Aur. Sempronius<sup>8</sup> (*Ann. ab. urb. cond. 263*), 'When the gods were displeased, was warned in a dream to go to the senate, and tell them that they were not satisfied with the presultor or dancer before, or ring-leader in the last plays, in which plays they take pleasure, being recreated by them; and that, unless the plays were renewed by their order with greater state and sumptuousness (called by Florus, in his breviary on that book, *Religious Ceremonies*) some great calamity should be inflicted (or, as others, the present not be removed) which the man not doing, was sharply rebuked; and yet delaying, out of reverence to the senate, and from fear that himself should be looked at as frantic, his son was taken from him; and yet still deferring, he was seized in all his joints with a tormenting disease, so that he could not stir; and at the last, telling his friends, he was by them willed to acquaint the senate; and being carried to them, and having done his errand, was presently restored to his health (so much power may the devil in the righteous judgment of God have granted to him, to seduce men unto, and detain them in his worship and service) wherewith the senate was so much taken, that they forthwith commanded the plays to be celebrated with greater care, cost and show, than formerly.'

The third may be that spoken of also by Titus Livius (*lib. 7*), in the consulship of C. Sulpitius Peticus, and C. Lucinius Stolo (*Anno ab urb. cond. 390*), in the time of the great and raging pestilence. Wherein Furius Camillus, dictator and deliverer of Rome from the Gauls, died; *Wherein, for procuring the mercy of the gods, there was a lectistern; but, when by no device of men, nor help*

*of the gods, the violence of the plague could be assuaged, their minds were so possessed with superstition, that the stage-plays were, as men say, first invented* (that is, belike, plays in that pompous, ludicrous, effeminate and luxurious mode on the stage, which had never before been used in the city — for several plays they had ere this time) *a strange device for a martial people, who before time* (for most part at least) *accustomed to behold games of activity and strength in the great list, called Circus. And from this small beginning* (he says) *in a second and wholesome state, this folly grew to such a height of madness, as is intolerable to the most opulent states and empires; and yet these plays so brought in, and set forth,* (called by Florus, in his breviary on that book, *new and strange religions*) *employed about a religious business, did neither rid men's minds of scruple and superstition, nor ease their bodies.* Thus they are condemned as superstition, and an innovation of their old religion, by these two famous heathen historians.

The fourth may be that which is made mention of by Tit. Livius, also toward the end of his 40th book concerning Fulvius Flaccus, fellow-consul with his own german-brother, L. Manlius Occidinus (*Ann. ab urb. con. 575*). Who declared, *That, before he would meddle with his office, he would discharge both himself and the city of duty towards the gods, in paying the vows that he had made, on that same day that he had his last battle with the Celtiberians, [about] the celebrating [of] plays to the honor of the most mighty and gracious god Jupiter, and to build a temple to Fortune Aequestris; and accordingly levied a great tax for that end, which behooved to be retrenched, because of the exorbitancy of it.*

The fifth and last shall be that which is touched by Polydore Vergil (*ubi prius, page 377*),<sup>9</sup> concerning the Romans, their taking care for Apollo's plays, which were first dedicated to him in the time of the second Punick war, for obtaining victory from him, to drive Hannibal out of Italy. To these may be added what Spondanus (in his *Ecclesiastical Annals*, p. 263), reports from Zozimus concerning Constantine the great, when he returned victorious over the Germans to Milan, that he quite neglected and condemned such plays, to the great grief of the heathens, who alleged that these plays were instituted by the gods for the cure of the pestilence and other diseases, and for averting of wars.

From all which it is manifest, that the original of these stage-plays, and such others, was from the devil, and celebrated by the heathens to the honor and worship of their devil-gods in way of religious

<sup>6</sup>de invent. rerum, lib. 4. cap. 14. p. 375. Ed. Polydore Vergil (1470?-1555?), *De inventoribus rerum*. See also *An abridgement of the works ...* (London, 1659).

<sup>7</sup>Ed. Livy, *History of Rome*.

<sup>8</sup>Ed. Juan Ludovico [Luis] Vives (1492-1540). *De Civitate Dei* (Basil, 1522). Also, *Citie of God* (London, 1610).

<sup>9</sup>Ed. Ibid.



sacrifices to them, either as pacificatory or gratificatory; with whom, in their idolatries and superstitions, the Scriptures forbid all symbolizing and fellowship.

Let us hear now, in the next place, some more of these fathers speak their own and the church's thoughts a little more particularly of stage-plays, with respect to such grounds, having heard some of them already.

Clemens Alexandrinus (*orat. adhort. adv. Gentes*),<sup>10</sup> calls stage-plays, comedies, and amorous poems, 'Teachers of adultery, and defilers of men's ears with fornications;' and says, 'That not only the use, the sight, the hearing, but the very memory, of stage-plays should be abolished.' And elsewhere (for I do here purposely forbear very particular citations, because ordinary readers will not much, if at all, search after them; and the learned, that have a mind to it, will easily find them out) tells Christian youths, 'That their pedagogues must not lead them to plays or theatres, that may not unfitly be called the chairs of pestilence, because these conventicles, where men and women meet together promiscuously to behold one another, are the occasion of lewdness, and there they give or plot wicked counsel.'

Cyprian (*de spectaculis*), styles theatres, 'The stews of public chastity, the mastership of obscenity, which teach these sins in public, that men may more usually and easily commit them in private; he learns to commit, who accustoms himself to behold the theatrical representation of uncleanness. It is not lawful for faithful Christians; yea, it is altogether unlawful, to be present at these plays.' And elsewhere he says, 'She that perchance came a chaste matron to the plays, goes away a strumpet from the play-house.'

We may here notice what the satirical poet Juvenal says to this purpose (*Satire 6*) 'That a man in his time could not pick one chaste woman, whom he might safely love as his wife, out of the whole play-house; and that all women, who frequent stage-plays, are infamous, and forfeit their good names.' It were good that our women, who love and haunt such plays, would consider this; as also, what is reported of Sempronius Sophus, a noble Roman, who divorced from his wife for this alone cause, that she frequented stage-plays without his knowledge, which might make her an adulteress; which divorce the whole Roman senate did approve (though it was the very first they did approve) as being a means to keep women chaste: So great an enemy to chastity were these plays judged to be; which is touched by Rodiginus, amongst others, in his antique lections

(*lib. 28. cap. 16*).<sup>11</sup>

Tertullian calls the playhouse, *The chapel of venery, the house of lechery, the consistory of uncleanness*. And in his *Apologeticus adversus gentes*, 'We renounce your spectacles and stage-plays, even as we reject their original, which we know to have had their conception from superstition; we have nothing at all to do with the fury of your Circus, with the dishonesty of the theatre; we come not at all to your plays.'

Origen (*in epist. ad Rom.*) says, 'That Christians must not lift up their eyes to stage-plays, the pleasurable delights of polluted eyes, lest their lusts be inflamed by them.'

Lactantius says (*de vero cultu*), 'That these interludes with which men are delighted, and whereat they are willingly present, because they are the greatest instigations to vice, and the most powerful instruments to corrupt men's minds, are wholly to be abolished from amongst us.'<sup>12</sup>

Gregory Nazianzen (*de rect. educ.*), calls stage-players, 'The servants of lewdness; and stage-plays, the dishonest, unseemly instructions of lascivious men, who repute nothing filthy but modesty; and the play-houses, the lascivious shops of all filthiness and impurity.'

Ambrose, (in Psalm 118), styles stage-plays, 'Spectacles of vanity, by which the devil conveys incentives of pleasure to men's hearts: Let us therefore turn away our eyes from these vanities and stage-plays.'

Jerome (*epist. ad Salvinam*), 'Have nothing to do with stage-plays, because they are the pleasing incendiaries of men's lusts.'

Augustine (*de Civ. Dei*), brands stage-plays with this black mark: 'That they are the spectacles of filthiness, the overturners of goodness and honesty, the chaser-away of all modesty and chastity; whorish shows, the art of mischievous villainies, which even modest pagans did blush to behold; the inventions of lewdness, by which the devil uses to gain innumerable companies of evil men to himself.' In another place he calls theatres, 'Cages of uncleanness, the public professions of wickedness, and stage-players, the most petulant, the most impure, impudent, wicked, shameful and detestable atonements of filthy devil-gods; which to true religion are most abominable.' And elsewhere he declares, 'That when the gospel came to be spread abroad in the world, stage-plays and playhouses, the very caves

<sup>11</sup>Ed. Lodovicus Caelius Rhodiginus (1469-1525), *Lectioinum antiquarum libri xvi* (Venice: Aldus, 1516; Frankfort, 1666).

<sup>12</sup>Ed. Divinarum Institutionum libre vi, de vero cultu. See *The Divine Institutes, book 6, Of true worship, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, chapter 20.

<sup>10</sup>Ed. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*.



of filthiness, went to ruin almost in every city, as inconsistent with it; whence the Gentiles complained of the times of Christianity, as evil and unhappy times.'

Epiphanius (*contra hares.*) says,<sup>13</sup> 'That the catholic and apostolic church reprobates and forbids all theatres, stage-plays, and such like heathenish spectacles.'

Chrysostom (*Hom. in Matthew*), says, 'I wish the theatres and play-places were all thrown down, though as to us they did lie desolate and ruined long ago.' Elsewhere he says, 'That nothing brings the oracles and ordinances of God into so great contempt, as admiring and beholding stage-plays: And that neither sacraments nor any other of God's ordinances (pray, mark this diligently, O how often is it sadly verified!) will do a man good so long as he goes to stage-plays.'

Bernard (*serm. ad milites templi*), says,<sup>14</sup> 'That all the faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ abominate and reject all dicing and stage-plays, as vanities and false frenzies.'

Let Salvian, his weighty words (*De gubernatione Dei*),<sup>15</sup> shut up this short account of the judgment of these ancient fathers [about] this matter, who says, 'That in stage-plays there is a certain apostasy from the faith. — For what is the first confession of their Christians in their baptism, but that they do protest they renounce the devil, his pomps, spectacles and works? Know thou, Christian, when thou dost wittingly and knowingly return to stage-plays, thou returnest to the devil, who is in his plays; for thou hast renounced both of them together.' Wherein many fathers agree with him; they being harmonious in condemning stage-plays, as being ordinarily stuffed with the names, histories, persons, fables, rites, ceremonies, villainies, incests, rapes, applauses, oaths, imprecations, and invocations of the idol-gods. As when the actors cry, *Help Jove, Juno, Apollo, Bacchus*, etc. and exclaim, *O Jove! O Cupid! O Venus! O Apollo! O Mars! O ye gods!* etc. and swear by *Jove, Mars, Venus*, the celestial gods, etc. (beside all these, they are often freighted [laden] in these days with wicked and profane scoffs and jests, abuses of Scripture, and bitter invectives against piety) and as drawing men on to profanity, idolatry and atheism.

In fine, to show the perfect agreement between the primitive and Protestant church [about] such plays, it will neither be impertinent, nor I hope

unedifying, to subjoin here the judgment of the famous reformed Protestant church of France (from which other reformed Protestant churches in this do not differ, yea, the stream of Protestant divines runs this way), declared in a national synod held at Rochelle, Anno 1571, where this canon was unanimously framed:<sup>16</sup> Congregations shall be admonished by their ministers seriously to reprehend and suppress all dances, mummeries, and interludes; and it shall not be lawful for any Christians to act or to be present (mark well) at any comedies, tragedies, plays, interludes, or any other such sports, either in public or in private chambers, considering that they have always been opposed, condemned and suppressed, in and by the church, as bringing along with them the corruption of good manners; especially when as the holy Scripture is profaned, which is not delivered to [be] acted or played, but only to be preached.

What used now to be said in apology for, and defense of stage-plays, and for reforming of them, yet so as to retain them still, was long since objected by the witty and voluptuous pagans, and solidly answered, and strongly confuted by the fathers; as it has been by several modern writers, particularly Dr. John Reynolds, Mr. Stubbs, and notably by Mr. Prynne<sup>17</sup> (to whose indefatigable diligence in collecting, and great judgment in disposing of many of the particulars here discoursed, I profess myself much beholden), and may be in a great part by what has been here hinted concerning the invention and original of them, the nature, end and use of them. Beside all that has been, and may most justly be said of the many dangerous and dreadful tendencies, attendants, consequents and fruits of them, and the horrid abuses of them, may sufficiently plead against the use of such stage-plays, being neither necessary nor profitable, and for the utter abolition of them. God is jealous, and will not be mocked. ❀

<sup>13</sup>Ed. *The Panarium; or Treatise Against Heresies*.

<sup>14</sup>Ed. *In praise of the New Knighthood*.

<sup>15</sup>Ed. *On the Government of God*. See *The Writings of Salvian the Presbyter* translated by Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan (Cima Pub Co: New York, c. 1947).

<sup>16</sup>Ed. This is a paraphrase of articles 27 and 28. See *The Ecclesiastical Discipline of the Reformed Churches in France ...: faithfully transcribed into English out of a French copy* (London, 1642) p. 45. For an annotated text of the discipline ecclesiastique, see Glen S. Sunshine, "French Protestantism on the Eve of St-Bartholomew: The Ecclesiastical Discipline of the French Reformed Churches, 1571-1572," *French History* (1990) 4.340-377.

<sup>17</sup>Ed. John Rainolds (1549-1607). *The Overthrow of Stage-plays* (2nd ed., 1629). Probably Phillip Stubbs, *Anatomy of Abuses* (3rd edition, 1584). William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix* (London, 1633).




# Musical Instruments in Psalm 150.

The following short article first appeared in *The Blue Banner*, v3 #3-4, in 1994, and has been on the FPCR website since 1997. As Dr. Bacon recently received a question about this article we are re-printing it with his reply.

*By Richard Bacon*

## MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN PSALM 150

he question sometimes comes up of the propriety of singing without the use of musical accompaniment. Psalms 149 and 150 are pointed to as justification for this concern. But let's stop and think about that for a moment. We not only sing about musical instruments; we also sing about such things as the lampstand, shewbread, and binding the sacrifice to the horns of the altar (Psalm 118). However, we do not actually *do* any of those things because they were weak and beggarly elements of the ceremonial law. They are some of the ordinances that were nailed to Christ's cross, and because they were, those forms no longer apply to us. As much as I appreciate musical instruments, instruments are no long a part of the public worship of God. This fact does not make the use of instruments 'evil.' Far from it. Instruments can be employed, just as a rock can be employed, for good or evil. Musical instruments are indifferent in that respect. However, because musical instruments were brought into the temple worship particularly at the behest of David, *as a prophet*, they have passed away with all the aspects of the Levitical worship.

Do you know why David instituted the use of musical instruments and choirs in the temple? The various courses of Levites had various things to carry from the Tabernacle when they were in the wilderness. Whenever the Tabernacle was moved, which it was for forty years, and a few times afterwards, various courses of Levites had different things to carry. David designed to move the worship of God out of a tent and into a permanent dwelling. The Levites were seemingly out of work. But not according to God, who said some of the Levites would play musical instruments. They would play cymbals, viols,

coronets, and all manner of musical instruments. The instruments were associated with the sacrifices, moreso than with singing (Carefully read 2 Chronicles chapter 29 for confirmation of that). So when the Levites sang Psalm 150, they sang about associating these instruments with the sacrifices. In a treatise against musical instruments in God's worship, G. I. Williamson makes this comparison: You have in the Old Testament a grand show. There was a grand show going on at the sacrifices, and there was a sound track for the show. Now, when the show goes away, what goes away with it? The sound track.

So it is not that we think musical instruments are evil, or that we think creation *per se* is evil. We enjoy art. But when that art is a violation of the second or seventh commandment, we eschew it. A picture can be good or it can be evil depending upon the use to which it is put. And the same thing is true of musical instruments.

## INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 150

From Mr. P. to Pastor Richard Bacon:

I read your article on Psalm 150. While I agree that in the Psalm we sing about musical instruments, in addition we sing about Praise using musical instruments. Is praise a part of worship? We may even want to say is praise a circumstance or an element of worship? Unlike Psalm 118 where "Bind the sacrifice with chords to the horn of the Altar" is stated at verse 27, we are told in Psalm 150 to "Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes" verse 4. In verse 1 we are told where to praise Him: "Praise God in His Sanctuary." If we interpret this Psalm as just a song being sung about objects we miss the point. This psalm is about praising the Lord and appropriately employing those things described in the passage. I see that you also concluded that





musical instruments were associated with the sacrifice in public worship. I think one of the passages that talks about this is 2 Chronicles 29:25-30. While the instruments played before and after the sacrifice, take a look at verse 28 where it described what went on during the sacrifice “So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.” Worship was taking place while the burnt offering was being sacrificed. Today we certainly don’t uphold the ceremonial aspects, but we do celebrate Christ’s sacrifice for us in Holy Communion. Therefore, is it conclusive to us this verse to say that the playing of the instruments were only associated with the sacrifice when worship by the assembly was taking place at the same time?

Dear Mr. P.

Thank you for your note. My concern with the use of musical instruments is not whether they can be utilized for praising God. The fact is that every lawful activity we undertake can be utilized to that end. The question comes down, rather, to one of what God has commanded us to use in NT public worship (I deliberately distinguish NT worship because I want us to see that the ceremonies of OT temple worship have passed away). If God has commanded us to use something in his worship in these days, then we must by all means use it. If he has forbidden that we use something, then we must refrain from its use. On these two points, virtually all who name the name of Christ are agreed. Where the disagreement generally arises is over things that God has neither commanded nor forbidden.

I would suggest to you that there were no musical instruments properly in the worship of God prior to the silver trumpets of Numbers 10:10ff. Further, the players of the musical instruments in the tabernacle/temple were made such *in the temple* because they could no longer be “porters.” You may recall that when God “dwelt in tents” that it was incumbent upon certain courses and families of Levites to carry the tents and furnishings from place to place as the tabernacle moved (Numbers 1:51; 4:15-33). When the temple was constructed along King David’s plan, the porters were no longer necessary. So, those very porters became the players of musical instruments in the temple (1

Chronicles 23:5, 26). It was therefore a Levitical, and I would argue, *therefore*, a ceremonial function. But even if one were to regard the playing of instruments as having some recourse in NT times, I think he should be willing to defend who, other than Levites, might properly and lawfully perform the function. There are no longer Levites — the only ordained offices in the NT being those of elder and deacon.

To consider your more specific question: I would say that praise is not only a part of worship, but more so that every part of our worship should involve praise. The question remains of how God has ordained that praise to take place. Certainly, we should sing “Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs” (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), making melody in our hearts. But if melody is being made by an accordion or piano, what need is there to make melody in our hearts? It seems to me that if praise *requires* the use of musical instruments, then Paul and Silas were not truly praising God in the jailhouse in Philippi, and the disciples and Jesus were not really praising God in the upper room following the last supper, etc. We know that they were truly praising God in song, therefore musical instruments cannot be required. But the regulative principle of worship indicates that if something is not required, then it is *by that very omission* forbidden.

The only place, then, for musical instruments, is as a circumstance. A circumstance is something that accompanies another action and makes it possible, but is not part of the action itself. Thus, we are commanded to assemble, but the “where and when” are circumstances. We must have them for the action to take place, but they are not part of the assembling itself. Now look again carefully at Psalm 150. The use of musical instruments in Psalm 150 is decidedly **not** circumstantial — it is commanded (with the “sanctuary” being spoken of clearly that of the temple, not the NT church — be careful not to confound categories because the words are the same — the Bible nowhere calls the NT assembly the “sanctuary”). But if it was commanded, then the Levites had no option to leave it out. In the NT we must regard those instruments as either commanded or circumstantial. But if we use Psalm 150 to *justify* their use, we are implicitly claiming that they are commanded. But if they are commanded, then Scripture requires the use of *all of them*, not just a “piano” (in fact, I don’t




think the instruments that we today call “organ” and “piano” existed at the time Psalm 150 was written). So, on what basis can we generalize and say “this just means musical instruments?” It seems highly arbitrary to me to maintain that the use of musical instruments is warranted, but not required and further, that the requirement is not for the instruments there mentioned, but for instruments of one’s own devising.

**FURTHER READING.**

*Instrumental Music in Religious Worship.* By Rev. John M’Donald. A brief tract summarizing the position against having musical instruments in public worship services. Available from FPCR.

*Organ Grinding Circa 1849.* A debate over the use of the organ in the public worship of God, which took place in 1849, wherein Robert L. Dabney, the famous Southern Presbyterian theologian, took a prominent part. See *The Blue Banner*, v. 3#1-2 (1994). The text of this article is also available at our website, [www.fpcr.org](http://www.fpcr.org)

*Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church,* John L. Girardeau. This is available for free as an electronic book or “eBook” at [www.fpcr.org](http://www.fpcr.org). This version (192 pages) includes marginal references to page numbers of the original edition of 1888, as well as expanded footnotes on some of the works referenced. After more than 100 years Girardeau’s book is still the *de facto* standard work against the use of instrumental music in public worship. As strange as this position may sound to the majority of Christians today, this was the majority view of the Protestant Reformers, and the general view in the Presbyterian churches until the tide of opinion began to turn in the middle of the 19th Century. Robert L. Dabney wrote of this work: “Dr. Girardeau has defended the old usage of our church with a moral courage, loyalty to truth, clearness of reasoning and wealth of learning which should make every true Presbyterian proud of him, whether he adopts his conclusions or not. The framework of his arguments is this: it begins with that vital truth which no Presbyterian can discard without a square desertion of our principles. The man who contests this first premise had better set out at once for Rome: God is to be worshipped only in the ways appointed in his word.” The full text of Dabney’s review from 1888, is included in *Organ Grinding* noted above. 

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