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WESTMINSTER BIBLIOGRAPHY

Part Three

A Review of *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* By Richard Bacon

Sundry Ministers of London: *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici (The Divine Right of Church Government)*. David Hall, editor. Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1995. 282 + lii. \$49.95 limited hardback edition; \$19.95 student edition.

This well-built volume from Naphtali Press is a new edition of a document first published in December 1646 under the auspices of the London Provincial Assembly. The significance of the publication of this volume is twofold: first, it comes during the 350th anniversary of the time that these debates were occurring and second, it comes at a time in which a major Presbyterian body in this country seems to be developing a sort of "identity crisis" concerning church government.¹

The London Provincial Assembly consisted of the Reformed or Presbyterian ministers in and around London. The Long Parliament, which had originally called the Westminster Assembly in 1643, was generally desirous of a "Presbyterian-like" settlement, but was also committed to an Erastian structure that would make Parliament the highest court in the English church.

While we may never know precisely from whose pen *Jus Divinum* came,² the London Provincial Assembly included among its members such English Presbyterian worthies as William Spurstowe and Edmund Calamy (two of the co-authors of the earlier SMECTYMNUUS),³ William

Gouge, Thomas Manton, and Thomas Gataker.⁴

The form of church government finally established by the English Parliament was characterized by Scottish commissioner Robert Baillie as a "lame Erastian Presbytery." Hopefully, with more and more Presbyterian (and other) churches going hat in hand to the government for papers of incorporation, a proper Westminster view of the relationship between church and state as presented in *Jus Divinum* will prevent the rise of a new "Democratic Erastianism" in this country. As the church's courts and committees seem to be more concerned with limiting legal liability than with proclaiming the whole counsel of God, perhaps we can all benefit not only from the insight, but from the courage as well, of a group of ministers who stood toe-to-toe with a parliamentary Caesar and did not blink.

During the year preceding the publication of the *Jus Divinum*, the Westminster Assembly *qua* assembly was threatened by Parliament with a praemunire.⁵ It was therefore inopportune for the Assembly itself to write *Jus Divinum*, as the law calling the Assembly gave it no such

ancient and our modern Bishops manifested, the Antiquity of Ruling Elders in the Church vindicated, and the Prelatical Church bounded. 1641, by SMECTYMNUUS. SMECTYMNUUS was an earlier work proposing a Presbyterian polity for the English church. The strange name came from the initials of its authors: EC was Edmund Calamy and UUS was for William Spurstowe. The other three authors were Stephen Marshall, Thomas Young, and Matthew Newcomen. The authors also published a defense of their book: *A Vindication of the Answer to the Humble Remonstrance from the unjust imputations of frivolousness and falsehood, wherein the cause of Liturgy and Episcopacy is further debated.* 1641.

⁴ Shaw, William A. *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and Under the Commonwealth, 1640-1660.* (2 vols.). New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green & Company, 1900. vol. II, pp. 399-405.

⁵ A praemunire in English law is basically a charge of resorting to a foreign court or authority and thus disregarding the authority or the supremacy of the sovereign (in this case the Parliament.) The "foreign court" was, of course, ecclesiastical government.

¹ PCA Consensus: A Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America. This reviewer's comments regarding the chapter on church polity in that document are contained in a collection of essays by various authors entitled *Answers to PCA Consensus.*

² *Jus Divinum* is a Latin term which basically translates to "divine right."

³ *An Answer to a Book entitled "An Humble Remonstrance," in which the Parity of Bishops and Presbyters in Scripture is demonstrated, the occasion of their Imparity in Antiquity discovered, the Disparity of the*

authority.

The reasons for the publication of *Jus Divinum* are rooted in the Erastian/Presbyterian debate within the Westminster Assembly. There were only a few Erastians in the Assembly, but they were quite vocal and clearly were supported by many in Parliament. When the Westminster Assembly reported its conclusions concerning church government to the Parliament in November 1644, the question of the *divine right* of church government was raised by Parliament. However, the Parliament had other matters before it that were considered more urgent and tabled the Assembly's report; but the differences between the Assembly and the Parliament on the question of church government and *Jus Divinum* continued to fester.

When the Parliament finally took the subject from the table the following year, early in 1645, they passed certain ordinances which were bound to offend the Assembly. The most objectionable ordinance withheld from the church's office-bearers the basic power of censure or suspension of church members - except for a few specified scandalous offenses. Parliament also specified a civil committee of lay commissioners for each county to whom spiritual causes could be appealed from the church courts. Further, the ordinances even allowed for an appeal from the proposed National Church Assembly to Parliament itself.

The threats of the Parliament were not altogether unexpected. The week before the petition went to the Parliament, Scottish Commissioner Robert Baillie wrote to David Dickson,

"None in the Assembly has any doubt of this truth [i.e., that Christ has appointed an ecclesiastical government in his church distinct from the civil government - R.B.] but one Mr. Coleman, a professed Erastian; a man reasonably learned, but stupid and inconsiderate, half a peasant, and of small estimation. But the lawyers in the Parliament, making it their work to spoil our Presbytery, not so much on conscience, as upon fear that the Presbytery spoil their mercat [an obsolete form of the word "market" - R.B.], and take up most of the country-pleas without law, did blow up the poor man with much vanity; so he is become their champion, to bring out, in the best way he can, Erastus's arguments against the proposition, for the contentment of the Parliament. We give him a free and fair hearing; albeit we fear when we have answered all he can bring, and have confirmed with undeniable proofs our position, the Houses, when it comes to them, shall scrape it out of the Confession; for this point is their idol."⁶

The next day, Coleman was absent from the Assembly⁷

and on Thursday March 19 it was ordered that Messrs. Strickland and Valentine would visit Mr. Coleman since it had been learned that Coleman was not well.⁸ On March 30, the *Minutes* record, "The Assembly was invited to Mr. Coleman his funeral."⁹

Always one to say what was on his mind, Baillie recorded in his journal for April 3, 1646, "God has stricken Coleman with death; he fell in an ague, and after four or five days expired. It's not good to stand in Christ's way."¹⁰ The same day John Lightfoot (later Bishop) took up Coleman's place as the chief proponent in the Assembly of the Erastian system.¹¹

The House of Commons, upon receiving the petition, voted by the margin of eighty-eight to seventy-six to regard the petition as a breach of privilege, which in turn exposed the members of the Assembly to the penalty of the previously mentioned praemunire. The offending paragraph in the Assembly's petition seems to have been:

"Should things be so ordered (which God forbid), that any wicked and scandalous persons might without control thrust themselves upon this sacrament, we do evidently foresee, that not only we, but many of our godly brethren, must be put on this hard choice, either to forsake our stations in the ministry, which would be to us one of the greatest afflictions, or else to partake in other men's sins, and thereby incur the danger of their plagues; and if we must choose one, we are resolved, and we trust our God will help us, to choose affliction rather than iniquity."¹²

Parliament claimed on April 21, 1646 in response to the Assembly's petition that the Parliament "hath jurisdiction in all causes, spiritual and temporal;" that its directions were binding on "all persons of this kingdom of what quality soever;" and the divines of the Assembly were reminded that they were strictly an advisory council. Parliament further explicitly prohibited the Assembly from delivering its advice on "matters already judged and determined" by Parliament. Nor was the Assembly to "debate or vote whether what is passed as a law by both Houses be agreeing or disagree to the Word of God, until they be thereunto required."¹³

The above summarized response by Parliament to the Assembly's petition came back to the Assembly on April 30, carried by Sir John Evelyn, Mr. Nathaniel Fiennes, and Mr. Samuel Brown, members of Parliament. In Mr. Brown's speech he explained Parliament's position:

⁸ *Ibid.* 213.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Baillie, II, 364.

¹¹ *Minutes*, 213, 439-42.

¹² Cited in Mitchel, *Westminster Assembly*, 297-300.

¹³ Cited in S. W. Carruthers. *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1943), 13-14.

⁶ Robert Baillie. *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1841-42), vol. II, 360-61. (Spelling and punctuation have been updated to reflect modern usage.)

⁷ *Minutes*, 207.

* The Parliament has the privilege to be the supreme judicatory in the kingdom and, as such, has jurisdiction in all cases and causes whether spiritual or temporal.

* The Assembly of divines, which was a creature of Parliament, was not authorized to interpret the Solemn League and Covenant,¹⁴ especially in relation to any laws that Parliament made or should make.

* But the Assembly's petition, *first*, opposed their judgment without being authorized as an assembly to do so to a law passed by both Houses of Parliament, claiming that the law was so contrary to the Covenant that they could not practice it and *second*, that opposition to a court instituted by the Parliament (viz. the lay commissioners) is a breach of the privilege of Parliament.¹⁵

Along with the charge of breach of privilege, the messengers brought nine questions. Those questions, or *queries*, went far beyond the actual question in dispute and, in effect, broadened the whole scope of the discussion of church government in the Assembly. The manner in which Parliament stated its questions is also instructive. For those questions having to do with church government, Parliament asked for positive enactment from Scripture. On the other hand, Parliament assumed itself to have whatever authority it gave itself in the church except where the divines could find specific scriptural prohibition to the magistrate.¹⁶

These nine broad questions moved the debate in the Assembly from the relatively narrow question of the jurisdiction of church courts to the much wider question of the divine right and how one determines if a practice is *Jus Divinum* (by divine right) or merely *jus humanum* (by human command). The Assembly spent the month of May, 1646 in considering, "How many ways the will and appointment of Jesus Christ is set out in Scripture?" They proceeded to determine on May 5, that his will may be set forth in express words; on May 7, that it may be set forth by necessary consequence; on May 18 they adduced the examples of Christ and the apostles proving truth from the Old Testament only by consequence and not just in express words; on May 28 they adduced some specific examples of necessary consequence; and finally on June 1 they adduced five more examples, one of which was the proof of the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath.¹⁷

Though the Assembly never actually answered the queries in a formal document, some considerable time was invested in them. Baillie explained, "The work of the

Assembly these bygone weeks has been to answer some

¹⁴ The Solemn League and Covenant was the political and ecclesiastical treaty between Parliament and Scotland which brought the Scots into the civil war on the side of the Parliament and required Parliament to establish Presbyterianism in England.

¹⁵ *Minutes*, pp. 453-58.

¹⁶ The nine queries can be found in *Minutes*, pp. 225-26.

¹⁷ *Carruthers*, 15-17.

very captious questions of the Parliament, about the clear scriptural warrant for all the punctilios of the government. It was thought it would be impossible for us to answer, and that in our answers there would be no unanimity; yet, by God's grace, we shall deceive them who were waiting for our halting."¹⁸

The anti-Erastian sentiment pervaded not only the Westminster Assembly generally, but was also a significant point of contention from the Scottish delegation and the most Reformed ministers in London. On July 30, 1646 the Scottish delegate George Gillespie dedicated his landmark anti-Erastian book, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* to the Westminster Assembly.¹⁹ A scant four months later the first edition of the anti-Erastian *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* made its way from the London Provincial Assembly.²⁰

Although the Westminster Assembly itself was not finally required by Parliament to submit answers to what Baillie called the nine "very captious questions," the book *Jus Divinum* is an express and direct answer to the Parliament's questions.²¹ The London Provincial Assembly followed the nine questions *in order* and gave distinct replies point by point to the Parliament. Further *Jus Divinum* confirmed each of the London Provincial Assembly's answers by appeal both to Scripture and the most able Reformed authors.²²

In a sense the Erastian debate reached its climax in the confrontation between the Parliament and the Assembly over this power of exclusion of certain persons from the table of the Lord. The confrontation began March 20, 1645/46, when Parliament set up its elaborate scheme of "Erastian Presbyterianism." The Assembly believed itself

bound by conscience to protest strongly such blatant

¹⁸ *Baillie*, II, 378.

¹⁹ *Minutes*, 261.

²⁰ The editor of the present edition follows others such as Robert S. Paul in attributing the work to the divines of Sion College. However, it should be noted that while the London Provincial Assembly met at Sion College, it was not strictly speaking a part of the College, but of the synod being erected by the Parliament. Philip J. Anderson in his article "Sion College and the London Provincial Assembly, 1647-1660" in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37(1) January 1986, p. 70 noted that Cornelius Burges distinguished between Sion College which consisted of all London Ministers and the London Provincial Assembly which consisted of those teaching and ruling elders who had specifically undergone presbyterial exam. Further, we note that the title page of the 1654 edition of *Jus Divinum* specifically mentions the London Provincial Assembly as the source of *Jus Divinum* and with Anderson that the Assembly tirelessly argued for a free hand in barring the scandalous from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Anderson -p. 77.).

²¹ It should be noted, however, that in the final analysis Parliament struck *Westminster Confession of Faith* Chapter 30, which contains the offending statement, "The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hands of the church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate." When the Church of Scotland adopted the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in 1647, it adopted Chapter 30 *in toto*.

²² *Hetherington*, 269-70.

invasions of the spiritual independence and self-governance of the church. The Assembly therefore petitioned Parliament in a carefully worded and ably reasoned document²³ to reconsider its actions. Parliament regarded the Assembly's petition as a threat of disobedience to the new enactment. The next day in a sermon to the House of Commons, Francis Cheynell, a member of the Westminster Assembly who would later become president of St. John's College, Oxford, reminded the Parliament, "Jesus Christ hath not entrusted any state to make new institutions or create new officers in his church."²⁴

The difficulty of barring "the scandalous" from the table was only one of many concerns the London Provincial Assembly had with the Erastian settlement of the English Church. Between 1647 and 1660 a total of 190 ministers' names appeared upon the roll of the London Provincial Assembly, yet they seemed to have considerable difficulty actually operating as a free court of Christ's church. The LPA consequently proposed five solutions which they believed would ameliorate the difficulties and strengthen the church. These included:

- * increasing the number of delegates, including ruling elders, that each classis could send to the Provincial Assembly
- * assisting in the settlement of unorganized classis and the establishment of new classes in and around the city of London
- * enforcing of the existing laws regarding the collection and disbursement of tithes
- * establishing a uniformity of practice and worship among the numerous parishes within their Province
- * getting and maintaining a free hand for the church officers to bar the scandalous from the sacrament of the Lord's supper

In order better to establish the fifth solution, the London Provincial Assembly called upon its several classes to take charge of admitting would-be communicants to the supper by (1) requiring that all of "competent age" should be required to "give an account of their faith before the parochial Presbytery" before coming to the Lord's Supper; (2) public catechizing of all covenant children ages nine and ten; and (3) requiring parents to instruct their children in the home.²⁵

Though Parliament did not press the threatened praemunire (at least partly due to the closeness of the original vote, to be sure), yet the relations between

Parliament and the Assembly had been strained such that they were never subsequently the same. Once it was too late, Parliament passed ordinances for setting up a National Presbyterian Establishment. But at the same time Oliver Cromwell was building up the New Model Army on a footing quite different from that originally ordered by the Parliament.

Cromwell and his New Model Army overthrew Parliament in December 1648 via Colonel Pride's purge of the Parliament. When the members of Parliament arrived at the House of Commons on December 5, forty-one leading Presbyterians in the House were arrested and many others were refused entrance. The resistance of the House was not overcome, however. On December 7, forty more members were taken prisoner - which left the fanatics in charge of the Parliament.

At that point the House voted 50 to 28 to take into consideration the proposals of the army. The army then ordered the Parliament to dissolve itself and to confer with General Cromwell for the discharge from jail of the members of Parliament.²⁶

With Colonel Pride's march on London and the purge of the Presbyterians in Parliament in 1648, it mattered little what advice the Westminster Assembly or the London Provincial Assembly gave Parliament. Cromwell and his army accomplished with sword and horse the overthrow of reason and Scripture. It was left to Scotland to establish a *Jus Divinum* church government. In a few years the Lord Protector Cromwell would be in Scotland, working against the established Presbyterianism of the Church of Scotland.

The republication of *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* declares once again the independence of Christ's church from the meddling of civil government. It is a welcome addition to the library of anyone who takes seriously the Presbyterian claim that Christ alone is king and head of his church and has placed in her a government of his own choosing and not of man's choosing.

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Pastor Bacon has written several articles and reviews for various Reformed journals and magazines including *The Blue Banner*, *Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, and *The Covenanter Witness*. His books include a study of seventeenth century ecclesiology entitled *The Visible Church and the Outer Darkness*. He also wrote a published response to *PCA Consensus: A Statement of Identity* on the subjects of church polity and discipline. He is presently video taping a series on church polity for Greenville.

²³ For the text of the petition see Alexander Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1897), 297.

²⁴ Francis Cheynell, "A Plot for the Good of Posterity," cited in *Carruthers*, 12.

²⁵ London Provincial Assembly, *Minutes*, folio 131. Journal of the House of Commons, VI, 94, cited in S. R. Gardiner *History of the Great Civil War*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1893), IV, 270.

²⁶ Journal of the House of Commons, VI, 94, cited in S. R. Gardiner *History of the Great Civil War*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1893), IV, 270.

Strengthened Hands

A Sermon by Richard Bacon

From a sermon preached in the morning service, October 9, 1994, to the First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett.

The passage under discussion is Nehemiah 6:1-9. This section of the book of Nehemiah is about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Chapter 6 discusses several attempts by the enemies of God to halt the raising of those walls -- to stop the work of God's people. There are several things I would like us to see in Nehemiah 6. We will pay particular attention to verse 9.

First of all, we need to remember that the rebuilding of the walls required determination from the people. They had to have a mind to the work. They had to want to do what they were doing because the task itself was formidable. Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah, and the other leaders of that day, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel were gathering the people of God for this task. But chapter 6 tells of a number of attempts that were made against Jerusalem by her enemies. We might call these enemies "scatterers." They were what Jesus characterized in Matthew 12:30 as those that scattereth. They were those who rather than gathering with Nehemiah were scattering.

Verses 1 through 4 tell of an attempt at a supposed reconciliation, but Nehemiah recognized it for the mischief that it really was. In verses 5 through 9 there is an attempt at intimidation. These evil scatterers were going to raise a false report. They were going to send a false report to the king, alleging that Nehemiah was up to something altogether different from what Nehemiah was actually doing. Verses 10 through 14 tell of an attempted appeal to Nehemiah's purported self interest. Finally, in verses 15 through 19, there is an attempt to cause divisions in communications as these evil men try to send letters to the people of Jerusalem to get them to rebel against Nehemiah. The purpose in each of these four instances was to weaken Nehemiah's hand, so that the work would not be done -- so that Nehemiah could not satisfactorily defend the city. Now, Nehemiah's enemies waited until a very late date. The wall had been built. All that remained, Nehemiah explained in verse one, was to hang the doors on the gates. So they waited until the work was nearly done. They realized that they would now have to make an all-out attempt to keep the project from being completed.

Nehemiah's response in verse 9 to all these attempts at

opposition affords us five teachings or doctrines that have continuing significance today. And because of the similarities between building the wall around a city with brick and mortar, and building up the church in a spiritual sense, whether it be a local church or whether it be a presbytery, we believe that these doctrines also have continuing applications for the church today.

Here are the five doctrines:

DOCTRINE ONE. First of all, *God's enemies often oppose him by opposing his people.* Look at what Nehemiah says in verse 9, "For they all made *us* afraid." The opposition was to builders of the wall; the opposition was to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem's opposition was not really to the Jews so much that it was to the God of the Jews. We can learn from this that God's enemies often oppose *him* by opposing his people. Oftentimes men shake their fists at God by shaking their fist at the covenant people. They become angry with us, but they are not angry with us initially. It is not that we do not deserve their anger; it is not that we are such great people that they could not possibly dislike us. That is not the point. The point is that they first hate God. It is because they first hate Christ that they hate us. Jesus told us to expect exactly that in John 15:20, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

First of all, God's enemies often oppose him by opposing his people.

It is not enough for the haters of God to be lawless; they would also attack those who *would* follow God's commandments. They do not only love their unrighteousness; they also love persuading others to be unrighteous along with them. That is what we understand Romans chapter 1 to mean. Paul said in verse 32 that covenant breakers not only delight in their lawlessness; they also delight in teaching others likewise.

It was not enough for Pharaoh that he did not worship the Lord; he would not let God's people go out and worship the Lord either. He did not want the people of God worshipping God. He would not allow the Israelites to worship.

So when we do worship the Lord, when we do call upon

him, when we do bow before him in worship, that often becomes the occasion for persecution and slander. In Psalm 37 the psalmist tells us that we will be persecuted for worshipping the Lord. Verse 12 reads, "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth." It is not that the wicked primarily hate the righteous, but that they hate the God of Righteousness. We must always be prepared for it. Paul makes the statement in 2 Timothy 3:12 that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution. We can expect it. We do not look for it; we do not try to cause it; we do everything that we can to avoid it; but the fact of it is that God's people really are hated when they stand up for God's righteousness.

As long as we do not make a difference between us and the world, the world can get along with us just fine because we seem to be one of them. However, when we say that we are not one of them; when we say that we will not follow wickedness; that is when the world begins to hate us. What did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do in Daniel 3 to get into trouble with the authorities? Nothing! All they had to do was stand there, while everyone else bowed down to their wicked idol. So it is with the righteous today. We do not have to go out of our way to do anything. All we have to do is stand for the way of righteousness. All we have to do is be where God tells us to be, and it will be noticeable enough to the wicked to hate us.

The root cause of the wicked's hatred of the righteous is their hatred for God. We are told that in John 15:19. So Tobiah in this Nehemiah passage hated Israel because he first hated Israel's God. First he shook his fist at God, then he shook his fist at the covenant people.

What uses might we draw from this? What are the applications for us today?

USE ONE. First of all, it is a *warning* to expect persecution. Do not be surprised when persecution arises from any quarter. God's enemies must show themselves to be the enemies of God. This is one of the things we should learn from the parable of the wheat and the tares. The parable of the wheat and the tares begins with a man who planted a wheat field. While he slept, the enemy came and slipped in some tares -- some weeds -- in among his wheat. The significant thing is that when the wheat and the tares first come up, you cannot tell them apart. You have to wait almost until the time of harvest to be able to tell them apart. But as they grow in the field together the wheat becomes more obviously wheat and the tares become more obviously tares. The wheat becomes more "wheat-like" and the tares become more "tare-like." As we live in conjunction with the world we should anticipate that those who love God will become more obvious in their love for

God as time goes by. By the same token those who hate God will become more obvious in their hatred for God as time goes by. God's enemies must show themselves to be his enemies.

USE TWO. Another use is as a *comfort*. It is a comfort to know that if the world hates us, it is a good indication that we are living the lives that God would have us to live. We need to remember that because we are among those whom the Father chose out of the world, then the world hates us as the world hates him. We need to be sure that the world hates us without cause: Peter cautions us that if we suffer, we need to ensure that we are suffering as Christians and not because we deserve it.

The world will hate us as we are more and more manifesting the life of Christ. That hatred should comfort us. It is a comfort to know that the world attacks us in the same way that the world attacked Stephen. They brought up false witnesses against him; they suborned witnesses against him. They found any reason they could to attack him. They were not attacking Stephen because he was a bad guy. They looked at Stephen and he had the face of an angel! What a "nice guy" he must have been! Yet the world hated him because he stood for the Lord Jesus Christ.

USE THREE. Another use would be as a *dissuasion* from loving the world. The sin that remains with us seems to be almost like a magnet, like a lodestone, drawing us back to the world. It points back to the world as a compass. The world's hatred of us tends to make the world and its life of sin less lovely to us. That which hates us cannot be lovely to us.

Secondly, we find that God's enemies routinely underestimate what he does for his people.

So we have several uses then of this first doctrine: as a dissuasion, as a comfort, as a warning. There are still other doctrines we can find in this passage.

DOCTRINE TWO. Secondly, we find that *God's enemies routinely underestimate what he does for his people*. "Their hands shall be weakened," their enemies said in Nehemiah 6:9. In Genesis chapter 14, Chedorlaomer did not realize what God would do though Abram or he never would have stolen Lot. If Chedorlaomer had known what God was going to do through Abram when he attacked Sodom, would he have stolen Lot? Of course not! He simply underestimated what God was going to do.

Remember in Judges 7 how the Midianites were like sand by the seaside for number, but God routed them with 300 hundred chosen men. They underestimated what God

would do for his people. God prepared to deliver his people by sending dreams that came to their mind. They dreamed they were being chased through the woods by a birthday cake. They dreamed that a big cake was rolling down the hill chasing them across the land. This does not seem to be very terrifying but apparently these men were having nightmares about being chased by cakes. That is what God can do for his people. He can simply put fear in the hearts of his enemies. Rational fear? Not necessarily! He might make them afraid of barley cakes. Whatever God chooses to do, his enemies routinely underestimate what he will do for his people.

Goliath was a giant of a man. In fact, he was such a large man that he was willing to stand and defy the army of the living God, because he underestimated what God would do through a faithful shepherd boy. David, that little shepherd boy, became indignant that someone would defy the army of the living God. He picked up a handful of stones from the river for his sling, thinking he might need 5. But he only needed one! Goliath underestimated what God would do for the faithful man.

Jonathan understood what God would do with faithful men. In 1 Samuel 14, he told his armor bearer, "For there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few." Two men against a garrison? Why not! The Lord was on their side. God's enemies routinely underestimate what he will do for his people. In the case of Jonathan and his armor bearer, an entire garrison of Philistines was put to flight by two men, only one of which had a sword.

Are there uses for this today? We are not suggesting that we ought to go out and attack God's enemies with river rocks. We are not suggesting that we ought to get a sword and attack a garrison of Philistines. Nevertheless there are spiritual uses today.

USE ONE. The first use is as a *warning* not to be like God's enemies. Do not reckon strength based upon numbers. Deuteronomy 32:30 tells us that one can chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. In Zechariah 4:10, the prophet instructs us not to despise the day of small things. In fact Zechariah was talking about the temple walls being rebuilt in Jerusalem. He said that as you lay those first few stones on the ground, do not despise the day of small things, because they shall have a mighty end if God should prosper them.

USE TWO. It is also a *reminder* that God's arm is not shortened. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that, in fact, God's strength often is made perfect in weakness. Paul found that God's strength in his life was made more manifest when God gave him a thorn in the flesh, to subdue him, to keep him under God's hand.

USE THREE. It is a reminder; it is a warning; it is an *encouragement*. It is an encouragement in that what God has done for a few in the past, he can do also for a few today. In Psalm 78, the psalmist is recounting to his children the great things the Lord has done. He cries out for us to sing to our children of the great things that the Lord has done for us in the past. In verses 4-7 he says, "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."

As we think about what God has done for his people in the past, it ought to encourage us to keep his commandments today -- knowing that he is fully capable of blessing us now as he has blessed his people in the past. Neither we nor our children should turn back as Ephraim did in the day of battle. Psalm 78:8-11 says, "And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law. And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them." We ought not to be like those children of Ephraim who turned back in the day of battle: though they were armed; though they had those things that were necessary; though they had more armament than Jonathan had when he put a entire garrison to flight; yet they turned back in the day of battle. The battle was not lost because the enemy overpowered them; the battle was lost because they refused to engage the enemy. Let us not be like those children of Ephraim.

USE FOUR. We also ought to use this doctrine as a *remedy* for complacency. Would we sit back and do nothing? Would we congratulate ourselves on all that we have done? Would we become like that Pharisee in Luke 18:10-11 who thanked God that he was not like "that publican?" The passage begins by saying that the Pharisee stood and prayed thus *with himself*. He probably did pray *to himself*. I doubt that his prayer got much higher than his head. He thanked God that he was not as that publican. It is easy for us to recognize that we ought not to pray that way. But how often do we pray, "I thank God that I am not as that Pharisee?" We can become just as complacent

in our self righteousness as the Pharisee was complacent in his attitude toward the publican. Let us remember that we ought not to sit back and congratulate ourselves for what has been done in the past.

I have already mentioned Chedorlaomer and the battle that Abram fought to get back his nephew Lot in Genesis chapter 14. Abram did win that battle with a handful of men. But those men were *trained* men. They were *trained* household servants. They knew how to use a sword. When were they trained? Do you suppose they waited until Lot was stolen and then decided to start training for the battle? Not at all! They were trained prior to the day of battle. So we and our children today ought not to wait for the day of battle to begin training. We ought not wait until things are so dire that we have no choice before we begin to catechize our children; before we begin to memorize the Scriptures -- laying them up in our hearts, applying them to our lives. No! We need to be trained before the day of battle so that when the battle is engaged we will be armed against the day of battle.

The third doctrine is that God's enemies oppose him by opposing his work.

DOCTRINE THREE. The third doctrine is that *God's enemies oppose him by opposing his work*. Look at the passage in Nehemiah 6 again. Sanballat and Tobiah were opposing Nehemiah so that as verse 9 says, the work would "be not done." The purpose of Sanballat and Tobiah in verse 3 was to cause the work to cease. They wanted the *work to stop*. This tactic had been successful before, if you look over in Ezra 4:17. That very tactic had been successful before cause a halt in the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Paul's life, after his conversion, is the story of opposition to the work of God in that generation. Wherever he went, from synagogue to synagogue, from city to city, the story is the same; opposition to the word of God. Paul stood and spoke the word of God and the wicked routinely threw him out of the synagogue, stoned him, dragged him out to the edge of town and left him for dead.

Even within the visible church of today, there is often the tendency to have low regard or no regard at all for God's work. In Isaiah 5:11-12 we read, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands." It is not simply that they were playing music. It is not simply that they were involving themselves in partying. It was that they were doing it so as to put out of their minds the work

of God. This is manifested throughout the visible church in our day as well. It is a time in which there is a very low regard for what God is doing and a very high regard for what men are doing.

This doctrine too has several uses for us today.

USE ONE. I submit to you that it ought to be a *persuasive* to attend diligently upon the means of grace. Whatever Satan would oppose, we ought to grasp hold of firmly. Attend diligently upon the means of grace. Whatever is opposed by Satan has the mark of being a handiwork of God.

USE TWO. It is also a *warning* that what God would prosper Satan would oppose. Expect, anticipate that Satan will oppose that which God erects. Continue on in what God has commanded. Finish the work! It is required of stewards that he be found faithful. That is the key thing. It is not required that the steward be found smart. It is not required that the steward be found well educated. It is not required that the steward be found rich. It is not required that the steward be found in the right society. It is not required that the steward be found born to the right family. But it is required that the steward *be found faithful!* We must continue on, even as Nehemiah pressed the work, so much the more as it was being opposed. Today as we are opposed, we must also press the work home. We must continue on. We must be faithful to that which God has called us.

USE THREE. A third use is as an *encouragement*. If it is a warning, it is also an encouragement to continue in God's work even when it is opposed. God is often pleased to give apparent success to his enemies only to later destroy them, and thus more fully manifest his glory. It would appear that if Pharaoh had a society of slaves in his country, and he was so powerful that he could compel them to try to make bricks without straw, then he must be able to direct them to do anything. But God raised up Pharaoh for one reason and one reason only. God raised up Pharaoh so his power might be more fully manifested to the nations. God told the nations of the world to look upon that mighty king Pharaoh and to watch him destroy Pharaoh. Often, God's enemies seem to have the upper hand. God's enemies seem to be on top. They appear to be the head and God's people appear to be the tail. But God has done that only to bring down the mighty. Just as the farmer raises grass for the purpose of cutting it down, so God also raises enemies for the purpose of cutting them down. Therefore, let us never, ever, ever envy the position of the wicked. They may seem to have plenty for a time, but consider their end. God will bring them low.

DOCTRINE FOUR. A fourth doctrine is that *God delivers his covenant people by the destruction of his*

enemies. Nehemiah prays in verse 9, “Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.” The classic example of this is, of course, the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. How did God save the Israelites? I suppose when they came up against the Red Sea in front of them, and the Egyptian chariots behind them, there may have been a faction among them that began talking about rapture. But that is not how God saves his people. God saves his people by the *destruction of their enemies*. And God opened up the Red Sea so that the children of Israel could pass through kicking up dust, Nehemiah says, on “dry ground.” But the Sea closed in on Pharaoh and his chariots, and the horse and rider were cast into the Sea. God had as little regard for them as we might have for an ant or a gnat. God showed himself mighty on behalf of his people.

A fourth doctrine is that God delivers his covenant people by the destruction of his enemies.

Nehemiah did not pray for a rapture from his enemies. He did not pray for his enemies simply to go away. No! He prayed for the means to overcome God’s enemies. He prayed for strengthened hands.

This verb here “strengthened” is in the *piel* conjugation, which is the conjugation that intensifies the action. He was praying not only for strengthened hands, he was praying for *very* strong hands. He was praying for *established* hands! He was asking for hands established to do work. And in praying that his hands be strengthened, Nehemiah prayed that the work of his hands would be established. He was not just praying for strong hands to do any kind of work. He was praying for strong hands for a specific purpose. He was praying that the works of his hands would be established. He wanted the work to last. He prayed that the wall would be built. He was praying that those doors would be hung upon the gate posts.

Sometimes God’s people are called to go out directly against an enemy, but more usually what they are called to do, is to build the work of God. That was exactly what Nehemiah was called to do. He defeated God’s enemies by establishing God’s work. In the establishing the walls of Jerusalem, Sanballat and Tobiah were defeated. They recognized that and that was the reason they were so opposed to God’s work.

There are several ways how we should apply this today.

USE ONE. First of all, there is an *encouragement*. What God has begun, he will establish. He is both the author and the finisher of his work. Not only does he

finish his work in spite of his enemies, but in fact quite overcoming his enemies.

2. There is a use here also as a *reminder* that it is God who strengthens our hands, and not we strengthening our own hands. When the Israelites first came into the land, Moses preached to them in the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy the eighth chapter, Moses warned them, “You are going to go into villages you did not build. You are going to find houses you did not have to erect. You are going to find wells you did not have to dig. You are going to find vineyards that are already producing grapes. You are going to find olive yards that already have olives falling from the trees. And you are going to be so grateful. But in a few years, there will be a tendency for you to think that your hands got you this wealth. You will begin to think that the strength of your own arms brought this to pass. I got up early in the morning, and I went out there, and I worked hard, and I got this for myself.” God warned the Israelites against that. We see the same warning here as a reminder as Nehemiah prays to God to strengthen his hands, that without God strengthening our hands, we have no strength. We have no strength in our own hands. We have no strength in our own arms. We have no way of strengthening ourselves. *God alone* can establish our work. Only he can set the doors on the gates. We must *never* trust in our own strength. We must *never* trust in our own wisdom. We must always depend *strictly* and *only* and *solely* upon the grace of God.

2. If there is a reminder here, there is also a *confidence builder*. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:12 that God is able to keep that which he has committed to him against that day. As our victory belongs to God, so also duty belongs to us. In Matthew 16:18, God has guaranteed his church that the gates of hell will not prevail against her. That does not mean that we may lie back, sit on our hands and do nothing toward that victory. But neither does it mean that victory is uncertain. *Victory is quite certain!* Is the victory to be in our lifetimes? I cannot say. But I know certainly that victory *shall* come to God’s people. We must pray that God will strengthen our hands because that is our duty and prayer is certainly a means which God has chosen to use to bring about that victory.

DOCTRINE FIVE. The fifth and final doctrine is that *God is often pleased to bring about the deliverance of his people by means of their prayers*. Nehemiah, understanding the dire situation, knowing that the enemy wanted to weaken his hands, realizing it was their desire to destroy the work, immediately prays, “But, thou, O God, strengthen our hands.” Often Scripture depicts God as one who delivers his people, because he heard the cries of his

people. Remember how while they were in Egypt, as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were groaning under the Egyptian taskmaster; God heard their cries. We could multiply examples. Throughout the book of Judges, the reoccurring theme of the entire book is the idea of God's people coming under the persecution of his enemies and then crying unto God, and God hearing their cries. Time and time again we see God depicted as the one who delivers his people because he heard them. That being the case, God ought to hear us! We ought to be confident that God will lend us his ear. We should know that God will incline his ear to hear our prayers. This word here signifies "crying out from anguish." It means being so overcome with anguish that we have to cry out. It is as though the people were crying "uncle." In Exodus chapter 2, when God heard the cries of his people, those cries of anguish, those cries of forlorn, he is represented as remembering the covenant that he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Not that he ever forgot. It is not as though the covenant had slipped his mind. Rather he was reminded of the covenant in this respect: he will keep covenant with his people. He is faithful to his people.

The fifth and final doctrine is that God is often pleased to bring about the deliverance of his people by means of their prayers.

Hypothetically, God does not need our prayers to accomplish his purpose. God can do whatever pleases him. Yet, in his grace and in his wisdom, he has ordained his people's prayer as one means by which he communicates the benefits that were purchased by Christ. Can I explain it? No. I have really at this point in my life given up trying. But I can report to you that the Scriptures depict God *again* and *again* and *again* as a God who answers prayer. He is depicted throughout the Scriptures as a God who honors his people's prayers, who inclines his ears to hear his people's prayers. I do not want to make the same error as those who would depict God as a jilted lover. I do not mean it that way at all. But there is a sense in which God inclines his ear toward us, waiting to hear for that whisper, that cry of anguish, that cry of "Oh, come unto me, O Lord." I cannot explain it; but the Scriptures describe him that way.

How might we use this?

USE ONE. First of all, as *instructions* to take our burdens to the Lord. I do not know if anybody else cares or not, but I have this assurance: Jesus cares. Therefore we can cast all our cares upon him. Yes, we all have

troubles. Yes, we have problems. Yes, we have cares. Yes, we have burdens. But we can take them to the Lord. We can *count* upon him. We can cast them upon him. There is no circumstance -- none -- so dire, so terrible, so bad, so hopeless that God will refuse to hear the cries of his people. There is not one! There is not a circumstance where God is helpless. No matter how bad our situation is in Rowlett, or Richardson, or Plano, or Sulphur Springs, or McKinney -- no matter how bad our situation is in the cities in which we live -- God is not helpless! God is not sitting back, wringing his hands, wondering what to do. God has full power over everything that comes to pass. God will not refuse to hear the cries of his people. He has *again and again* described himself as a covenant keeping God who inclines his ear to hear his people's prayers.

USE TWO. Secondly, there is an *encouragement* to lay our most heart felt desires for reformation, for deliverance, before the Lord. As much as we love Christ's church, we cannot love it more than he does. There is an encouragement here that this is his work; therefore we can lay these things before him. As strong as our desires are for reformation and deliverance of Christ's church, we can have assurance that God will answer those prayers, because it is also the desire of his heart. He wants these things too. It may be that what God is going to do in this generation is honor your prayers. You know why there has not been reformation yet? It might be because we are not *praying* yet. It might be because we are not *fasting* yet. It might be because we are not *making use of the means* that God has said he will honor.

USE THREE. The third use is another *encouragement* that great peril should occasion great prayers. Are we in trouble? Are we in *great* trouble? Then that should occasion *great* prayers. That should elicit fervent cries of anguish to the Lord. And if great peril occasions great prayers, then we can be encouraged in this: that those great prayers may lead to *great* deliverance.



