
Covenant Reformed News

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God's Way Is in the Sanctuary (2)

In the last *News*, we considered the grievous afflictions that overwhelmed Asaph (Ps. 77:2-9). Now, we shall see his restoration by God's grace. "And I said"—a thought grips Asaph; he must give it utterance—"this is my infirmity," literally, "this is my anguish" (10). "All my troubles (2-9), including my doubting questionings (7-9)," Asaph realizes, "are bringing me nothing but pain and grief. I must stop this!" "The years of the right hand of the most High" (10)—these are what I must think about! Not in order to mope or feel sorry for myself! Not in order to torture myself and make myself feel worse by comparing my present misery with former bliss and so wallow further in my grief." So faith is reawakened in the troubled believer who recalls "the years of the right hand of the most High" (10), the times of God's marvellous deeds. "He has delivered His church in the past! He will do it for me!"

Notice Asaph's believing resolution: "I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings" (11-12). Asaph promises that he will "remember," "meditate" and "talk," literally, speak with himself or muse, on God's "works," "wonders" and mighty "doings," and so fill his soul with good thoughts. Even so must we think and speak of God's great redemption and wise providence, instead of moping in self-pity. As the apostle Paul instructs us, "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). In this way, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (4:7). If you find yourself going the way of Asaph in despair, feed on the truth of Philippians 4 and the lessons of Psalm 77!

This is where the "sanctuary" mentioned in the title of this and the last article comes in. The word "holy" is rightly translated as a holy place or "sanctuary," as per Calvin and our Authorised Version (13). The sanctuary or temple typifies God's sacred dwelling place in heaven. The Triune God is consecrated to Himself in all His providential government and in all His ways with us, individually and corporately. Thus, we must not complain about His dealings with us. They are always for His glory and for our good (Rom. 8:28), even if we do not see it. But our problem is that we are more interested in our own selfish interests and earthly pleasures, so we foolishly think that God must be supremely concerned about these things too, and that it is His role to give us favourable winds and plain sailing so that we feel good. If and when this does not happen, we murmur and grumble as if He had wronged us. But Scripture teaches that "the will of God" is our "sanctification" (I Thess. 4:3), not our self-esteem, health, wealth or fun.

Job was a much more God-centred person than we are but, under extremely difficult circumstances, even he doubted the Most High's goodness to him and grumbled about his Maker. But after God appeared in His majesty and spoke a little of His wisdom, Job declared, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

As Asaph well knew, at the heart and centre of the temple was the ark of the covenant. In the ark were the two tables of the law which reveal our sin. Atop the ark was the mercy seat on which blood was sprinkled typifying the cross of our Saviour. From the ark's mercy seat, Jehovah spoke of law and grace, of justice and mercy in Jesus Christ in the fellowship of His covenant.

It is no wonder, therefore, that God's way is "in the sanctuary" and so is only understood by those in His sanctuary. In the NT age, God dwells in His holy church by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Those who love His public worship acquiesce and rejoice in Jehovah's dealings with them. But if you sinfully do not attend a faithful church, you will not understand God's way in your life and so will bring down trouble upon your own head. This is something to think about, if you are tempted to skip church services!

In the preaching, the holy gospel of Christ is proclaimed, the message of the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). If you neglect or do not heed the faithful preaching, you will struggle with Jehovah's way in your life.

Our Father has given us His inspired Word, the 66 books of the Bible. The Scriptures must be read personally and in family devotions. In this way, each of us will confess, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). But if you fall away from Bible reading, you can expect anguish and grief.

Likewise, you cannot live an unholy life and acquiesce in God's dealings with you. Even in the way of obedience, the saint will not always understand why things happen as they do, but our comfort is that our heavenly Father has a good purpose with it all.

In Psalms 73 and 77, Asaph understood two things in God's sanctuary. First, negatively, there is no common grace (73:17-18) and, second, positively, God's ways with His elect are always gracious (77:13). These two lessons are only learned in the sanctuary and are not taught by the world, the false church or one's own sinful heart.

In the sanctuary, with praise, wonder and joy, we confess, "who is so great a God as our God?" (13). Why, though, is He called "great" here, and not good or righteous or wise? Because, in his unbelief, Asaph's god was too small! This is often our problem, too, for we foolishly think that our infinite God is smaller than our troubles! The incomparably "great" Jehovah decrees our whole lives, plans each of our struggles, guides us through all of them and brings us out the other side, in order to sanctify us and glorify Himself. This is what Asaph learned through his troubles: "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?" (13). *Rev. Stewart*

Did Christ Endure God's Wrath Against the Whole Human Race?

I received a very thoughtful and incisive question from a brother who had read Dr. Abraham Kuyper's book, *Particular Grace*, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) in Michigan, and available from the CPRC (£22, inc. P&P).

As anyone familiar with some of Dr. Kuyper's writings knows, in the early part of his ministry, after his conversion, he was an ardent and passionate defender of the doctrine of sovereign and particular grace. He fought furiously against the liberals in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands who were teaching Arminianism (condemned by the *Canons of Dordt*) and outright Pelagianism in its worst form. Only later in life, when he formed a political party and ran for a place in the Dutch parliament, did he alter his views and introduce into the churches the wretched doctrine of common grace, though he still rightly denied that God desires to save the reprobate.

The questioner, himself persuaded of the truth of particular grace, wonders about the paragraph with which chapter 24 of Kuyper's book, *Particular Grace*, begins: "Though we are committed to the confession that the fruit of Jesus' suffering has been appointed only for the redeemed, we at the same time confess designedly and emphatically that he has endured the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race" (p. 208). In the questioner's judgment, that statement seems to militate against the teaching of the entire book. And so it would seem.

Dr. Kuyper was a sufficiently astute theologian to avoid the blatant contradiction that this paragraph suggests. It would do Kuyper injustice to accuse him of holding two contradictory positions: God's particular grace in the cross for the elect only and God's general grace in the cross for all men—as many erroneously teach today. We must find the meaning of Kuyper's statement within the context of chapter 24 and his firm conviction that grace is sovereign and for the elect only. That grace is rooted in Christ's atoning work, which was a propitiation for His people only and for no one else.

The meaning of Kuyper can only be understood in the light of an organic conception of the human race. Admittedly, this is a doctrine that few understand and believe, chiefly because Arminianism, with its individualism, has conquered much of the professing church. In Arminian thinking, Adam's fall affected only individuals; and Christ's death is only for individuals—individuals who accept Christ as their Saviour.

But individualism is not the teaching of Scripture, and Kuyper was too Reformed to think in these terms. He saw the entire human race as an organic whole with Adam as its head and root. He grasped the biblical teaching that Adam's fall brought guilt upon the whole human race. He saw that all men, including the elect, are guilty for Adam's sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Kuyper recognized, that for us to be saved, the guilt of Adam's sin had to be taken away by Christ's perfect sacrifice. He understood, therefore, that Christ paid for Adam's sin and the guilt of it. In that sense of the word, Kuyper could say that Christ "endured the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race," for the whole human race was, organically and federally, in Adam.

This truth that Kuyper sets forth here is a crucially important one and must not escape the attention of anyone who wishes to be Reformed. At the same time, Kuyper, though supralapsarian in his theology, looks at the matter from what seems to be an infralapsarian viewpoint. If I may make Kuyper's position clear with a figure (not Kuyper's figure), I would say that Kuyper looks at the whole human race as if it is a stream of water that issues from its source. Adam is that source. It was created by God pure and sweet, but Adam corrupted it so that the whole stream became deadly polluted. If the stream or any part of it is to be purified, the source must be purified. This Christ did by His atoning sacrifice when He died for the original sin of Adam for which all men are guilty. In that context, the statement of Kuyper is true.

But after the fall, God divided the stream into two separate streams; humanity was sovereignly divided into the stream of election and the stream of reprobation. But the stream of election is now free from Adam's guilt because Christ took away Adam's guilt—the guilt of all men, also of us, the redeemed.

While Kuyper's meaning is along these lines, I personally prefer another solution to the problem. It is, admittedly, the supralapsarian position, but it seems to me to be more in keeping with the Scriptures. The idea is this. From eternity in His unchangeable counsel, God determined to glorify Himself through Christ as the head of the church. This church, saved in Christ, is the true world of sovereign election. It is the world for which Christ died. It is the world of John 3:16 and I John 2:2. It is the world that is organically one with Christ, for it is His body. It is the world that includes the creation in all its parts over which Christ is Lord and head. It is the world of the age to come in which God's glory shall shine through Christ and His church from sea to sea.

To accomplish that great purpose of glorifying Himself in Christ, God determined all His counsel: the heavenly creation, the world of angels, the universe in all its vast expanse and the human race born out of Adam. While in the world of angels election and reprobation were accomplished immediately with the fall of Satan, God determined to cause His church to be born in a world of men, organically one in Adam, guilty because of Adam's fall, but redeemed through Christ who was eternally their head and suffered and died as their head. The fall of Adam attains its purpose in Christ.

The relationship between election and reprobation is not that of a common source corrupted by Adam's fall with part of it snatched out of a fallen human race, but of a temple of elect with Christ the cornerstone and the reprobate as the scaffolding needed to build the temple. It is not the relation between two streams of water, once one stream, but now divided into two, but it is like the relation between corn kernels on the one hand, and roots, tassel, stem, husks and cob on the other hand. The latter is needed for the former, but the latter is not the purpose of the plant, though necessary for the plant. It is the wonderful work of God, preserving man's organic unity to serve as a means to bring about the one great organic unity of Christ and His church—by which God Himself is glorified in all His wonderful works. "How wondrous are the ways of God, unfathomed and unknown!" *Prof. Hanko*