

THE BLUE BANNER

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For Christ's Crown & Covenant

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In this Issue.

Warfield: "Miserable-Sinner Christianity." ❧ Neither are We Amateurs.

by Richard Bacon



As plans stand right now 2004 will be the last year that we publish the *Blue Banner* in its present form. The resources that have been dedicated to the *Blue Banner* in the past will now be dedicated to a different and exciting new venture. Hopefully we will have some more news about that in future issues. While it remains to be determined, it is possible that the *Blue Banner* will be published on an irregular basis and contain a single sermon or article.

The main article in this issue, and DV for the next couple issues after this one, is a series written by B.B. Warfield for the Princeton Review and included in his two volume work on perfectionism. The title, though strange, is the original title. By "Miserable Sinner Christianity" Warfield referred to the fact that even subsequent to regeneration and all that entails, the justified Christian is a miserable sinner considered in himself. So strongly did Warfield hold that opinion, that he began the three articles with the statement, "It belongs to the very essence of the type of Christianity propagated by the Reformation that the believer should feel himself continuously unworthy of the grace by which he lives."

The reason the *Blue Banner* is publishing these articles is because they speak in a somewhat subtle way to the errors that are arising within several Reformed and Presbyterian bodies in these days regarding something they call "final justification." These men generally disdain what they refer to as "morbid introspection" or worse terms, and instead look for objective "proof" that one is in covenant with God. This they do by setting forth the sacraments as sufficient evidence of faith in Christ and claim that the perfectability of good works (though they would not use that particular term) leads to a justification that they call "final justification" that is subsequent to and dependent in great measure on sanctification and perseverance. If it sounds to *Blue Banner* readers like this has turned the gospel of free grace on its head, then take some heart that you are not the only ones to which this is an "uncertain sound."

Clearly it would be anachronistic to maintain that Warfield addressed an error nearly a hundred years before the error actually arose. That is not the point of publishing these articles. The point is that the error now being set forth by these men is not new in its roots, no matter whether the phrases they use to describe it are different. It really all comes down to the old belief that men must add something to the (Continued on Page 2)

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Inside This Issue

(Continued from Page 1) finished work of Christ in order to be sure of their salvation. This belief arises in every generation because it is the product of the natural (carnal) mind.

If someone claims that we can look to “good” works as ground for a final justification, he must deal with the nature of how works arising from a miserable sinner can be good. These men typically resort to a superficial view of good works in which an action is regarded “good” if it meets the simple test of outward conformity to the law of God. On the other hand, if the claim is made that intention and motive contribute to whether a work is “good” or not (something the reformed community has always insisted upon), then one is right back to a subjective criterion. The goal of moving away from subjectivity toward objectivity and away from self-examination toward the works themselves is lost once it is admitted that a work must be good not only in the matter of it, but in its motive as well.

But something else should be noted. If one could genuinely look at his own heart’s motive and compare each of his works with the necessity of doing it strictly out of love with a whole heart, soul, mind, and strength for God, then he would see what a “miserable sinner” he actually is. So far would works then be from forming an objective criterion, that they would lead an honest man to despair.

One final word on the subject of the Warfield articles: the superficiality of the “federal vision” with its rejection of individuality (which is not identical with individualism by the way) downplays the entire idea of individual sin and repentance from sin. The covenant and corporate idea does not receive a “proper” place in the federal vision error, but rather a place that overwhelms the importance and place of individual sin, faith, and justification. Warfield deals with that error by way of application as well.

The review of the book by Pastor John Piper is a reprint from a review I wrote earlier this year for *Pulpit And Pew*, an online magazine of pastoral theology. The review is self-explanatory, but does take some exceptions to Piper’s use of the terms “gratitude” and “debtor ethic.” ❀

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“Miserable-Sinner Christianity” in the Hands of the Rationalists.

Part 1: From Ritschl to Wernle. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Works* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1932) 7.113-176.

By B. B. Warfield.

IT¹ belongs to the very essence of the type of Christianity propagated by the Reformation that the believer should feel himself continuously unworthy of the grace by which he lives. At the center of this type of Christianity lies the contrast of sin and grace; and about this center everything else revolves. This is in large part the meaning of the emphasis put in this type of Christianity on justification by faith. It is its conviction that there is nothing in us or done by us, at any stage of our earthly development, because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ's sake, or we cannot ever be accepted at all. This is not true of us only “when we believe.” It is just as true after we have believed. It will continue to be true as long as we live. Our need of Christ does not cease with our believing; nor does the nature of our relation to Him or to God through Him ever alter, no matter what our attainments in Christian graces or our achievements in Christian behavior may be. It is always on His “blood and righteousness” alone that we can rest. There is never anything that we are or have or do that can take His place, or that can take a place along with Him. We are always unworthy, and all that we have or do of good is always of pure grace. Though blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, we are still in ourselves just “miserable sinners”: “miserable sinners” saved by grace to be sure, but “miserable sinners” still, deserving in ourselves nothing but everlasting wrath. That is the attitude which the Reformers took, and that is the attitude which the Protestant world has learned from the Reformers to take, toward the relation of believers to Christ.

There is emphasized in this attitude the

believer's continued sinfulness in fact and in act; and his continued sense of his sinfulness. And this carries with it recognition of the necessity of unbroken penitence throughout life. The Christian is conceived fundamentally in other words as a penitent sinner.² But that is not all that is to be said: it is not even the main thing that must be said. It is therefore gravely inadequate to describe the spirit of “miserable-sinner Christianity” as “the spirit of continuous but not unhopeful penitence.” It is not merely that this is too negative a description, and that we must at least say, “the spirit of continuous though hopeful penitence.” It is a wholly uncomprehending description, and misplaces the emphasis altogether. The spirit of this Christianity is a spirit of penitent indeed, but overmastering exultation. The attitude of the “miserable sinner” is not only not one of despair; it is not even one of depression; and not even one of hesitation or doubt; hope is too weak a word to apply to it. It is an attitude of exultant joy. Only this joy has its ground not in ourselves but in our Savior. We are sinners and we know ourselves to be sinners, lost and helpless in ourselves. But we are saved sinners; and it is our salvation which gives the tone to our life, a tone of joy which swells in exact proportion to the sense we have of our ill-desert; for it is he to whom much is forgiven who loves much, and who, loving, rejoices much. Adolf Harnack declares that this mood was brought into Christianity by Augustine. Before Augustine the characteristic frame of mind of Christians was the racking unrest of alternating hopes and fears. Augustine, the first of the Evangelicals, created a new piety of assured rest in God our Savior, and the

¹ *Armesünderchristendom* [Miserable-sinner Christianity]. The term has become practically a technical term to express the particular attitude of the Christian towards sin in the teaching and life of the Church of the Reformation.

² Accordingly the first of Luther's Ninety-five Theses runs: “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in teaching, ‘Repent,’ etc., intended penitence to be the whole life of believers.” Cf. *The Princeton Theological Review*, October, 1917, pp. 511f.

psychological form of this new piety was, as Harnack phrases it,³ “solaced contrition,” — affliction, for sin, yes, the deepest and most poignant remorse for sin, but not unrelieved remorse, but appeased remorse. There is no other joy on earth like that of appeased remorse: it is not only in heaven but on earth also that the joy over one sinner that repents surpasses that over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

The type of piety brought in by Augustine was pushed out of sight by the emphasis on human graces which marked the Middle Ages. Luther brought it back. His own experience fixed ineradicably in his heart the conviction that he was a “miserable sinner,” deserving of death, and alive only through the inexplicable grace of God. What we call his conversion was his discovery of this bittersweet fact. He had tried to think highly of himself. He found that he could not do so. But he found also that he could not possibly think too highly of Christ. And so it became his joy to be a “miserable sinner,” resting solely on the grace of Christ; and to preach the gospel of the “miserable sinner” to the world. This is the very hinge on which his Reformation turns, and of course, Luther gave expression to it endlessly in those documents in which his Reformation-work has been preserved to us.

He is never weary of setting the two aspects in which the “miserable sinner” may be viewed side by side. “These things,” he says, in one place,⁴ “are diametrically opposed — that the Christian is righteous and loved of God, yet is at the same time a sinner. For God cannot deny His nature, that is, cannot but hate sin and sinners, and this He does necessarily, for otherwise He would be unjust and would love sin. How then are these two contradictories both true: I am sinful and deserve the divine wrath and hatred; and the Father loves me? Nothing at all brings it about except Christ the Mediator. The Father, He says, loves you, not because you are worthy of love, but because you have loved Me and believed that

I came forth from Him. Thus the Christian remains in pure humility, deeply sensible of his sin, and acknowledging himself, on its account, to be deserving of God’s wrath and judgment and eternal death ... He remains also at the same time in pure and holy pride, in which he turns to Christ and arouses himself through Him against this sense of wrath and the divine judgment, and believes not only that the remainders of sin are not imputed to him, but also that he is loved by the Father, not on his own account but on account of Christ the Beloved.”

“A Christian,” says Luther again,⁵ “is at the same time a sinner and a saint; he is at once bad and good. For in our own person we are in sin, and in our own name we are sinners. But Christ brings us another name in which there is forgiveness of sin, so that for His sake our sin is forgiven and done away. Both then are true. There are sins ... and yet there are no sins. The reason is that for Christ’s sake, God will not see them. They exist for my eyes; I see them, and feel them, too. But Christ is there who bids me preach that I am to repent ... and then believe in the forgiveness of sin in His name ... Where such faith is, therefore, God no longer sees sin. For thou standest there for God not in thy name but in Christ’s name; thou dost adorn thyself with grace and righteousness although in thine own eyes and in thine own person, thou art a miserable sinner (*armer Sünder*) ... Let not that, however, scare you to death ... Speak, rather, thus: Ah, Lord, I am a miserable sinner (*armer Sünder*), but I shall not remain such; for Thou hast commanded that forgiveness of sins be preached in Thy name ... Thus our Lord Jesus Christ alone is the garment of grace that is put upon us, that God our Father may not look upon us as sinners but receive us as righteous, holy, godly children, and give us eternal life.” “We, however, teach,” he says again,⁶ “that we are to learn to know and regard Him, as Him who sits there for the poor, stupid conscience, if so be that we believe on Him, not as a judge ... but as a gracious, kind, comforting mediator between my frightened conscience and God; and says to me — You are a sinner, and are afraid that the devil will drag you by the law before the judgment seat; come then and hold fast to me, and fear no

³ “Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte,” 3: 1890, p. 59 (ed. 4, 3: p. 66; E. T. 5:1899, p. 66), “getrösteter Sündenschmerz.” Cf. *The Princeton Theological Review*, January, 1905, pp. 97ff.

⁴ “Ad Galatians I 338 (1534).” The three quotations from Luther which follow are taken from J. Gottschick’s article, “Propter Christum,” in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 7: 1897, pp. 378-384.

⁵ “Werke,” Erlangen ed., 2: pp. 197f.

⁶ xviii, pp. 294 ff. (1582).

wrath. Why? Because I sit here for the very purpose that if you believe in me, I can come between you and God so that no wrath or evil can touch you. For if wrath and punishment go over you, they must first go over me, and that is not possible ... Therefore we are all through faith altogether blissful and safe, so that we shall abide uncondemned, not for the sake of our own purity and holiness, but for Christ's sake, because, through such faith, we hold on to Him as our Mercy-seat, assured that in and with Him no wrath can remain, but pure love, indulgence, forgiveness."

Embedded in the Protestant formularies, both doctrinal and devotional, this "miserable-sinner" conception of the Christian life has moulded the piety of all the Protestant generations. Throughout the Protestant world believers confess themselves to be, still as believers, wrath-deserving sinners; and that not merely with reference to their inborn sinful nature as yet incompletely eradicated, but with reference also to their total life-manifestation which their incompletely eradicated sinful nature flows into and vitiates. Their continued sinning, indeed, is already confessed whenever they repeat the Lord's Prayer, since, among the very few petitions included in it, is the very emphatic one: "Forgive us our trespasses."⁷ Naturally therefore, the expositions of this prayer, designed for the instruction of the several Churches in their attitude toward God, are the special depository of

pointed reminders to believers of their continual sinning. Luther, for example, incorporates a very full and searching exposition of "the Fifth Petition" into his Large Catechism, in which he affirms that "we sin daily in words and deeds, by commission and omission," and warns us that "no one is to think that so long as he lives here below he can bring it about that he does not need such forgiveness"; that, in fact, "unless God forgives without cessation, we are lost."⁸ It is by his Short Catechism of 1529, however, that Luther has kept his hand most permanently on the instruction of the Churches. In it he teaches the catechumen to say that "God richly forgives me and all believers every day, all our sins," "for we sin much every day and deserve nothing but punishment."⁹ In the instructions for the confessional coming from the hand of Luther which were soon incorporated into this Short Catechism, the believing penitent accordingly is told to say "I, miserable sinner (*armer Sünder*), confess myself before God guilty of all manner of sins ..."¹⁰ The hold which this teaching has taken of the devotional expressions of the Lutheran Churches may be illustrated by the presence in the new Agenda of the National Prussian Church of a Confession of Sin for the whole congregation which runs thus: "We confess ... that we were conceived and born in sin; and, full of ignorance and heedlessness of Thy divine word and will, always prone to all wickedness and slack to all good, we transgress Thy divine commandments unceasingly in thoughts, words and deeds."¹¹ Naturally it retains its place in the forms of service adopted for "the three bodies" of American Lutherans. In the German form¹² the Confession of Sin takes this shape: "I, poor sinful man, confess to God, the Almighty, my Creator and Redeemer, that I not only have sinned in thoughts, words and deeds, but also was conceived and born in sin, and so all my nature and being is deserving of punishment and

⁷ — CCCCCC, Luke 11:4; CCCCCCCC, Matthew 6:12; "trespasses" in the Anglican "Book of Common Prayer"; "debts" in the Presbyterian "Book of Common Worship." The meaning is the same in every case, and the constant repetition of the Lord's Prayer in either form is a constant confession of continual sinning. It is admitted on all hands that Jesus did not look upon His followers as men who had ceased to sin. For recent statements from writers who would not allow as much of Paul see Weinel, "Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments," 1913, p. 189; and especially H. Windisch, "Taufe und Sünde," 1908, p. 534: "Miserable-sinnerism even finds support in the Bible also. Jesus, for example, by the side of the Methodist notion of conversion which He employs; by the side of the strict requirement of cleansing; recognizes the continuance of sinning and quite like all Lutheran Christians assures His disciples of the divine clemency." So also P. Wernle, "Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus," 1897, p. 127, where we are told that Paul has gone far beyond Jesus, has nothing to say of no one being good, or of prayer for forgiveness, and brings the pneumatic closer to God. "It may be said that Paul thought worse of men and better of Christians than Jesus. Both the theory of original sin and the theory of the 'flesh' are alien to Jesus, but so is the doctrine that the Christian no longer sins."

⁸ See Th. Hardeland, "Der kleine Katechismus D. Martini Lutheri," 1889, p. 186; cf. H. Scholz in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 6: 1896, p. 471.

⁹ Hardeland, as cited, p. 137 (155f.), and 185; P. Schaff, "The Creeds of Christendom," 3: 1878, pp. 80, 83.

¹⁰ Schaff, as cited, p. 88.

¹¹ H. Scholz, as cited, p. 472.

¹² "Kirchenbuch für Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden, herausgegeben von der Allgemeinen Versammlung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Nord Amerika," 1908, p. 4.

condemnation before His righteousness. Therefore I flee to His gratuitous mercy and seek and beseech His grace. Lord, be merciful to me, miserable sinner (*armen Sünder*)." The English form is to the same effect.¹³

It is the same in the Reformed Churches as in the Lutheran: catechisms and liturgies alike embody the confession of the continued sinfulness of the Christian, and his continued dependence on the forgiving grace of Christ. In Calvin's Catechism the catechumen is made to declare that there is no man living so righteous that he does not need to make request for the forgiveness of his sins, that Christ has therefore prescribed a prayer for forgiveness of sins for the whole Church, and that he who would exempt himself from it "refuseth to bee of the companie of Christes flocke: and in very deed the scriptures doe plainlie testifie, that the most perfect man that is, if he would alleadge one point to justifie him selfe thereby before God, should bee found faultie in a thousand." "It is meete therefore," it concludes, "that everie man have a recourse continually unto God's mercie."¹⁴ When expounding at an earlier point¹⁵ the clause in the Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," it is said that God "doeth freely forgive all the sinnes of them which beleve in him," the comprehensiveness of the language is intended to include in the declaration sins committed after as well as before the inception of faith. And therefore, when good works come to be treated of,¹⁶ it is said that they are "not worthy of themselves to be accepted," "because there is mixed some filth through the infirmity of the flesh, whereby they are defiled." They are accepted by God therefore "onely because it pleaseth God of his goodnesse to love us freely, and so to cover and forget our faultes."

The teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism is to

¹³ "The Common Service for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations," 1907, pp. 1-2: "Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee, that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹⁴ We quote from the old English translation first printed at Geneva, 1556, as reprinted by Horatius Bonar, "Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation," 1866, p. 66.

¹⁵ P. 26.

¹⁶ Pp. 31f.

the same effect. We increase our guilt daily, we are told;¹⁷ our whole Christian life is occupied with a conflict against sin and the devil;¹⁸ and our best works in this life are imperfect and defiled with sin.¹⁹ To the question whether those that have been converted can keep God's law perfectly, it is answered explicitly, "No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience, yet so that with earnest purpose they begin to live, not only according to some but according to all the commandments of God."²⁰ As in Calvin's Catechism, the most comprehensive language is employed, however, in expounding the clause of the Creed on the forgiveness of sins. "I believe, that God for the Satisfaction of Christ," we read, "hath quite put out of his Remembrance all my Sins, and even that Corruption also, wherewith I must strive all my Life long."²¹ And naturally the exposition of "the Fifth Petition" of the Lord's Prayer²² is the occasion for repeating that we are "miserable sinners" (*arme Sünder*) burdened not merely with the evil which always still clings to us, but also with numerous transgressions.

Perhaps this series of truths never received crisper statement, however, than at the hands of John Craig in his larger Catechism (1581), on the basis whether of the article of the Creed or of the petition of the Prayer.²³ "Why is remission of sinnes put here? Because it is proper to the Church and members of the same. Wherefore is it proper to the Church only? Because in the Church onely is the spirit of faith and repentance ... How oft are our sinnes forgiuen vs? Continually euen unto our liues end. What need is there of this? Because sinne is neuer thoroughlie abolished here." "What seeke we in this rift petition? Remission of our sinnes, or spirituall debts ... Should euery man pray thus continually? Yes, for all flesh is subject to sinne. But sometimes men doe good thinges? Yet they sin in the best thinge they doe."

¹⁷ Q. 13.

¹⁸ Q. 32.

¹⁹ Q. 62.

²⁰ Q. 114.

²¹ Q. 56. We use the old Scotch translation, Edinburgh, 1615 (Bonar, as cited, p. 132).

²² Q. 126. (Bonar, as cited, pp. 160f.).

²³ Bonar, as cited, pp. 210, 232.

The Calvinistic liturgies naturally also reflect this universal Reformed doctrine. The Confession of Sins contained in the liturgy which was published by Calvin in 1542 and which passed into the use of all the French-speaking Reformed Churches, has been universally admired. Its beauty, says E. Lacheret, has been proclaimed with one voice; Christian sentiment finds in it one of its purest and strongest expressions: "brief, sober, solemn, it expresses in a grave style and penetrating tone, the grief of the penitent soul, its appeal to the divine mercy, its desire for a new and holy life."²⁴ Its opening prayer in the form in which it has been long used in the English-speaking French Protestant Church of Charleston, S. C., runs thus:²⁵ "O Lord God! Eternal and Almighty Father! we confess before thy Divine Majesty that we are miserable sinners,²⁶ born in corruption and iniquity,²⁷ prone to evil, and of ourselves incapable of any good.²⁸ We acknowledge that we transgress in various ways²⁹ thy holy commandments, so that we draw down on ourselves, through thy righteous judgment, condemnation and death."

The brief Catechism of the Church of England, although very plainly presuming the continuous sinning of Christians, naturally contains nothing explicit on the subject. Whatever may be lacking in it is abundantly made up, however, in the Articles and Prayers. The Articles not only affirm that "the infection of nature" derived by every man from Adam "doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated" and has in them "the nature of sin" (ix.); but also that he can do no good works which can endure the severity of God's judgment (xii.), and very explicitly that all men, except Christ alone, "although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things; and if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (xv.). They are therefore to be condemned, we are told, "which say they can no

more sin as long as they live here" (xvi.). With respect to the Prayers we have only to bear in mind the Exhortation, General Confession, and Absolution with which both the Morning and Evening Services begin; or indeed only the Litany, in which specifically God's people abase themselves before Him as "miserable sinners" and beseech His forgiveness and holy keeping. The enumeration in the General Confession of the modes of sinning of which the petitioners are guilty is exceedingly comprehensive, and yet is keyed wholly to the experience of believers. In the exhortation in response to which their confession is made, they are addressed as "dearly beloved brethren," and God is designated as their "heavenly Father," from whose "infinite goodness and mercy" they are receiving and are further to look for all things requisite for the welfare of both body and soul. Yet they are represented as guilty of "manifold sins and wickedness," and are led by the minister in this Confession: "Almighty and most merciful Father: We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us." Their only refuge is in the Lord; and the cry is therefore at once appended: — "But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord." That is the very spirit of the "miserable sinner," as is also the closing petition of the prayer: "And grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake; That we may hereafter lead a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of Thy holy Name. Amen." The note which sounds here is precisely the same as that which rings out in the Easter Litany of the Moravian Church: "We miserable sinners (*armen Sünder*) pray that Thou wouldest hear us, dear Lord and God!"³⁰

It has not always been easy through the Protestant ages to maintain in its purity this high attitude of combined shame of self and confidence in the mercy of God in Christ. But even in the worst of times it has not been left

²⁴ "La Liturgie Wallonne," 1890, p. 17.

²⁵ "The Liturgy, or Forms of Divine Service, of the French Protestant Church, of Charleston, S. C." Translated from the Liturgy of the Churches of Neufchatel and Vallangin: editions of 1737 and 1772 ... 1853, pp. 7, 8.

²⁶ *Paovres pecheurs* in Calvin's form (Baum, Cunity, and Reuss, "Opera Calvini," 6: 173); the form *misérables pécheurs* appears to have come in during the eighteenth century.

²⁷ "Conceived and born in iniquity and corruption" — Calvin.

²⁸ "Prone to evil, incapable of all good" — Calvin.

²⁹ "Without end and without cessation" — Calvin.

³⁰ Schaff, as cited, p. 805.

without witnesses. There is Zinzendorf, for example.³¹ It was in an evil day of abounding Rationalism that he rediscovered for himself and for his followers a “miserable-sinner Christianity.” He gave the term as recovered by him for daily use in his brotherhood a particular coloring of his own; sentimentalized it, if we may so say; and especially made it vivid by means of a very specialized analogy. The terms “sin,” “sinner,” are used in German, with a less prevailing religious reference than in English, in the general sense of “offence,” “culprit”; and it happens to have come about that in the popular German speech the customary designation of the condemned criminal awaiting the gallows is precisely “the miserable sinner.”³² The implication is that all the resources of such an one have been exhausted: he stands stripped, destitute, desperate before his doom. Seizing upon this accident of usage, Zinzendorf bids the Christian see in the condemned criminal the image of himself: in this thoroughly specialized sense also the Christian is a “miserable sinner.” Not indeed the merely condemned criminal. He is in Christ, and for what he is in Christ is this condemned criminal snatched from the gallows by the mere clemency of one on whom he has no claim. He is therefore distinctively the pardoned criminal; and therefore his immediate preoccupation is less with the guilt from which he has escaped than with the deliverance which he has received. “The most solid distinction between an honest disciple of the no doubt still lingering old teachers who were known as Pietists, Spenerites, Halleites and a ‘Brother ...’ is this: the former commonly has his misery always before his eyes and glances only for his necessary comforting to the wounds of Christ, the latter has always before his eyes the finished reconciliation and Jesus’ blood and only for his necessary humbling casts an occasional glance on his misery.”

Zinzendorf pushes his simile into details and insists on the application of them all. Having J.

K. Dippel’s rationalizing doctrine of the Atonement in mind, he declares that the deliverance of the believer from the punishment due to his sin is accomplished in no other way than that of the thief from the gallows — not through future good behavior, but out of pure mercy. And like the thief, he owes not only his escape from the immediately impending gallows but whatever further existence is accorded to him, continuously to the mere favor of his deliverer. Thus through every moment of his life the believer is absolutely dependent on the grace of Christ, and when life is over he still has nothing to plead but Christ’s blood and righteousness. Very complete expression is given to this conception in the noble hymn, “Christ’s Blood and Righteousness,” some of the pungency of which is lost in John Wesley’s translation of it, excellent as that translation is in transmitting the general sense. The blood of Christ, says Zinzendorf here, is his sole comfort and hope, on which alone he builds in life or in death: yea, even though by God’s grace he should attain to a life of unbroken faithfulness in His service, and should keep himself clean from all sin whatever up to the grave itself — he should still, when he came to stand before the Lord, have no thought of “goodness” and “godliness,” but would say only, “Here comes a sinner who depends on the great Ransom alone.” The poignancy of that declaration is inadequately expressed by Wesley’s

“When from the dust of death I rise,
To claim my mansion in the skies,
Even then this shall be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived and died for me.”

It must not be imagined because of its hypothetical supposition in this hymn, that Zinzendorf allowed the possibility of the believer’s actually living free from sin “up to the grave.” Sanctification with him was most decisively held to be a process which reaches its end only when we are freed from the limitations of sense; and his rejection of all perfectionist notions is so decisive as almost to seem harsh. “Should any one say,” he says, “he was in *sensu perfectissimo* done with sin, and had *hoc respectu* no longer to strive, he would be a fanatic or arrogant fool.”³³ He is particularly decisive in his rejection of the

³¹ Zinzendorf’s doctrine of the “miserable sinner” is admirably stated by Bernhard Becker, “Zinzendorf und sein Christentum,” ed. 2, 1900, pp. 296-298. See also H. Scholz, in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 6: 1896, pp. 463-468.

³² J. and W. Grimm, “Deutsches Wörterbuch,” 1: 1854, p. 555: “The imprisoned and condemned criminal was called der arme Gefangene, der arme Sünder.” Heath’s “German and English Dictionary,” 1906, p. 582: “armer Sünder, condemned criminal awaiting execution.”

³³ Becker, as cited, p. 300, where Zinzendorf’s judgment on Perfectionism is briefly but clearly stated.

Quietistic view of sanctification. That, says he, carries with it an ideal of the Christian life, with its passivity, apathy, freedom from trepidation, which can find no example in Christ. No, the believer strives against sin all his life, and is never without failings; and from his well-grounded fear of sinning arises a powerful, ever present motive to watchfulness and effort. He has nothing to depend on but Christ, and Christ is enough; but that does not relieve him from the duty of cleansing his life from sin, but rather girds his loins for the struggle. The necessity for the continuance of the struggle means, of course, the continuance of sin to struggle against. As one of Zinzendorf's critics puts it:³⁴ "To feel himself a 'miserable sinner' never has the meaning with him of desisting from the moral task or of attributing less value to it than to religious experience. On the other side it is equally excluded that this doctrine amounts to a new form of self-torturing after a pietistic fashion. For it is precisely against the self-torturing of that narrow-hearted, unfruitful practice of penitence,³⁵ rich in illusions and disillusion, of the dominant pietism, that Zinzendorf's system is emphatically directed. It is not his meaning that a Christian man should be of a sour countenance, and hang his head; he hates the dejected and grumbling piety which comes to nothing except the repetition of its dirges. He requires and exemplifies a joyous Christianity." "Miserable-sinner Christianity" is equally removed from self-asserting and self-tormenting Christianity, which is as much as to say from Rationalism and Pietism. It is Christ-trusting Christianity, and casts its orbit around that center. And when we say Christ-trusting Christianity, it must be intended not merely negatively but positively. The "miserable sinner Christian" not merely finds absolutely nothing but Christ in which to repose any trust, but he actually trusts — *trusts*, with all that that means — in Christ.

In those same bad days of the eighteenth century "miserable-sinner Christianity" was

rediscovered also for themselves by the English Evangelicals. We may take Thomas Adam as an example. His like-minded biographer, James Stillingfleet, tells us³⁶ how, having been awakened to the fact that he was preaching essentially a work-religion, he was at last led to the truth, not without some reading of Luther, it is true, but particularly by the prayerful study of the Epistle to the Romans. "He was," writes his biographer, "rejoiced exceedingly; found peace and comfort spring up in his mind; his conscience was purged from guilt through the atoning blood of Christ, and his heart set at liberty to run the way of God's commandments without fear, in a spirit of filial love and holy delight; and from that hour he began to preach salvation *through faith in Jesus Christ alone*, to man by nature and practice lost, and condemned under the law, and, as his own expression is, *Always a sinner*." In this italicized phrase, Adam had in mind of course our sinful nature, a very profound sense of the evil of which colored all his thought. In one of those piercing declarations which his biographers gathered out of his diaries and published under the title of "Private Thoughts on Religion,"³⁷ Adam tells us how he thought of indwelling sin. "Sin," says he, "is still here, deep in the centre of my heart, and twisted about every fibre of it."³⁸ But he knew very well that sin could not be in the heart and not in the life. "When have I not sinned?" he asks,³⁹ and answers, "The reason is evident, I carry myself about with me." Accordingly he says:⁴⁰ "When we have done all we ever shall do, the very best state we ever shall arrive at, will be so far from

³⁶ "Private Thoughts on Religion," by the Rev. Thomas Adam: ed. Poughkeepsie, 1814, pp. 22ff. There are many other editions.

³⁷ "These entries from his private diary, which were meant for no eyes but his own, bring before us a man of no common power of analytic and speculative thought. With an intrepidity and integrity of self-scrutiny perhaps unexampled, he writes down problems started, and questionings raised, and conflicts gone through; whilst his ordinarily flaccid style grows pungent and strong. Ever since their publication these 'Private Thoughts' have exercised a strange fascination over intellects at opposite poles. Coleridge's copy of the little volume (1795) ...remains to attest, by its abounding markings, the spell it laid upon him, while such men as Bishop Heber, Dr. Thomas Chalmers, and John Stuart Mill, and others, have paid tribute to the searching power of the 'thoughts.'" A. B. Grosart, in Leslie Stephen's "Dictionary of National Biography," 1: 1885, 89-90.

³⁸ "Private Thoughts on Religion," as cited, p. 72.

³⁹ P. 74.

⁴⁰ P. 218.

³⁴ Scholz, in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 6: 1896, p. 465.

³⁵ *Bususkampfspraxis*. What is meant is the tendency to treat the self in accordance with the divine judgment which is recognized as impending over it. There is a really informing article on the *Bususkampf*, in C. Meusel's "Kirchliches Handlexikon," 1: 1887, pp. 618 f. See also Schiele and Zscharnack, "Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart," 1: 1909, col. 1486.

meriting a reward, that it will need a pardon.” Again, “If I was to live to the world’s end, and do all the good that man can do, I must still cry ‘mercy!’”⁴¹ — which is very much what Zinzendorf said in his hymn. So far from balking at the confession of daily sins, he adds to that the confession of universal sinning. “I know, with infallible certainty,” he says,⁴² “that I have sinned ever since I could discern between good and evil; in thought, word, and deed; in every period, condition, and relation of life; every day against every commandment.” “God may say to every self-righteous man,” he says again,⁴³ “as he did in the cause of Sodom, ‘show me ten, yea, one perfect good action, and for the sake of it I will not destroy.’”

There is no morbidity here and no easy acquiescence in this inevitable sinning. “Lord, forgive my sins, and suffer me to keep them — is this the meaning of my prayers?” he asks.⁴⁴ And his answer is:⁴⁵ “I had rather be cast into the burning fiery furnace, or the lion’s den, than suffer sin to lie quietly in my heart.” He knows that justification and sanctification belong together. “Christ never comes into the soul unattended,” he says;⁴⁶ “he brings the Holy Spirit with him, and the Spirit his train of gifts and graces.” “Christ comes with a blessing in each hand,” he says again;⁴⁷ “forgiveness in one, and holiness in the other, and never gives either to any who will not take both.” But he adds at once: “Christ’s forgiveness of all sins is complete at once, because less would not do us good; his holiness is dispensed by degrees, and to none wholly in this life, lest we should slight his forgiveness.” “Whenever I die,” he says

therefore,⁴⁸ “I die a sinner; but by the grace of God, penitent, and, I trust, accepted in the beloved.” “It is the joy of my heart that I am freed from guilt,” he says again,⁴⁹ “and the desire of my heart to be freed from sin.” For both alike are from God. “Justification by sanctification,” he says,⁵⁰ “is man’s way to heaven, and it is odds but he will make a little serve the turn. Sanctification by justification is God’s, and he fills the soul with his own fulness.” “The Spirit does not only confer and increase ability, and so leave us to ourselves in the use of it,” he explains,⁵¹ “but every single act of spiritual life is the Spirit’s own act in us.” And again, even more plainly:⁵² “Sanctification is a gift; and the business of man is to desire, receive, and use it. But he can by no act or effort of his own produce it in himself. Grace can do every thing; nature nothing.” “I am resolved,” he therefore declares,⁵³ “to receive my virtue from God as a gift, instead of presenting him with a spurious kind of my own.” He accordingly is “the greatest saint upon earth who feels his poverty most in the want of perfect holiness, and longs with the greatest earnestness for the time when he shall be put in full possession of it.”⁵⁴

Thus in complete dependence on grace, and in never ceasing need of grace (take “grace” in its full sense of goodness to the undeserving) the saint goes onward in his earthly work, neither imagining that he does not need to be without sin because he has Christ nor that because he has Christ he is already without sin. The repudiation of both the perfectionist and the antinomian inference is made by Adam most pungently. The former in these crisp words:⁵⁵ “The moment we think that we have no sin, we shall desert Christ.” That, because Christ came to save just sinners. The latter more at length:⁵⁶ “It would be a great abuse of the doctrine of salvation by faith, and a state of dangerous security, to say, if it pleases God to advance me to a higher or the

⁴¹ P. 212.

⁴² P. 71.

⁴³ P. 129. In the same spirit with these quotations, but with perhaps even greater poignancy of rhetorical expression is this declaration of Alexander Whyte’s (“Bunyan Characters,” 3: 1895, p. 136): “Our guilt is so great that we dare not think of it ... It crushes our minds with a perfect stupor of horror, when for a moment we try to imagine a day of judgment when we shall be judged for all the deeds that we have done in the body. Heart-beat after heart-beat, breath after breath, hour after hour, day after day, year after year, and all full of sin; all nothing but sin from our mother’s womb to our grave.”

⁴⁴ P. 103.

⁴⁵ P. 99.

⁴⁶ P. 180.

⁴⁷ P. 179.

⁴⁸ P. 209.

⁴⁹ P. 216.

⁵⁰ P. 219.

⁵¹ P. 242.

⁵² P. 234.

⁵³ P. 247.

⁵⁴ P. 225.

⁵⁵ P. 231.

⁵⁶ Pp. 223f.

highest degree of holiness, I should have great cause of thankfulness, and it would be the very joy of my heart; but nevertheless I can do without it, as being safe in Christ.” We cannot set safety in Christ and holiness of life over against each other as contradictions, of which the one may be taken and the other left. They go together. “Every other faith,” we read,⁵⁷ “but that which apprehends Christ as a purifier, as well as our atonement and righteousness, is false and hypocritical.” We are not left in our sins by Him; we are in process of being cleansed from our sins by Him; and our part is to work out with fear and trembling the salvation which He is working in us, always keeping our eyes on both our sin from which we need deliverance and the Lord who is delivering us. To keep our eyes fixed on both at once is no doubt difficult. “On earth it is the great exercise of faith,” says Adam,⁵⁸ “and one of the hardest things in the world, to see sin and Christ at the same time, or to be penetrated with a lively sense of our desert, and absolute freedom from condemnation; but the more we know of both, the nearer approach we shall make to the state of heaven.” Sin and Christ; ill desert and no condemnation; we are sinners and saints all at once! That is the paradox of evangelicalism. The Antinomian and the Perfectionist would abolish the paradox — the one drowning the saint in the sinner, the other concealing the sinner in the saint. We must, says Adam, out of his evangelical consciousness, ever see both members of the paradox clearly and see them whole. And — *solvitur ambulando*. “It is a great paradox, but glorious truth of Christianity,” says he,⁵⁹ “that a good conscience may consist with a consciousness of evil.” Though we can have no satisfaction in ourselves, we may have perfect satisfaction in Christ.

It is clear that “miserable-sinner Christianity” is a Christianity which thinks of pardon as holding the primary place in salvation. To it, sin is in the first instance offence against God, and salvation from sin is therefore in the first instance pardon, first not merely in time but in importance. In this Christianity, accordingly, the sinner turns to God first of all as the pardoning God; and that not as the God who pardons him once and then leaves

him to himself, but as the God who steadily preserves the attitude toward him of a pardoning God. It is in this aspect that he thinks primarily of God and it is on the preservation on God’s part of this attitude towards him that all his hopes of salvation depend. This is because he looks to God and to God alone for his salvation; and that in every several step of salvation — since otherwise whatever else it might be, it would not be salvation. It is, of course, only from a God whose attitude to the sinner is that of a pardoning God, that saving operations can be hoped. No doubt, if those transactions which we class together as the processes of salvation are our own work, we may not have so extreme a need of a constantly pardoning God. But that is not the point of view of the “miserable-sinner Christian.” He understands that God alone can save, and he depends on God alone for salvation; for all of salvation in every step and stage of it. He is not merely the man then, who emphasizes justification as the fundamental saving operation; but also the man who emphasizes the supernaturalness of the whole saving process. It is all of God; and it is continuously from God throughout the whole process. The “miserable sinner Christian” insists thus that salvation is accomplished not all at once, but in all the processes of a growth through an ever advancing forward movement. It occupies time; it has a beginning and middle and end. And just because it is thus progressive in its accomplishment, it is always incomplete — until the end. As Luther put it, Christians, here below, are not “made,” but “in the making.” Things in the making are in the hands of the Maker, are absolutely dependent on Him, and in their remnant imperfection require His continued pardon as well as need His continued forming. We cannot outgrow dependence on the pardoning grace of God, then, so long as the whole process of our forming is not completed; and we cannot feel satisfaction with ourselves of course until that process is fully accomplished. To speak of satisfaction in an incomplete work is a contradiction in terms. The “miserable-sinner Christian” accordingly, just as strongly emphasizes the progressiveness of the saving process and the consequent survival of sin and sinning throughout the whole of its as yet unfinished course, as he does justification as its foundation stone and its true supernaturalness throughout. These four articles go together and form the pillars on which the whole structure

⁵⁷ P. 220.

⁵⁸ P. 225.

⁵⁹ P. 253.

rests. It is a structure which is adapted to the needs of none but sinners, and which, perhaps, can have no very clear meaning to any but sinners. And this is in reality the sum of the whole matter: "miserable-sinner" Christianity is a Christianity distinctively for sinners. It is fitted to their apprehension as sinners, addressed to their acceptance as sinners, and meets their clamant needs as sinners. The very name which has been given it bears witness to it as such.

Naturally, therefore, to those who are not preoccupied with a sense of their sinfulness, "miserable-sinner Christianity" makes very little appeal. It would indeed be truer to say that it excites in them a positive distaste. It does not seem to them to have any particular fitness for their case, which they very naturally identify with the case of men in general. It appears to them to foster a morbid preoccupation with faults which are in part at least only fancied. It does scant justice, as they think, to the dignity of human nature, with its ethical endowments and capacities for self-improvement. It presents, as they view it, insufficient and ineffective motives for moral effort, and tends therefore to produce weak and dependent characters prone to acquiesce in an imperfect development, merely because they lack the vigor to go forward. Men turn away from it in proportion as they are inclined to put a high estimate on human nature as it manifests itself in the world, and especially upon its moral condition, its moral powers, its present and possible moral achievements. It is a gospel for sinners, and those who do not think of themselves as sinners find no attraction in it. It has accordingly been in every age the shining mark of attack for men of what we commonly speak of as the Rationalistic temper. It should not surprise us, therefore, that in our own age also it should have been made an object of assault by representatives of this general tendency of thought. And it is very natural that it was that arch-Rationalist, Albrecht Ritschl, who, a half century ago, drew it afresh into burning controversy.

On the basis of his Rationalistic construction of Christianity, Ritschl developed a doctrine of "Christian Perfection," in which Christians are represented as working out religious and moral perfection for themselves, by the sheer strength of their own right arm, without any help whatever from God. He developed this doctrine in express

antagonism to the Reformation conception of "the miserable sinner," and he did not fail to stud his exposition of it with scornful references to that conception. It was, however, when writing-in a Biblical basis for his doctrine, in the closing pages of the exegetical volume of his great work on "Justification and Reconciliation,"⁶⁰ that his polemic reached its climax. His leading purpose here is to deprive the Reformation doctrine of the support of Paul, to which it makes its chief appeal. In the teaching of the Reformers, he says, Christians are led to keep alive a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves, in order that they may the more constantly and earnestly look to Christ, and the more utterly rest on His righteousness. Paul, on the contrary, does nothing of the kind. He presents Paul's teaching both in its negative and in its positive aspect. Negatively, says he, Paul knows nothing of any provision for the forgiveness of Christians' sins; positively, he not only exhibits a very healthful satisfaction with his own moral condition, but betrays no tendency to think less well of other Christians than of himself. He did not keep his own sins constantly in mind — if he had any; and he does not teach his converts to keep their sins in mind — though his letters show us that he knew perfectly well that they had a good many. And he never connects the sins of Christians with their justification, after the manner of the Reformers; indeed, he had never reflected on the relation of the justification they had received to their subsequent sins. The justification was there; the sins were there — whenever they were there: Paul never in his thought brought the two into connection. Still less was he of a sad countenance because of these sins — whether his own or others'; on the contrary, possessed of a consciousness of well-doing in his work, not unbroken sorrow for his sins — of which he betrays not a trace — but satisfaction with his condition as a Christian and with his work as an apostle, is his mood. And Ritschl does not fail to generalize from Paul's case, declaring that every man may and ought to have like Paul the consciousness of good work done- not precisely of a multiplicity of good works, but of a connected life-work that is good; and having that, he may account himself, in the Pauline sense, perfect. This work must of course be proved to be

⁶⁰ "Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung," 2: ed. 1, pp. 363ff.; ed. 3, 1889, §§39f., pp. 365ff.

approved; but it may be proved and approved, and form a valid ground of complete satisfaction with ourselves. Satisfaction with our Christian attainments, not constant penitence for our sins — that is the Pauline conception of the Christian life.

As an account of Paul's attitude toward the sins of Christians, this leaves much to be desired. It makes the impression that he is represented as being indifferent to them, although that accords very ill with the contents of his letters. It scarcely adequately represents the preoccupation of these letters with the sins of his converts and their strenuous dealing with them, to say simply that Paul "was of course acquainted with the fact" of the imperfection of his converts.⁶¹ He certainly does not treat the sins of his converts as negligible things. But if we ask, how it is possible that with these sins abounding about him and engaging his unceasing care, he should never have reflected on the relation of his great message of justification by faith to them, and indeed never suggests any relief for them whatever, we obtain no answer from Ritschl. There is, to be sure, a remark dropped⁶² — in accordance with one of Ritschl's own doctrinal notions — to the effect that Paul kept "the two points of view, of justification by faith and the bestowment of the divine Spirit on believers, unconfused." But even if this could be pressed into a suggestion that Paul expected the sins of Christians to be eradicated by the Holy Spirit, their guilt would still be left unprovided for: and Paul would not be expected to, and does not, speak of them as if he were indifferent to their guilt. Perhaps there is a veiled hint that Christians are to expiate these sins in their own persons at the judgment day. But if so it is not worked out. We are left to the unresolved contradiction that Paul, whose message revolved around the deliverance of believers from their sins, yet looked upon the sins still committed by them as negligible.

And what shall we say of Paul's alleged satisfaction with himself? Of course passages like Romans 7:14ff., Galatians 5:17, in which he probes the human heart, and even uncovers his own soul for us, are set aside. Even when that is done, however, we are far from a Paul who is

satisfied with his attainments and indifferent to his shortcomings; though we do have a Paul who rejoices in his salvation. It is the indifference to sin, considered as guilt, inherent in Ritschl's system of teaching, not Paul's, which is really made the basis of judgment. Ritschl wishes to make Paul say in effect that Christians may neglect their sins: it is not their sins but their salvation with which they should be concerned. But Paul will not say that. The most that Ritschl can venture to maintain, with the utmost wrenching of the text, is that Paul does not direct his converts to any remedy for their continued sinning; and that from this we may infer that he did not think it required any remedy — despite his multiplied rebukes of their sins and agonizing warnings against them! And even this he cannot assert of John. John, he allows, does provide a remedy for the sins of Christians, a remedy that directs us to the faithfulness and righteousness of God, the cleansing effect of the sacrificing Christ, the intercession of Christ.⁶³ John alone, therefore, says Ritschl, occupies the standpoint of the Reformers on this matter.⁶⁴ Not quite even John; for though the hard facts of experience had compelled John to modify the optimistic judgment which Paul held concerning Christians, he remained, we are told, essentially of the optimistic party, and could by no means descend to the depths of the Reformers. "John also is far removed from the pessimism with which Luther emphasized the perpetual imperfection and worthlessness (*Werthlosigkeit*) of the moral activity of Christians. Sinning is for him still always the exception in the Christian life, not the rule and an inevitable fate."⁶⁵

Ritschl's book was published in 1874. But the seed sown in it did not come to its fruitage for a quarter of a century. His representation of the attitude of the New Testament writers to the sins of Christians, did not fail of an immediate echo, of course, here and there. And it was no doubt silently moulding opinion in like-minded circles. It was not until the latter half of the last decade of the century, however, that wide interest was manifested in it. An essay or two appeared on the subject in 1896, and then, in 1897, attention was sharply attracted by an extended discussion of it

⁶¹ As cited, p. 365.

⁶² P. 370.

⁶³ P. 373.

⁶⁴ P. 372.

⁶⁵ P. 378.

in a book of unusual vigor both of thought and language written by a young man of twenty-five, just out of the University, Paul Wernle. Wernle came forward as an enthusiastic but independent pupil of Ritschl's. "So far as I see," he says,⁶⁶ "Ritschl is the sole theologian who as yet has seriously interested himself in the question of how sin in the life of Christians was thought of and dealt with by the apostles." The time had come, he thought, to go into the matter more thoroughly than Ritschl had been able to do. He devotes to it, therefore, this, his maiden book, in which he endeavors not merely to ground Ritschl's conclusions, but also to give them sharper and more complete expression. The view that he asserts (no other term will meet the ease) is that with Paul — it is with Paul alone that the book concerns itself — the Christian is as such altogether done with sins, and is a sinless man, who will appear as such in the rapidly approaching judgment day;⁶⁷ and that the Reformation has so far departed from Pauline Christianity that it has transformed it from a religion of sinlessness into a religion of sinning.⁶⁸

In attaching himself thus closely to Ritschl, and carrying out the suggestions made by Ritschl to their logical conclusions, Wernle perhaps somewhat neglects his chronologically closer predecessors. E. Grafe mildly rebukes him for this.⁶⁹ "The ideas brought forward here and acutely grounded," he says, "are, in great part, not altogether new, not so unheard of as the author appears to suppose. He himself recognizes with lively gratitude that A. Ritschl was the first to point energetically to the question under consideration. But other theologians also have already raised it, such as, for example,

Schmiedel, Scholz, Karl, Holtzmann." Wernle was not, however, unaware of the existence of these closer predecessors. He even mentions them.⁷⁰ He writes, however, clearly, in independence of them, and those of them of any large significance in the development of the controversy antedated the publication of his book by so short an interval, that it is quite possible that it was well advanced to its completion before they became accessible to him. Two of them are of sufficient importance, nevertheless, to require that we shall give some account of them before proceeding to look into Wernle's own book. We refer to W. A. Karl and H. Scholz.

W. A. Karl⁷¹ stands so far outside of the most direct line of development of the controversy that he does not derive immediately from Ritschl, and does not make it his primary object to validate Ritschl's condemnatory judgment upon the Reformation doctrine of "the miserable sinner," although he will permit as little standing-ground in the New Testament for this doctrine as Ritschl himself. Though he has thus climbed up some other way, however, he nevertheless takes his position at the head of the subsequent development, in so far as he was the first to proclaim Paul "the great idealist," who, in his incurable doctrinairism, asserted the completed sinlessness of Christians in the face of all experience.⁷² His first object in his chief work — which he describes in the very military language of "obtaining the mastery of the Pauline soteriology from a new point of attack" — he tells us is to reach a unitary conception of Paul; and he seeks this, according to Wernle,⁷³ who does not believe that Paul can be unified, "by identifying a series of heterogeneous ideas with one another." "We can learn from this," adds Wernle, "how Paul must probably have begun

⁶⁶ "Der Christ and die Sünde bei Paulus," 1897, Preface.

⁶⁷ As cited, p. 126. A certain ambiguity attaches to the word "sinless." Even Wernle does not quite venture to assert that Paul supposes himself to be free from a sinful nature; but only from sinful acts. Commenting on Galatians 2:20, he says he does not fully understand it (p. 19), and then proceeds to say that we cannot on its ground attribute to Paul "a consciousness of sinlessness." He is speaking here of the inner nature, not of external acts, and therefore at once explains his meaning to be that "the feeling of perfection which filled Paul in so high a manner has yet its limitations in the reality of the 'flesh,' and the delay of the 'consummation,' that is, of 'the world to come.'" Jacobi ("Neutestamentliche Ethik," 1899, p. 324) appears to have misunderstood him here to be speaking of the perfection of act — which Wernle does attribute to Paul.

⁶⁸ As cited, p. 124; cf. p. 106.

⁶⁹ *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 22: 1897, col. 517.

⁷⁰ Scholz, at pp. 11, 19, 53; Karl, at p. 86; Holtzmann at pp. 2, 21, 61, 87. Schmiedel's "Glaube und Dogma beim Apostel Paulus" (*Theologische Zeitschrift aus der Schweiz*, 1893, pp. 211-230), which seems likely to be the work referred to by Grafe, does not appear to be cited by Wernle; but he cites Schmiedel's Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians (pp. 48, 71). He cannot be reproached with lack of attention to "the most recent literature."

⁷¹ "Beiträge zum Verständnis der soteriologischen Erfahrungen und Spekulationen des Apostels Paulus," 1896; also, "Johanneische Studien: I. Der erste Johannesbrief," 1898.

⁷² Cf. H. J. Holtzmann, "Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Theologie," ed. 2, 1911, 2: p. 166, note 3.

⁷³ "Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus," p. 86.

had he sought after a unitary system — nothing more.” This is far higher praise than we ourselves could give to Karl, who seems to us busied with imposing a system of teaching on Paul of which Paul could never have dreamed. In his work on John he proceeds to impose the system which he had already imposed on Paul, on 1 John also, with the object of showing that the same body of religious conceptions are present in a wider circle than that into which we enter in Paul’s letters.

The chief elements of this early Christian conception-world are the idea of a real indwelling of Christ, that is, of the Pneuma (in John also of God)⁷⁴ — for the expression of which the preposition “in” forms a short formula — along with the fixed conviction that this indwelling produces in us ethical perfection as well as recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus and also “parrhesistic ecstasy”; and not only guarantees but is identical with eternal life.⁷⁵ What in this view New Testament Christianity consists in is just a mystical transformation, referred as its cause to the indwelling of the Pneuma-Christos, and manifesting itself in a new faith, belief in the Messiahship of Jesus; a new conduct, ethical perfection; and ecstatic phenomena. On all three of these characteristic manifestations of Christianity Karl lays the greatest stress. Our concernment is, however, only with the central one. The ethical perfection affirmed in it is asserted in its fulness. What John teaches, we are told, is that “all Christians are entirely sinless and therefore pure and righteous as Christ Himself, that is, perfect in love.”⁷⁶ This perfection is expounded both in its relation to forgiveness of which it proves to be the condition, and in its relation to the indwelling of the Pneuma-Christ of which it is represented as the immediate and necessary effect. The whole matter is summed up in a single sentence thus:⁷⁷ “If the Pneuma-Christ dwells in me, I am ethically renewed and thus ‘righteous’ in God’s eyes.” This “ethical renewal” which is conceived as instantaneous and complete, is the ground of our acceptance as

righteous. “We can say briefly,” says Karl,⁷⁸ “that the word ‘righteousness’ designates the ethical renewal according to its religious value, according to the value which it has before God.” Or more crisply still,⁷⁹ “The ‘righteousness of God’ is ethical perfection.”

He deals with the matter from both the objective and the subjective point of sight. “The forgiveness of sins is accomplished,” says he,⁸⁰ “with renewal of the whole man. How would God forgive me and leave me still in my sinful misery? How can I pardon my enemy and hold him incarcerated in his prison? Herein I perceive forgiveness, herein it manifests itself, completes itself, consists — that God sends me the Spirit, renews me ethically. Our life of salvation forms a unity like all that makes claim to the word life. It consists not first in forgiveness, then in a subsequent renewal; but in the renewal I experience also the forgiveness, and the result is full reconciliation with God.” Elsewhere,⁸¹ having declared roundly that “we feel that our previously committed sins are forgiven only as we are renewed,” he illustrates the deliverance by urging that no thief will believe his thefts are forgiven so long as he continues to steal: he must stop stealing before he can have a sense of forgiveness. No doubt men, both Protestants and Catholics, pretend that it is otherwise, and imagine themselves to enjoy forgiveness while they go on sinning. But this imaginary forgiveness — forgiveness to-day, to-morrow new sins — is frankly imaginary, and we all know it. “Therefore,”⁸² it will not do to say, First pardon, then ethical renewal; first the feeling of the forgiveness of sins, then the purpose of renewal.” That is not what Paul says, and it is fundamentally wrong, as is very easily seen. For we cannot have forgiveness without repentance; and we cannot repent without experiencing sin as sin; and we cannot experience sin as sin without having in ourselves its contradictory with which to contrast it — the ethical ideal. This is apparently supposed to be equivalent to saying that we must be good before we can be forgiven. On the next page⁸³ the sorites

⁷⁴ What is new in 1 John (over against Paul) is the indwelling of God as well as of Christ or the Pneuma (“Johanneische Studien,” p. 4). But this indwelling of God is not an independent indwelling but is through that of Christ (p. 99).

⁷⁵ “Johanneische Studien,” pp. 101, 103.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁷⁷ “Beitriige,” p. 48.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ P. 59.

⁸⁰ P. 71.

⁸¹ P. 51.

⁸² P. 52.

⁸³ P. 53.

is thrown into this form: "This, then, is our meaning: Only he can receive forgiveness of sins, who is in a condition to be sensible of their forgiveness. Only he is sensible of it who knows his sin. Only he knows it who is in grace. Therefore it is not right to say, First forgiveness of sins, then renewal; for there is no forgiveness without renewal." These statements will not be apprehended in their full meaning unless it is understood that the "renewal" spoken of is complete renewal, "ethical perfection," and that the "forgiveness" spoken of is not supposed to accompany but to follow on it; forgiveness is received only after we are perfect. The process is accurately outlined as follows:⁸⁴ "Through the indwelling of Christ we are ethically renewed, and we become an ethical new-creation. We fulfil the commandments of God. Naturally we enter then into a new relation with Him. First, His judgment on us, then naturally His treatment of us, is changed. He esteemed and treated us before as sinners, because that is what we were; He judges and treats us now as 'righteous' because we are now become righteous before Him, that is, we are what He wants us to be."

The central Reformation doctrine is here replaced by its contradictory, and according to this teaching we should not receive forgiveness until we become glorified saints. Paul escapes this result in Karl's exposition of him by representing Christians as becoming ethically perfect immediately on their baptism, and therefore recipients of forgiveness from the inception of their Christian life. "The Apostle," says he,⁸⁵ "presupposes and does not doubt that through baptism Christ dwells in Christians. All who are baptized are 'in Christ.' Thence comes their sinlessness ... A Christian can therefore never sin again." "This indwelling of the Pneuma-Christos, however," he says again,⁸⁶ "means for us a complete ethical new-creation. 'If any one is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, behold all has become new' (2 Corinthians 5:17). It cannot be otherwise than that this renewal is a complete one. For Christ, as a unitary (*geschlossene*) personality, cannot dwell in us as something only partial. A personality, a unity, suffers no division. Either we

have Him wholly or not at all. If we have Him dwelling in us completely, however, there dwells in us also His moral personality. He shares with us a kind of moral infallibility. A Christian can no longer sin."

On this view all progress in Christian living is excluded; the Christian on baptism is all that he will ever be, at once. "The ethical gifts," says Karl,⁸⁷ "are not given in part, or in advancing development, but completely." Taking the matter more broadly, he undertakes to show⁸⁸ that no passages exist in Paul which suggest a development. "If Christ dwells in us at all," he says,⁸⁹ pressing his *a priori* argument, since He is an indivisible person, "He must be present in us without remainder." The charismata, being wrought by the spirits, may indeed show themselves in different degrees, and if the moralization of Christians had similarly been committed to the spirits, it too might be progressive. But Paul denies the possibility of ethical development, precisely because it is the product of the indwelling Christ Himself — that it is "once for all settled by the once for all indwelling of the Pneuma-Christos — to which then the idea runs parallel that the ethical renewal, because necessary to salvation, must be always present in perfection."⁹⁰ For the Parousia hangs always trembling on the horizon, and the Christian must be always ready.

It is a sufficiently bizarre body of teaching which Karl attributes thus to Paul. And it stands in open contradiction to facts with which, as we all know, Paul was in the most observant contact. This does not deter Karl from attributing it to him. "We must of course ask," he says,⁹¹ "whether these declarations" — the declarations concerning the sinlessness of Christians — "accord with the facts. We should think that, among the Christians of whom he could not deny that they had the Spirit, Paul would have made the experience that not all is gold that glitters, that even in Christians a notable remainder of actual sinning continued. The Corinthians, for example, might have opened his eyes in this

⁸⁴ P 30.

⁸⁵ Pp. 96f.

⁸⁶ P. 14.

⁸⁷ P. 24.

⁸⁸ Pp. 17ff.

⁸⁹ P. 17.

⁹⁰ Pp. 26f.

⁹¹ P 16.

matter. How did he adjust himself to the facts of open wickedness which he encountered? Paul never comprehended these facts. They were to him the riddle of all riddles. He stood before them with the toneless, 'Know ye not?' ... These are desperate passages, these numerous 'Or are ye ignorant?' or 'Know ye not?' sections. In them the complete perplexity of this great idealist comes to expression ... It is precisely when he jolts against sins, that he argues that such sins are impossible to Christians. He reasons away theoretically what stands before his eyes as facts." That is to say, that is what must be attributed to Paul on Karl's theory of his teaching. Let us hear him, however, again:⁹² "We have seen that Paul's theory does not agree with the facts. It exists merely as a particular notion of the metaphysical nature and mode of existence of the Risen One, and the nature of His indwelling. This idea cannot, however, be harmonized with the facts. That the indwelling of Christ on the ethical side does not coincide with ecstasy, that one can in other words be a good ecstatic and a very bad Christian — this fact Paul did not banish out of the world by denying it theoretically. Paul may possibly have been religiously, ethically, psychologically and physically of such a predisposition that the glory of the Lord expanded in him all at once like the flaring up of a great light (he himself uses this figure in 2 Corinthians 4:6); it was not so with other men and it will not be so. In his splendid enthusiasm, unselfishness and devotion to the saving of souls, the Apostle makes on us, to be sure, the impression that the full moral greatness of Jesus had taken up its dwelling in him, so that Paul might have justly declared to his opponents that he *could* no longer do an unworthy act, because it was Christ who moved him; just as a great musical genius may assert of himself with our approval that it is impossible for him to write a single false harmony. But it was a mistake in Paul to assume the same ethical completeness in every Christian ecstatic. We are not bound by the mistake, because we no longer accept his metaphysical principles. Paul could not reason otherwise, because according to his assumption Christ dwells in us either altogether or not at all. We think more spiritually now of the Risen One than Paul did, and of His indwelling more as psychologically mediated. And so it is possible for

us to speak of a progress in Christ's indwelling."

The circle of conceptions attributed by Karl to Paul stand in no more staring contradiction with the facts of life, not merely open to Paul's observation and thrust, violently on his attention, but copiously remarked upon in every one of his letters, than they do with his most explicit and most elaborated teaching. It would serve no good purpose to exhibit this in detail. It is obvious to every reader of Paul's letters. And it is enough here simply to point to the two formative conceptions from which this whole system of teaching attributed to Paul derives, and each of which stands in diametrical contradiction to his most fundamental convictions. It is a desperate undertaking to attempt to interpret Paul as basing forgiveness on acquired character, that is, on works. It is precisely to the destruction of that notion in all of its forms that a large part of his life-work was devoted. It is equally unwarranted to attribute to him the idea that renewal is instantaneously complete. That, too, he explicitly negatives too often for citation. It is not Paul's but Karl's reasoning, that to have Christ at all we must have the whole Christ — which is true enough — and that having the whole Christ is already for Him so fully to have assimilated our nature to Himself that there remains no further development possible — which is so far from true that it is absurd. On these two principles hangs the entire system of teaching ascribed to Paul. There is no need to say anything further.

The main purpose of Hermann Scholz, in his winningly written essay "On the Doctrine of the 'Miserable Sinner,'"⁹³ is to justify Ritschl's representation of the essential difference between the attitudes of Paul and the Reformers towards the actual Christian life. The Reformers, says Ritschl in effect, and Scholz after him, concentrate all their attention on the necessary sinning of Christians, and thus give to the Christian life the aspect of defeat and consequent endless penitence, and to Christians themselves the character of merely perpetual petitioners for pardon. Paul, on the other hand, say they, looks out rather on the constant conquest of sin by Christians, and sees the Christian life as an arena of high ethical exertions and ever increasing ethical advance; while Christians are to him therefore distinctively the morally strong.

⁹² P. 50.

⁹³ Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 6: 1896, pp. 463-491.

If the antithesis were as here stated, *cadit quaestio*: the Reformers have no case. But they have been deprived of their case by the removal from the statement of their position and of that of Paul alike, of all that each has in common with what is ascribed to the other. Thus an artificial antagonism has been produced, and, if you restore to each what has been omitted, the two melt into one another. The most that can be even plausibly contended is that the emphasis may be thrown by each of them on different elements in the general conception of the Christian life insisted on by both: the Reformers emphasizing rather the constant penitence which belongs to Christians, Paul the constant ethical advance which is achieved by them. Scholz knows this perfectly well; and accordingly, when he comes to contrast the two, with actual appeal to the records, finds some difficulty in making out clearly the contrast between them to which he is committed.

The essay opens with an account of the doctrine of “the miserable sinner” drawn largely from Zinzendorf.⁹⁴ The definition put in the forefront⁹⁵ very fairly describes it. “The idea of ‘the miserable sinner’ has from of old been in ecclesiastical use in order to declare the abiding imperfection of the Christian life and the impossibility of our delivering ourselves.” There is nothing apparent in that of slackness in moral effort or depression of spirits; only, what one would think a natural and necessary recognition of constant dependence on God and His grace. And Scholz is compelled to admit that in the case at least of Zinzendorf, who is used by him as its chief exemplar, the doctrine did not either inhibit ethical activity or cloud the natural joy of the Christian heart.⁹⁶ Nevertheless he deprecates the mood which it fosters. It takes all the pleasure out of our work, he says. It destroys the spur to effort. It substitutes a habit of looking for forgiveness for our actions — and expecting it as a matter of course — for the better habit of anticipating ethical results from them. Who will keep the ideal before his eyes if he knows it to be unattainable and that meanwhile it is enough

that he confesses himself a “miserable sinner”?⁹⁷ Obviously Scholz has passed here beyond both his definition and his example; he is blackening the conception of “the miserable sinner” by ascribing to it traits not derivable from either.

This is even more clear, when, a little later, repudiating the doctrine in the name of Paul, he brings against it his most summarily expressed arraignment.⁹⁸ “Accordingly the doctrine of ‘the miserable-sinner’ applied to the active moral life, whether as object of daily forgiveness, or as occasion for mistrust or indifference towards advance in sanctification, has no support in Paul. Of course Paul derives his Christian state exclusively from the good-pleasure of God ... He is never weary of emphasizing that in all the relations of our lives we are dependent on God’s grace ... He thus represents evangelical Christianity in the whole range of its practical religious motive, as the Reformers have summed it up in the doctrine of justification; and we need not say more on that. But the special reference to daily, active sinning is lacking. In this matter he is interpreted not out of himself, but by means of alien inferences. The preponderant attention given to the doctrine of justification has dulled men’s sense for the independent ethics of the Apostle; the necessary emphasizing of the natural inability of man has led to the assertion of an imperfection without measure and without end.” Of course again a “miserable-sinner” doctrine such as is here described should be repelled as Scholz repels it: a doctrine which throws such stress on justification that it has lost all sense for moral action; and which has turned our continued imperfections into a “precious doctrine” to be cherished, instead of a state of sin to be striven against. We are *not* to continue in sin; moral effort is *always* demanded; and the recognition of our continued imperfection must operate as the *spur* that at every moment drives us onward. In justice to Scholz it is to be borne in mind, however, that in his own environment there are some who do appear to submerge the moral demand in continued or repeated justification, thus finding the whole meaning of Christianity, formally at least, in justification; and who fancy themselves to be maintaining the

⁹⁴ Scholz had himself come out of Moravian circles and it was no doubt natural to him to turn first to Zinzendorf.

⁹⁵ P. 463.

⁹⁶ P. 465.

⁹⁷ P. 472.

⁹⁸ P. 482.

Lutheran tradition in so doing.⁹⁹ It is less in them, however, than in Scholz's transcript of Paul's teaching that the real "miserable-sinner" doctrine is to be found.

And when Scholz goes on to describe¹⁰⁰ the state of mind which ruled in Paul's day, "the miserable-sinner" finds his own very much reflected in it. "To the generation of that day, nothing was more alien than the passive knowledge of self and of sins, which makes a painful privilege or distressful business of the mournful contemplation of our perpetual imperfection, falls back therewith on the grace of God, and is just as sluggish in forming resolutions as in actual conduct. A high feeling of responsibility teaches us not to permit ourselves to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). With this earnestness in our sense of duty, the joyful character of Christian morality thoroughly accords. Everything is thrilling with stimulation — the range of the morally attainable expands — the final success is assured." ... That is just how the "miserable sinner" feels. Does not Scholz himself tell us so of Zinzendorf, his typical example? "That no abatement is suffered in the earnestness of sanctification and moral renewal, or in the comprehensive circle of duties included in them," he says,¹⁰¹ "may be recognized all the more readily that Zinzendorf's Christocentric ethics, elsewhere made known, is characterized by richness of conception, purity of ideas, and salutary emphasis on the effort after sanctification. To feel ourselves a 'miserable sinner' has never with him the meaning of renunciation of the ethical task, or even assignment to it of a lower value in comparison with religious experience. It is equally excluded on the other hand that this doctrine issues in a new form of self-torturing after the Pietistic fashion. It is precisely against the self-torturing of that narrow-hearted, unfruitful penitential practice of the dominant Pietism, rich in deceptions and self-deceptions, that Zinzendorf's system is directed with emphasis. He does not wish that a Christian man should be of a sad countenance, with hanging head; he hates a dejected and discontented piety, which comes to

nothing but the repetition of its lamentations. He demands and exhibits a joyful Christianity."

Scholz's zeal, it cannot fail to have been perceived, is burning for the ethical character of Christianity, which he wrongly conceives to be brought into jeopardy by the point of view of "the miserable sinner." Following Ritschl he even places justification and sanctification in contrast with each other as contradictories, of which if one be taken the other must be left. Paul, says he,¹⁰² never refers sinning Christians to Christ for forgiveness, but always on the contrary to the Holy Spirit that they may be girded for the fight. The Christian life is thus to Scholz, in its very essence, a conflict; and as it is not a hopeless but an auspicious conflict, it is also a constant advance towards the good. He stands here on ground diametrically opposite to that occupied by Karl, who, we will remember, supposes the Christian from the very beginning perfect, just because recreated by the Holy Spirit. Scholz, on the contrary, teaches an ethically progressive Christianity, and indeed it is precisely for this that he is primarily solicitous, as it well became him to be on the ground of his Ritschlian moralism. "It presupposes a high estimate of the moral powers of the gospel," says he,¹⁰³ praising Paul, "when in general, he does not doubt a favorable issue of the process depicted, and in particular shuns employing the divine forgiveness as a means of soothing, to say nothing of as a motive for correction." Paul, he says, only incidentally and in particular instances warns against overconfidence, but on the other hand "puts, fundamentally, in the first rank growth, advance, progress." "Who will see in these heroic lines," he cries,¹⁰⁴ "the portrait of 'the miserable sinner'?" No one, of course; but only because, in painting the figure of the strenuously advancing Christian, common to both "the miserable-sinner Christianity" and his own fervent moralism, he has sedulously obliterated the background upon which it is thrown up in the one, and worked in that which is appropriate only to the other. The divine forgiveness is not allowed to serve either for consolation for shortcomings still remaining or for encouragement for going onward. It is under the incitement of the gospel proclamation

⁹⁹ Cf. *The Princeton Theological Review*, 18: 1920, pp. 98ff.

¹⁰⁰ P. 483.

¹⁰¹ P. 465.

¹⁰² P. 476.

¹⁰³ Pp. 476f.

¹⁰⁴ P. 477.

alone, which can act only “ethically,” that is to say in the way of bringing inducements to bear on a free spirit, that the Christian hews his way onward in the strength of his own right arm. It is not difficult to see which of these two points of view is Paul’s.

It is also easy to see that, although there is no room in Scholz’s system for such a perfectionism as Karl teaches, he cherishes nevertheless a very high estimate of human prowess and human achievements, and is eager (with the help of Paul) to set it over against what he conceives to be the depreciatory view of “the miserable sinner.” “Paul,” says he,¹⁰⁵ after having drawn a picture of the shortcomings of Paul’s converts, “has no scruples in designating as saints or sanctified, as the beloved of God, as the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost, the building of God, a host of men who display these obvious deficiencies in their active moral life.” And then he adds: “To such an extent does reflection on God’s grace, which enters into the life of believers on the one side as justifying, on the other sanctifying, and forms something new in the core of their nature, preponderate with him, that the empirical failings of moral sinfulness do not come into comparison with it.” On the face of it, this statement is a recognition of the continued presence and activity of sin in Christians, and the exaltation of the power of grace — justifying, sanctifying, recreating — over it. The scope of it is merely to show by the titles which he gives them, the honor which Paul put on Christians as subjects of this grace, with a view, naturally, to withdrawing them from the depreciatory judgment supposed to be visited on them (but surely not as subjects of grace) by “miserable-sinner Christianity.”

This motive is more clearly manifested, however, in the description of Paul’s estimate of his own person. “It may be boldly maintained,” we read,¹⁰⁶ “that Paul makes no express use of the predicate miserable sinner for his own person and in view of his daily life of sanctification. He would neither say with Luther, ‘for we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment’; nor would he with Zinzendorf rest his hope before God’s judgment ‘on the Ransom alone.’ What is to be read in 2 Timothy 4:7 is spoken entirely in

this sense: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me at that day. His good conscience is raised above all doubt, although with the proviso of humble deference to the final judgment of God (1 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:2; 6:3ff.); he exhorts the brethren to walk in imitation of him (Philippians 3:17), and when he brings into consideration the effect of his vocational activity in his life, and the development of the inner man, he can only triumphantly declare: We all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).” Shall we say that on this showing Paul, despite his constant protest, was saved by works, at least in part — not by “the Ransom alone”? Shall we say that according to it, again despite his protest, he had already attained and was already perfect; and, different in this from his converts whom he addresses in his letters, had already fought his fight through to a finish and no longer was ethically advancing? We can hardly say less than that according to it Paul felt no lack in himself, no dissatisfaction with his attainments, and saw nothing before him but ever rising stages of glory. And even that, although overdrawn and, as here put, misleading, might be allowed to pass without much remark, except for one thing — the omission of Christ.¹⁰⁷ If we could look through it and see Christ behind it all; and look into it and see trustful dependence on Christ transfused through it all; we might perhaps recognize Paul in it. Otherwise not: for to him Christ was all in

¹⁰⁵ Pp. 475f.

¹⁰⁶ P. 479.

¹⁰⁷ It may be worth while to remind ourselves that almost as good a case could be made for Paul’s “perfection” before as after his conversion. He never was a “sinful” man in the coarse sense. “He had been a highly moral Pharisee, and lived the strictest of lives,” as we are reminded by P. Gardner (“The Religious Experience of Saint Paul,” 1911, p. 22). He tells us himself that “as regards the righteousness which was in the law he was blameless.” He does not accuse himself of the vices which he names as having stained the lives of some of his Gentile converts. If he seems in a passage like Titus 3:3 to include himself in the description, may we not say (reasons Gardner) that the “we” is ambiguous and must we not in any case deny Titus to Paul? And is not Ephesians 2:3 open to the same doubt? The bearing of the fundamental fact that Paul was in any case a “good” man ought not to be neglected in interpreting his words. The alternatives are not either “good” or “wicked,” but either “good” or “perfect.”

all and only in Christ did he have any ground, any goal, any hope, any strength. The ground of Paul's satisfaction was not in himself but in Christ. And that is precisely what "miserable-sinner Christianity" means. It does not mean that our attainments in Christian living may not be great, or that we may not find a legitimate satisfaction in their greatness. It means, however, that it is only as we penetrate behind these attainments, no matter how great they may be, to their source in the Redeemer, that we find any solid ground for satisfaction. And if our attainments meanwhile fall in any degree short of perfection, the necessity of recourse to their guarantor in the Redeemer becomes in that degree more and more poignant. To Paul as to his followers there is no satisfaction to be had in the contemplation of ourselves, since our best attainments are imperfect, and since, because they are experienced as imperfect, they beget in us a divine dissatisfaction which spurs us onward. Here is the paradox of "the miserable-sinner Christianity" — dissatisfaction with self conjoined with satisfaction with Christ, in whom alone is the promise and potency of all our possible advance.

It was immediately on the heels of Karl's and Scholz's essays that Paul Wernle's book¹⁰⁸ appeared, written with such flare and fury as to compel the attention which they had not received. Wernle comes forward like Scholz as a follower of Ritschl,¹⁰⁹ though he was too young to have been his personal pupil; and he makes it his real task to justify by a detailed study of Paul's Epistles, or rather of as many of them as he will allow to Paul,¹¹⁰ Ritschl's representation that the Reformation doctrine of "the miserable sinner" finds no support for itself whatever in Paul.¹¹¹ The

method he pursues is that bad one very common among Teutonic investigators, of coming to the subject of study with a hypothesis already in hand, and "verifying" that hypothesis by seeing how far it can be carried through. This method leads inevitably to much twisting and turning in the effort to make the unwilling texts fit into the assumed hypothesis: and no one surely could have given us more twisting and turning than Wernle does. The Paul with which he emerges is far more Karl's Paul than Scholz's: he is indeed substantially the same Paul with Karl's. It is not easy, it is true, to obtain a perfectly unitary picture of him. He is not only presented as with the most brazen impudence asserting as fact what not only he but everybody concerned could not fail to know was not fact — as when he is said to have proclaimed all Christians, the Christians of Corinth and Galatia, for example — free from sin. He is represented also as contradicting himself flatly with the utmost ease and indifference — as when he is said to have taught that Christians are not liable to the judgment and yet to have threatened Christians sharply precisely with this judgment. He is even drawn as so developing from epistle to epistle as, in effect, to be a series of Pauls. He does not get to be really Paul in fact until the sixth chapter of Romans, and then by the third chapter of Colossians he has passed onward into still another Paul. These Pauls are all bound together, it is true, by two common traits which may be supposed to form the fundamental, as well as the abiding, elements of his character. He is always a missionary and always an enthusiast.¹¹² But he only slowly becomes a moralist. Up to the sixth chapter of Romans he teaches no morality; there he teaches an immediately perfect morality; when we arrive at the third chapter of Colossians he is found teaching a progressive morality. Before the sixth chapter of Romans we have merely the missionary proclaiming justification by faith and leaving it at that; the quickly coming Parousia precludes all question of his converts' sinning — there is not time for sinning; and so they are left to the warmth of their purely religious

¹⁰⁸ "Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus," 1897. The preface is dated February, 1897. Scholz's essay was printed in the last *Heft* of the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* for 1896 and appeared probably in November. Karl's dedication is dated January, 1896.

¹⁰⁹ Pp. 5; 3f.

¹¹⁰ He uses Thessalonians, Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Colossians (omitting Ephesians and the Pastorals). Karl uses only the four great epistles and Philippians.

¹¹¹ This is the way he states his problem in a general and positive form (p. 3): "The problem of the Christian life, as the Reformation raised it, and as Ritschl has posited it afresh, is this: how the Christian can be a joyful child of God, in spite of sin." The Reformation answer, By trusting our sins to Christ, he says is wrong. Paul's answer (as he reads Paul), By the immediate perfecting of the soul in baptism, is also wrong. Ritschl's answer is, By treating

sinning as negligible and going on and doing your duty in your station in life. That seems in general Wernle's answer.

¹¹² Cf. e.g. p. 79: "For the right understanding of the Epistle to the Galatians, two factors are of decisive importance: his theory of the Christian life is the theory of a *missionary*; and its root is *enthusiasm*."

enthusiasm in view of the rapidly approaching end. In the sixth chapter of Romans the morals of the converts have been taken up among the miraculous gifts of the Spirit; they have been recreated in their baptism into newness of life; henceforth they cannot sin; they are perfect. Yet by the third chapter of Colossians this perfection has been found sufficiently imperfect to admit of further perfecting; the converts must go on if they are to attain perfection.

It is needless to say that Wernle feels little admiration for this Paul, who seems to be ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. If the main motive of his book is to deprive the Reformers of the support of Paul, this is not because in his own view the support of Paul is of large value. The argument against the Reformers is purely *ad hominem*. If orthodox Protestantism derives comfort from the supposition that it reproduces the teaching of Paul, it must forego that comfort. For himself, however, it would be difficult to determine which Wernle thinks less well of — orthodox Protestantism or Paul. He stands apart from both, and from his superior position of critic speaks biting words of each. Nothing startled his first readers more than the contemptuous tone which he uses towards Paul. The venerable Adolf Hilgenfeld sharply rebukes his “overbearing manner” — with perhaps some increase of the sharpness because of the manifestation of this overbearing manner also toward the Tübingen school.¹¹³ Otto Lorenz is full of indignation over what he calls Wernle’s “swaggering attitude” toward the Apostle.¹¹⁴ These are not men whom it was easy to shock with criticisms of Paul; both say things about him themselves which shock us. But they could not brook his reduction to a man

of whom it could be said that he had no eye for the real, that he dealt in commonplace, high-sounding phrases of whose truth to fact he was indifferent, that when he did not wish to see a thing he did not see it, that he learned nothing from experience, did not in the least bother about the contradictions of fact, but acted steadily on the theory, “It ought to be, therefore it is.”

Wernle’s primary impulse was derived from what he conceived to be the unwholesome acquiescence of Protestant Christianity in sinning. What he sought in the first instance to do was to show that no warrant for this attitude was supplied by Paul from whom Protestantism felicitated itself that it derived its whole religious character. For Luther and his followers, he asserts,¹¹⁵ “the riches of God’s grace and of the merit of Christ are manifested precisely in the forgiveness of the ever new sins of the Christian.” “It is emphasized over and over again,” he says, “that the whole glory of the condition of Christians consists in this — that sin no longer condemns, that we can live in grace in spite of sin.” The implication is that on the Protestant view, what we receive in Christianity is really license to sin; continuous forgiveness of sins supersedes the necessity of cessation of sinning; and the question that is raised is “whether the moral state of the Christian possesses any importance.” It was not Paul who made Christianity into this kind of a “sin-religion.” It was Augustine who did this; he it was who first put sin and grace over against each other at the heart of Christianity, preoccupied man with the idea of sin, and presented the Christian religion as above everything else a source of consolation for men self-conscious in their sin. With Paul it was a very different story. To speak perfectly frankly Paul shows very little engagement with the subject of sin.¹¹⁶ In Romans alone among his epistles does he handle the topic theoretically at all. In the other letters even the terms “sin” or “to sin” are near to lacking. In I Corinthians, for instance, the noun “sin” occurs only in three passages in the fifteenth chapter and the verb “to sin” in seven passages scattered through the letter. And yet the congregation at Corinth certainly gave sufficient occasion for speaking of sin, if Paul was specially inclined to speak of it.

¹¹³ *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 41: 1898, pp. 161ff., article “Paulus vor dem Richterstuhle eines Ritschlianers (Paul Wernle).” “The ‘hard doctrinairism,’” says Hilgenfeld in closing — referring to Wernle’s characterization of Paul’s teaching — “is clearly to be recognized not in Paul of Tarsus but in Paul Wernle of Basel, who missed Ritschl’s doctrine that we know nothing of sin outside the Christian community in Paul, and cannot find his way in the higher ideas of the Paul who reasons of sin and grace” (p. 171).

¹¹⁴ *Protestantische Monatshefte*, 1: 1897, pp. 376-378, review of Wernle’s book. “Is there no other explanation of these contrasting declarations, that the Christian is free from sin and that he is not so, except the crassest selfcontradiction? ... Wernle himself knows very well ... that his ideas are carefully ordered and stand in a close inner connection.” It is in truth not Paul who is self-contradictory, but Wernle himself.

¹¹⁵ P. 101.

¹¹⁶ P. 124.

In Romans sin is, no doubt, made the subject of discussion in chapters 1-3, 5b. and 7b. But all these discussions concern the pre-Christian situation, while in Romans 6 sin is just dismissed altogether from the Christian life, and that in the plainest of words. When Paul thinks of sin, in other words, he is not thinking of Christians; he is thinking of something which Christians put behind them on becoming Christians. Precisely what Christians are is the men who have ceased from sinning; the relation of the condition of sin and the condition of grace is a chronologically successive one. And so, Wernle formally announces as the result of his investigations just this:¹¹⁷ "That the Christian state has nothing further to do with sin; that the Christian is a sin-free man and shall appear as such before God at the rapidly approaching day of judgment."

The religion of Christians, according to Paul, says Wernle, feeds purely on God and the future. "Forgiveness of sins, comfort for sin — that belongs to the past; the Pneumatic must be done with that."¹¹⁸ He has secured his forgiveness once for all in the great experience of justification, by which his life has been cut in half. We have already seen Wernle declaring that "the condition of grace follows the condition of sin in chronological succession."¹¹⁹ It is precisely here, he says, that Protestantism has deserted Paul; and he expounds the matter at length. "In Protestant orthodoxy," says he,¹²⁰ "the relation of the state of grace to the state of sin is no longer conceived as one of succession. The proof of universal sinfulness has for the Lutheran dogmatician the purpose of showing the indispensableness of righteousness by faith for every moment of the life (as is very clearly set forth by Troeltsch, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johann Gerhard und Melancthon*, pp. 133ff., 137). We should be conscious of ourselves as sinners in every moment of our Christian life, that we may ever anew feel the need of forgiveness and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. From this point of view the contrast of the 'now time' [in Roman 3:26] to the time of the 'sins that are past' is explained by the contrast of the Christian and pre-Christian eras, and the theme treated is why

God, and how He, was gracious to the Jews already before Christ's death. For the Christian on the other hand the time of sin altogether coincides with the time of forgiveness; for Christ's death has made it possible for us to receive justification ever afresh, despite our perpetual sin." Having thus described the Protestant view, he now contrasts with it Paul's own. "It is impossible," he says,¹²¹ "to exaggerate the divergence of this Protestant theory from Paul's meaning. Where is there in the whole body of Paul's letters a single passage in which Paul appeals to Christ's death for the continuing sins of Christians? And which letter even in the smallest degree shows the Lutheran mood as to sin and grace? In all — in absolutely all — of them the fundamental idea is this — that sins are gone, that the Christian has them no longer, since he has become a Christian. The 'now time' is precisely the Messianic age; over against it the 'sins that are past' of Romans 3:25 are the sins of Christians before their entrance into the community of the Kingdom of God (cf. 2 Peter 1:9 and everywhere in the later literature). God has borne with them patiently and passed them by up to the forgiveness through Christ's death; now, since those burdened with them have become believers in Christ, He has obliterated them. When we were still sinners, Christ died for us; now, since we have been justified by His blood, we are no longer sinners (Romans 5:8 [8, 9]). The 'now time' begins historically, it is true, with Christ's death and resurrection, but for every Christian it begins with his entrance into the community, with his justification. Then the sins that are past are washed away; up to then the man was a 'sinner,' now he is that no longer. Precisely from this it is clear that Paul, in Romans too, occupied the standpoint of the missionary, divided the world from the missionary's experience of conversion, and distributed sin and grace respectively to the two halves of life. He did not reflect upon how the Christian receives forgiveness in the state of grace, since he made no such supposition as that the Christian needs forgiveness in the state of grace. In Protestant orthodoxy, on the other hand, the missionary problem has fallen away, and a problem derived from the congregational life has taken its place."

¹¹⁷ P. 126.

¹¹⁸ P. 127.

¹¹⁹ P. 126.

¹²⁰ P. 94.

¹²¹ Pp. 94f.

It is not worthwhile to remark here on the violence done in this passage to Romans 3:25, 26. There can be no real question that Paul is distinguishing there between the two dispensations, and makes no reference whatever to the pre- and post-justification experiences of the individual Christian. It is more important at the moment to point out the emphasis with which Wernle confines the effects of justification in Paul's view to the sins committed before it has been received. If sins are committed afterwards, there is no remedy for them in justification. But he is emphatic in declaring that according to Paul, no sins are committed afterwards. The saving effect of justification continues only because Christians, having been completely saved by it once for all, need no further saving. This is how Wernle puts it:¹²² "The natural man, whether Jew or Gentile, so long as he operates with works, can only bring down God's wrath on himself, and never finds of himself by his own activity the way to the divine salvation. In the sight of the infallible Judge, as the Scriptures reveal Him, who can stand before God? When it is a matter of salvation, man can only lift his eyes and grasp the hand that is held out to him — that is, believe. Here the missionary question has only become the occasion for the most profound apprehension of the religious problem. Had Paul carried this way of thinking through, his theology would have approached that of the Reformation, and especially Calvin's (cf. the kindred idea in *Institutes*, III, 12) infinitely more closely; for how can a man who so judges himself before God ever cease to feel himself a sinner, who is in need of grace? But strange as it may appear to us, Paul confined this way of thinking to the state of the natural man, and banished it from the state of Christians. The Christian may boast (Romans 5:2); he is the bondservant of God and of the righteousness (Romans 6:18, 22); is filled with the fruit of righteousness (Philippians 1:11). Thus Paul has remained to the end the missionary, who summons to the Kingdom of God. The Christian congregations are for him withdrawn from the world, the children of God who do righteousness. Man sins; the Christian is free from sin after his justification."

According to this representation the entirety of salvation not only hangs with Paul on

justification, but is accomplished in justification. But Wernle does not maintain this representation. The insistence that justification affects only the sins "that are past" in each individual case, made even in this very passage, renders its maintenance impossible. The life of the Christian may be consequent on his justification, but it is also subsequent to it; it may be lived out under the influence of justification, it is not — and it is one of Wernle's most peremptory assertions that with Paul it is not — lived out under the continuous application of justification. Paul, according to him, looks upon justification as cutting the life into two unrelated halves. What it does is to give the Christian a new start. Its only effect is wholly with the past life. The future life — what of it? There must be something to be said of it. We find Wernle accordingly, on an earlier page,¹²³ representing Protestantism as differing from Paul, precisely in its tendency to look upon justification as the entirety of salvation. Paul, it seems, had something to add to justification. "The missionary preaching of the prevenient grace of God which grants to every believer forgiveness for his previous sins, is what distinguishes Paul from the other apostles, is the peculiarly Pauline element of his theology. But this always remained with him missionary preaching; he did not revert to this side of his gospel with Christians. That great proclamation of faith and forgiveness stands with him at the beginning, and is far from being, as in Protestantism, the sum of his whole religion. Protestantism has thus — by applying this missionary preaching to the community and declaring it the whole of the gospel — passed far beyond Paul." There could not be a more distinct assertion that justification constitutes only a part, perhaps only a small part, of Paul's gospel, and concerns only the initial stage of the Christian life; it was supplemented for those who had experienced justification by an apparently copious and certainly weighty further teaching.

It is not at first apparent, however, what this further gospel for believers as distinguished from unbelievers is. It appears as if in Paul's practice, or at least in his earlier practice, it amounted to nothing more than the preaching of the duty of a moral life and exhortations to those who sinned to repent and put away sin from them. By such a

¹²² Pp. 95f.

¹²³ P. 54.

representation the effect of justification is made in the sharpest way possible to be merely the giving to men of a fresh start; and Paul is made, despite the protest of his whole life, to base salvation in the most express manner on faith and works combined, or rather on works alone wrought on the basis of a clean slate attained through faith. Wernle,¹²⁴ while declaring that in point of fact Paul did proceed practically on precisely this ground — “separating justification and salvation in such a way that he bases them respectively on different conditions, the one on faith and the other on works” — yet finds himself in difficulties in attributing this dualism to him in theory, because of his “promising salvation to every believer without any supplement or any condition.” After all, then, Paul understood himself to promise a complete salvation to that faith by which justification is received; and this is sufficiently close to saying that all salvation was, in one way or another, implied in justification. His gospel was a unit, and it is to misunderstand him to divide it into unrelated or loosely related parts. “Therefore,” says Wernle himself,¹²⁵ “Paul’s theory of justification and salvation, what he called his gospel, is unitary and clear. It is pure proclamation of faith; faith receives salvation as well as justification. It introduces into the community of salvation and guarantees salvation to those that are in it. It needs no supplementing by works; the simple invocation of the name of Jesus at the judgment is enough.” But then he adds: “But this theory, this gospel, is not the whole of what Paul taught. We meet with almost nothing of it in the letters to the Corinthians; the fear of God, sanctification, love are demanded by Paul from the believers. In 1 Corinthians 10: he directly forbids them to imagine themselves sure of salvation. That the judgment proceeds according to works is also in Romans 13:14 the simple assumption. This contradiction of theory and practice is insoluble.”

A consideration portion of Wernle’s inability to accredit to Paul a unitary conception of salvation, is due really to his own ingrained dualism, inherited from Ritschl, with regard to justification and ethical renewal. “It is Ritschl’s merit,” he says,¹²⁶ “to have shown that justification has no

causal relation to the moral life, that, rather, its consequences are peace with God and firm hope of acceptance at the last judgment, confidence in prayer and trust in God’s providence,”¹²⁷ — in other words religious, as distinguished from ethical. “The Christian, through justification, receives a right to all the benefits of the Messianic community, without any moral transformation being derived from it.” Clearly this is a profoundly immoral doctrine to attribute to Paul, without anything so far as we have yet seen, to balance it. The Apostle, we have been told, preaches justification by faith alone, and promises to all who exercise this faith salvation in its completeness; and this is defined to include all the benefits of the Messianic community; and yet no moral transformation is included, although moral transformation is prominent among the Messianic promises. Fortunately, the Apostle is not in the least guilty of the immorality charged against him. He not only preaches morality as we have already seen with the utmost vigor, and threatens with the terrors of the judgment all doers of iniquity. He provides for the moral life of his converts as an essential part of his gospel, and that with such fulness that Wernle represents him as providing for their necessary and complete sinlessness.

It is of course the sixth chapter of Romans which comes most pointedly into consideration here; but equally of course not the sixth chapter of Romans alone, or even first. Wernle is himself compelled to admit that in Galatians 5:24 what is taught in Romans 6 is suggested, and that in 1 Corinthians 6:11 it is something more than suggested. The latter passage he represents as¹²⁸ the first in which Paul gives utterance to this line of thought. “He does not yet attempt,” he adds, “to make clear to himself how the sinlessness of Christians follows from the experience of baptism; he has as yet no theory of regeneration. He is merely sure that, through God’s grace in baptism, past and present stand in the sharpest contrast, and sin is already broken off.” “The Corinthians are to take note that the Christian life is no life at once in sin and grace, that after the once for all and unrepeatable experience of sanctification and justification, sin has simply come to an end.” We are astonished, says Wernle,

¹²⁴ P. 97.

¹²⁵ P. 99.

¹²⁶ P. 100.

¹²⁷ Ritschl, “Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung,” 2: pp. 343-355.

¹²⁸ Pp. 57f.

to read such words addressed to the sinful Corinthians. The actual situation, however, could not affect Paul's conviction "of the total separation of the Christian life and the world, and the radical significance of conversion, as he had experienced it in himself." "There is already exhibited here that audacious but abstract idealism, which, in the framing of theories, looks on the contradiction of experience with indifference."

As the sixth chapter of Romans itself is approached we are warned to remember the enthusiastic background and to interpret therefore from the eschatological standpoint. And then we have this remarkable passage.¹²⁹ "From the other epistles we learned that the problem of the sin of Christians had no existence for Paul whatever because of the hoped-for nearness of the Parousia. This result is not invalidated but sustained by Romans 6. The problem does no doubt emerge, but only to be simply repelled: 'God forbid.' And the reason is the same as before; we are already living in 'the age to come,' are snatched away from the old world. We are just as certainly risen as Christ is risen; bodily death will surely pass us by. Sin is no longer anything to us, since in the next instant we receive the new sinless body. We can no longer sin, because we are men of the future." We have called this passage remarkable because it is a mass of open contradictions. The problem of sin among Christians is said to have no existence with Paul and to be raised here and argued. It is said that it is raised only to be repelled, and that it is argued to one solution out of a possible many. In point of fact, the passage is not concerned with our bodily death and resurrection and says nothing of the Parousia, whether near or distant; it is "as if alive from the dead" that we are to walk (verse 13). So far from sin being no concern of Christians, the passage is written because it is very much their concern. So far from its being impossible for Christians to sin because they are men of the future, the Apostle earnestly exhorts them not to sin, proves that it is grossly inconsistent in them to sin, and in the end promises them freedom from sin as an attainment of the future. From the very first verse of the sixth chapter of Romans two things subversive of Wernle's whole point of view are

perfectly plain. First, that Paul is speaking to a constituency among whom sinning has not automatically ceased on their believing. "Are we to *continue* in sin?" he asks of them; and that would not have been a serious question if it had been a matter of course that they had ceased from sinning and could no longer sin. Secondly, that the grace received by them at believing did not have exclusive reference to the sins that were past. Had that been the case it would have been meaningless to ask whether they were to continue in sin that this grace *might abound*. This question involves the understanding that sins committed in the Christian life share in the same grace by which the sins of the pre-Christian life have been cancelled. Paul is contemplating a situation in which not only is it conceived that sins may occur in the life of Christians, but it is understood that, occurring in it, they receive the same treatment as the sins that are past — make drafts on the same grace, and thus "cause that grace to abound."

Wernle approaches the sixth chapter of Romans, then, with a bad case already in hand. We are afraid that we must say that he makes it worse by the way in which he deals with it. It is a typical and also a crucial instance of his mode of expounding Paul, and we shall therefore permit ourselves a considerable quotation from it.

"So far as this theory," says he,¹³⁰ speaking of the theory that the Christian on becoming a Christian becomes also automatically sinless, "is simply the expression of the personal enthusiasm of the Apostle, it still has for us something inspiring. He had experienced the radical change; for him conversion was a new creation and resurrection. And the feeling of being wholly free from the past, and of looking solely to the future — yes, even of already living in the future as a new man — was the living impetus of his great work. But the sixth chapter of Romans goes far beyond a mere confession-like expression of pure experience. It flatly asserts for every Christian what he, the Apostle, had himself experienced. After having had so many experiences of sin in the congregations, and in the midst of the very city in which the impossibility of a sin-free Christian life stared him daily in the face, he draws up, on the ground of a series of logical conclusions, the propositions which infer and

¹²⁹ P. 103.

¹³⁰ Pp. 103ff.

maintain the sinlessness of Christians. After having as missionary steadily required nothing but faith, he here without more ado assumes that becoming a believer is also a break with sin, a moral renewal. What he had only suggested in Galatians 5:24 — that Christians have crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts — he expands here with manifold repetitions. He even dilates into the hyperbole, that the body of sin of baptized people is done away (Galatians 6:6), that they are no longer in the flesh (Galatians 7:5). No doubt he has not failed to accompany his descriptions of the Christian life always with requirements that Christians are to be what they have become. 'Reckon ye yourselves, therefore, to be dead to sin, but living for God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body. Present not your members as weapons of unrighteousness in the service of sin, but present yourselves to God' (Galatians 6:11-13, 19). What was first an experience receives the significance of an eternal obligation. It comes in the end to this — that the Christian *ought* not to give the dominion to sin, that he *ought* to refuse obedience to its lusts; but that is a subsequent supplement to the theory, which was required by observation of the congregations. The theory itself is framed like a law of nature, antecedently to all inquiry. Whether the Christian actually sins no longer — in Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia, Rome — that gave Paul not a bit of concern. These conclusions which he draws are valid, because the presuppositions — the death of Christ, and so forth — are correct, not because experience is in their favour. As soon as this is overlooked, the whole passage loses its cogency. Paul raises the question whether the Christian still sins.¹³¹ To say merely that it is his duty to serve God, that sin ought not to reign any longer in him, would be no answer at all. Everything here points to the impossibility of sinning; this is declared in the propositions in the indicative. The answer that the Christian is free from sin is *first* given. *Afterwards* his duty is laid on him in the premises. This may no doubt seem to us very salutary but certainly it ought not to be necessary — if what is maintained first is true.

"In point of fact, however, the sixth chapter of

¹³¹ It is doubtless unnecessary to point out that this is not the fact. The question Paul raised was not whether the Christian still sins, but whether the Christian ought still to sin. What follows in Wernle's argument is therefore from the start without force.

Romans yields us nothing but proof that all his experiences in his congregations taught the Apostle nothing when he had it in hand to repel an objection that suggested itself against his theory. Here is pure hard doctrinairism, quite intelligible from the Apostle's eschatological enthusiasm, but none the less doctrinairism. Paul does not wish to see the problem of sin in the life of Christians; therefore it has no existence. At bottom, despite this theory, he holds the ethical and the religious together only by an assertion. For that (moral) conversion always and everywhere coincides with becoming a believer, the Apostle has not shown and experience had already in his time refuted it. He could not do anything else, however, than tread this dangerous path of postulations, because he had left the proclamation of judgment out of his theory. If mere faith saves and all believers are exempt from the judgment, then the moral character of religion can be preserved only through the postulate that justification and regeneration coincide. It remains a postulate which experience seldom verifies; but the moral earnestness of faith is saved by it. Only by this theory could Paul meet effectively the valid objections against his gospel. If the believer is at the same time the regenerated, then all reproach of moral laxity falls away. Paul is not to blame for the difficulties and ambiguities which have thus been imposed on Christian dogmatics. For it was his fixed belief that the new world would come quickly and these questions be altogether abrogated. And this would also be the sole decisive reply to the objection of Galatians 6:1 — the destruction of the world.

"The doctrine of the sin-free life of the Christian is the most striking difference of the Pauline theology from that of the Reformation. The Reformers derived from Romans 6 the obligation to strive after sanctification, the explanation of the perpetual *mortificatio carnis* and *resurrectio spiritus*. But the possibility that the Christian can attain to moral perfection in this life, they denied outright; it has since been characteristic of sects and fanatics. There lay in this simply a historical necessity. It was out of fanaticism, that is to say, out of fixed belief in the nearness of the Parousia, that this doctrine was generated in Paul's case too: apart from this it cannot maintain itself. The break with this postulate of sinlessness was an act of veracity. Since, however, the Reformers

retained the Pauline formulas, they increased the confusion and called into existence that, in spite of all idealism, false theory of regeneration in which the question dare not be asked who is regenerate or when and where the regeneration has taken place. And since, following in the track of Paul, they have even more completely set aside the proclamation of the judgment, without it having, in conversion, such a counterweight as Paul had in Romans 6, they have crippled the moral power of the gospel and robbed themselves of the simplest of the practical motives. Thus they have at one and the same time advanced beyond Paul to the gospel of Jesus, and yet remained behind him. It is not to the sixth chapter of Romans alone that this applies, but it is very clearly in evidence there.”

It is after this absurd fashion that Wernle establishes his central contention — that Paul teaches that Christians as such are sinless, and thus stands at the opposite pole from the Reformation doctrine that Christians “sin much every day.” It is very clear from Wernle’s own presentation that Paul does not teach anything of the kind. To attribute it to him is to bring him into open conflict, not only, as Wernle allows, with all the facts of his observation- facts, be it noted, known to us only from his letters — but with all the facts of his letters as well. The Christians of Paul’s letters are not sinless but “sin much every day.” The individual instances of sins actually committed brought before us here and there in the letters, although a significant fact, do not constitute the main fact. The main fact is the pervasive concernment of the letters with the moral correction and advancement of Christians. The letters are compact of imperatives. We have had occasion to observe how Wernle attempts to meet the challenge of these imperatives in the sixth chapter of Romans. It is scarcely worth while, however, to endeavor to explain away one here and there. They crowd every epistle; and this general fact cannot be met by declaring¹³² that Paul did not know the difference between *sein* and *sollen*, so that to this man who understood how to use the imperative better than anybody else who ever lived, “the difference between the natural and the ethical, what we are and what we ought to be, was hidden.” After all is said, it remains true that

exhortations like these imply imperfection, effort, growth; and these things accordingly appear as the characteristic of the Christian life as it is brought before us in Paul’s epistles. F. Winkler observes quite to the point:¹³³ “We have no New Testament letter to which there are not adjoined ethical exhortations, which set sanctification before us in its progressive nature with the fundamental tendency of ‘Not that I have already attained or am already made perfect, but I press on after it’ (Philippians 3:12ff.).” It is meaningless to attempt to explain away Philippians 3:12. The whole New Testament is an extended Philippians 3:12, and is based fundamentally on the presupposition that a holy life is an achievement and is attained by continuous effort, the goal of which lies ever in the future. Wernle is compelled by his thesis to contend that nevertheless Paul does not contemplate any growth in the Christian life. The Parousia was immediately impending, says he: there was no time for growth. The Christian must at all times be already grown, or the Parousia would catch him unready.

The Parousia thus appears as “in the higher sense the regulator of the Christian life.”¹³⁴ “It is clear from this,” Wernle explains, “how wholly perverse it is to talk of a process, or a *development*, of the Christian life with Paul. He prescribes an incessant separation from the world, and renewal of the mind; he does not rest satisfied with conversion; nevertheless the conception of development can only by a misunderstanding be introduced into the Pauline ethics. The nearness of the Parousia leaves no place for it whatever; what it demands is precisely that we be ready when the Lord comes; it makes it difficult so much as to set before ourselves a high goal in the distance. Therefore the ethics of Romans 12-13 passes no other judgment on sin than the rest of the letter. Because the idea of development is wholly absent, there is no place for it here; there is nothing here but the either — or. He who does evil incurs the wrath of God, and of His agent the earthly magistracy. The Christian who does evil has nothing else to expect than the heathen; there is no forgiveness which makes his position more endurable. The conclusion of chapter 13 falls in with this. He who still walks in darkness

¹³² Pp. 59f.

¹³³ Pp. 114f.

¹³⁴ “Robert Pearsall Smith und der Perfektionismus,” 2tes Tausend, 1915, p. 12.

must perish when the 'day' appears. The Christian life is a life in the clear light of the coming day; it has nothing to hide, it needs no twilight. It is absolutely impossible to have part in Christ and still to do the pleasure of the flesh; that is, the Christian in sin has secured no place whatever in the Pauline ethics. By such a notion it would have lost its very core." No sooner, however, has Wernle made this strong assertion that the Christian according to Paul is always "finished," always all that he is to be, so that he may be ready for the Parousia, than he is compelled by passages like Colossians 1:5, Philippians 3:20f., Romans 8:11ff., to allow that the Parousia does not find him finished, but contributes something to his "glory." So long as he lives here below he has "to contend with the remains of the old world in his body."¹³⁵ This seems to him to be in contradiction with Paul's general teaching, and he takes refuge as always in the manifest inconsistency between Paul's teaching as he expounds it and the matter of fact which is always seeking recognition at his hands: "It remains always a mere assertion that the Christian has broken once for all with sin; experience is always compelling corrections, exhortations and threats."

It is not, however, merely by exhortations and threats that Paul deals with the sinning Christians into contact with whom his experience brought him. He tells us of individual cases of sinning Christians with whom he dealt by discipline. They occur from the earliest epistles (2 Thessalonians 3:12ff.) on, and in no case is the sin dealt with, even when of the grossest nature (1 Corinthians 5:5), treated, as Wernle would have us believe Paul must needs look upon it even at its lightest, as destroying the Christian character. In Galatians 6:1ff. this practice of discipline is generalized and made a standing Christian duty toward erring brethren, a manifest proof that it was supposed that Christian brethren might err and need to be corrected, as indeed is directly asserted. Wernle's dealing with this passage is very instructive.¹³⁶ He begins by declaring that only the lighter sins are contemplated here: an assertion borne out neither by the term employed, nor by the context: surely the nature of the faults intended is

intimated in Galatians 5:19ff. He then goes on to say that it is presupposed that at the moment of sinning, even in the case of light faults, the Christian loses the Spirit — an assertion again wholly without warrant from either the text or the context, or rather in complete disaccord with both. The term rendered "restore him" in our English version means just "correct him," "set him right." And the presupposition of the context is that, in the perpetual conflict between the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:17), any Christian may, at any time, be overtaken by a fault. Wernle is merely, in the interests of his theory that a Christian cannot sin, representing every Christian that sins as no longer a Christian; and that involves, of course, a repeated passage back and forth from Christianity to the world and back again to Christianity, in the ease of one who sins from time to time and is "corrected." Accordingly Wernle writes: "Thus the Christian life falls into a perpetual uncertainty, an eternal falling and rising again; it falls apart into separate pieces which are divided by periods of sin. And this cannot possibly be otherwise in an ethical theory based on the Spirit. This sharp division between sinner and pneumatic draws constantly after it a pulverization of the conception of life, and leaves it dependent on each moment whether the Christian is a sinner or a pneumatic." The bald assumption which lies at the bottom of such a deliverance — responsible for much of Wernle's false construction of Paul's teaching — is that queer doctrine argued by Karl, merely assumed by Wernle, that one must be all a sinner or else all a pneumatic; that there can be no intermediation between them: in other words that the Spirit works His effects always instantaneously complete and never through progressive stages. There is not only no warrant for this, but it is contradicted on every page of Paul's letters. Then Wernle remarks that Paul speaks in this passage no single word of "grace," or "forgiveness" — any more than in the letters to the Corinthians: "setting right" — that is what is suitable for the sinner. The remark is true enough. The sinning Christian needs only to be set right — because the forgiveness is presupposed; the Christian is living under a dispensation of forgiveness.

That Paul teaches that Christians are living under a dispensation of forgiveness is, to be sure, precisely what Wernle is most strenuously

¹³⁵ P. 117.

¹³⁶ Pp. 75f.

denying. Justification, according to his most insistent contention, has to do in Paul only with past sins, not future ones; there are no “future sins” — for Christians do not, cannot sin. What Paul says, however, is quite unamenable to such an interpretation. He does not say, “There is therefore now no sinning for those in Christ Jesus.” He says, “There is therefore no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus”; and on the face of it this means not that those in Christ Jesus have received forgiveness for their past sins and must look out for themselves hereafter; but that those in Christ Jesus live in an atmosphere of perpetual forgiveness. Wernle, of course, cannot allow that. “The Reformers repeated this sentence often,” says he,¹³⁷ “but always understood it wrongly. They interpreted it as teaching that the Christian is freed from the condemnation of the law even though he should sin, because forgiveness becomes his daily portion through his faith in the vicarious suffering of Christ: in all their sorrow for sin this clause gave them their surest consolation. Paul, however, grounds freedom from condemnation on this — that the Christian is freed from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; that therefore the demand of the law is fulfilled in the pneumatic man. The Christian is no longer condemned because he no longer sins up to the Parousia, because he is a pneumatic man. Nowhere perhaps does the difference between the two theories come so clearly to expression as in this verse. For the Reformers, everything turns on this — that the Christian in spite of his sin, can be a joyful child of God; for Paul, that he is delivered from his sin and makes his entrance into his future life. It is always the intensified eschatological expectation which separates Paul from the Reformers.” It ought to be enough to point out that there is no apparent eschatological reference in Romans 8:1, beyond that which is involved in the very notion of salvation. And it certainly ought to be enough to point out that in this passage least of all can Paul be supposed to be teaching the perfection of Christians. What, at bottom, Wernle makes Paul do here is to suspend the salvation of Christians on themselves — there is to be no condemnation only if they cease from sinning and maintain their sinlessness up to the Parousia. And certainly it is a desperate expedient to make Paul

a patron of a work-salvation, whether apart from or in conjunction with faith.

As the passage is treated by Wernle, however, as a kind of crucial one, it may not be amiss to scrutinize its language a little more closely. Paul says, “There is *therefore* now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus,” and is therefore drawing an inference from the immediately preceding statement. That preceding statement is, “Accordingly then the same I with the mind serve the law of God, with the flesh, however, the law of sin.” That is to say, when Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation,” he is inferring that there is no condemnation from his divided mind — not from his wholly sinless state. This clause also, however, opens with an illative particle, which carries us back to the “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God, (it is) through Jesus Christ our Lord.” And that is the cry wrung from Paul by his analysis of his divided mind. Paul then certainly means to represent the “no condemnation” as his in spite of remaining sin and sinning. When now in the second verse of the eighth chapter he supports his assertion that there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus by declaring that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed us from the law of sin and death,” he is repeating in substance what he had said in the last clause of Romans 7:25, with a clearer indication of the reason of the effect produced. The reason why his divided mind results in an assurance that there is no condemnation is that its division is not between equal claimants, but that one is wholly preponderant — and the preponderant one is “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” His mind is divided only because the Spirit of Christ Jesus has invaded it, and by invading it has freed it from the control of sin. The term employed for “freed” is not the term for “cleansed,” but the term for “emancipated”: it has slavery, not impurity, for its background. It is bondage to sin which is affirmed to be broken; not cleansing from sin which is affirmed to be effected. This Spirit of Christ, breaking our bondage to sin, we are told, has come to us as the result of a substitutive atonement wrought by Christ in our behalf (Romans 8:3); and it is explicitly declared that this atonement, condemning sin in the flesh, was “in order to the fulfilling in us of the righteousness of the law” — of “what the law has

¹³⁷ P. 109.

laid down as its rightful demand: the singular comprehend[ing the] ... collective (moral) claims of right as a unity" — as H. A. W. Meyer puts it. Thus Paul teaches that our "no condemnation" in spite of our continuing sins is no ministering to evil, but has our fulfilment of the law as its necessary sequence: in other words that our justification not only covers our future as well as our past sins, but has a causal relation to our sanctification. Clearly it is the Reformers, not Wernle, who have understood Paul.

The publication of Wernle's book made something like a sensation. The subject of "the sins of Christians" was brought by it, as Hans Windisch puts it,¹³⁸ into "the foreground of theological discussion." The opinions expressed upon the subject were very varied. Many of the same general way of thinking — adherents, as Windisch would put it, of "the critical-scientific theology," or, as Fr. Winkler more distinguishingly describes them,¹³⁹ of the "history of religion wing of the modern theology" — rallied to Wernle and indeed formed a party among whom it rapidly became something like a tradition that Paul teaches in one way or another the sinlessness of Christians. Naturally, however, adverse critics were much the more numerous. Paul Feine puts it strongly when he says:¹⁴⁰ "This hypothesis called out almost universal contradiction, which did not remain without influence upon Wernle himself." Whether under the influence of this adverse criticism or not, Wernle did find himself ultimately unable to maintain the positions he had so violently asserted.

Already on the appearance of his "Beginnings of our Religion,"¹⁴¹ the old contentions by which he had startled the world had dropped out of sight. He has a chapter here on "the piety of the community and the piety of Paul himself"; and while the general portrait of Paul which he draws in it is not wholly dissimilar to his former mode of conceiving him, yet there is no repetition of the earlier book's fantastic description of him as a man sinless in his own eyes and attributing a like

sinlessness to his converts asserting it of them, rather, with the fanaticism of a doctrinaire theorist although the actual facts staring him in the face shrieked against his creed. Perhaps the nearest that he comes here to repeating those old assertions is when, in discussing the contrast between sin and grace (on which he says Paul was the first to ground piety), he declares that with Paul "sin and grace" were thought of as successive, not contemporaneous. That is one of his old contentions and may be intended here in the old meaning; but it is not developed here. Elsewhere he tells us in the old spirit, that, Paul throwing the emphasis on grace and being fundamentally a man of feeling, the danger of his point of view was ethical sloth. This, however, says Wernle now, the Apostle struggled against with all his might, and then instances the sixth chapter of Romans in proof. The sixth chapter of Romans appears here, then, as an effort on Paul's part to ethicize his congregation, and not, as in the former book, primarily as evidence that, being in his view by necessity of their new birth holy, they needed no ethicizing. In other words, the imperative reading of this chapter has taken the place of the indicative reading of it insisted on in the former book.

The changes thus indicated are not small, and they were to go further. In a few years it came about that Hans Windisch¹⁴² did for Wernle what Wernle had done for Ritschl — took his rapid sketch, and extended, elaborated, deepened it. If Wernle's book is to Ritschl's paragraph or two, what, say, our good right arm is to our little finger, Windisch's treatise is to Wernle's book what the whole body is to the arm. Wernle undertook to show that to Paul (the Paul of his special selection of epistles) the Christian is a sin-free man, and he paints his Paul with a very broad brush. Windisch undertakes to demonstrate the same proposition for the whole New Testament, and not content with the New Testament pushes his inquiry back to Ezekiel and forward to Origen, and examines the whole ground through a microscope. Wernle, looking apparently on Windisch's at once brilliant and labored treatise, not as the triumphant demonstration but as the *reductio ad absurdum* of his own thesis, out of which it grew, took occasion from its publication to sing his *mea*

¹³⁸ "Taufe und Sünde im ältesten Christentum bis auf Origines," 1908, p. 2.

¹³⁹ "Robert Pearsall Smith und der Perfektionismus," 2: 1915, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ "Theologic des Neuen Testaments," 1910, p. 420, note.

¹⁴¹ "Die Anfänge unserer Religion," 1901; ed. 2, 1904, pp. 250, 252f.

¹⁴² As cited.

culpa. Paul to him is still fundamentally the missionary, but he is no longer supposed to have thought Christians sinless: "Missionaries who imagine that Christians no longer sin, are sinless men in their actual nature," he now writes,¹⁴³ "are not known to history, have never been known to history. Accordingly, the apparently contradictory theory must be corrected by the practice out of which it came, and from which it is framed. A purer man of practice than Paul, there never was; everything with him is an 'ought' and finds its place under a life-purpose. And thus the whole theory of sinlessness so far as it is found in him expresses nothing more than the energy of his requirements, and the radicalness of his faith that his God will fashion something stable out of the weak, wavering, sinking, hundred-times falling Christians. There is optimism here, of course, not only an optimism of the backward, but of the forward view, not isolated from experience, but deeply apprehending the sad experience and pushing forward to the goal." He still thinks that Paul believes it *possible* for Christians to become sinless, because he took such expressions as "new creature," "newborn children," "second birth," seriously. Possible, but by no manner of means necessary; all of Paul's apparent indicatives are nothing at bottom but strengthened imperatives; when he speaks in the sixth of Romans of an inability to sin — that is but the strongest possible way of saying that it is very improper to sin. He still thinks Paul was no teacher of "miserable-sinner Christianity"; his object was not to comfort men in their sins but to deliver them from them, and "he believed in the final purification of his communities for the day of judgment and in the salvation of all who had been called and elected even though many would need to pass through hard judgments." Paul's belief in election, he says, had its roots in his radical experience of God and possession of God, which allowed no place for a God who does His work only half way. Lapses into sin, light or serious, are not excluded by this mighty faith in election and grace; but grace abounds above sin and will ultimately have its way. Those that sin Paul does not comfort by pointing them to grace; that was forbidden by his whole tendency as a missionary. He warns them of the divine judgment and calls them to repentance. They will be punished according to their sins and saved as

by fire. As we read this retraction we are almost tempted to think that Wernle has joined the company of the prophets. The ball which he had set to rolling had to roll very far, however, before it came to rest at this point.❧❧❧

¹⁴³ *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 34: 1909, coll. 589f.

Neither Are We Amateurs

John Piper, *Brothers, We Are NOT Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 286+15pp. \$14.99 US.

Reviewed by Richard E. Bacon.



iper draws his title for this collection of essays written to Ministers of Word & Sacrament from the idea that the term “professional” is one best reserved for lawyers or corporate CEOs. In that sense it is difficult to disagree with him. However, as the term applies to doing one’s calling well and understanding that ministry is not a calling belonging to every adopted son of God, Piper may give one the wrong impression. In the latter sense, this review maintains, “Brothers we most certainly ought to strive for professional excellence.”

But Pastor Piper is correct in saying that the word “professional” has been coopted and is often used in the way he uses it in his title. The man of God is not a “mere professional,” as one who seeks parity among the other professions of the world. Piper is correct that it is sometimes a desire to be “seen as professional” that creates in the heart of the pastor a cooling of his zeal or a change in his goals for ministry. Certainly in the sense that any attitude has that effect upon the man of God, he must reject the attitude or desire that brings it about. However, it could be that a better term might have been chosen than “professionalism.”

Beyond the shocking title of the book, it consists simply of thirty chapters in which Piper explains to ministers how to apply ideas he has already written about in previous books. In this book one again finds the tension that exists in Piper when he tells pastors to preach justification by faith alone and then in the next chapter tells them to make sure that people do not obey God merely out of gratitude to him. This tension is a significant weakness in Piper’s writings generally, and it continues in the present volume. So it is that Piper continues to insult the motive of gratitude, held by all the reformers to be the right response to God’s grace, in his chapter “Brothers, Beware of the Debtor’s Ethic.” This is the same

language and contempt that Piper exhibited in his earlier *Future Grace*.

Piper characterizes the motive of gratitude for God’s grace as “God has done so much for you; now what will you do for Him?” Alternatively, he claims, it may be packaged as “He gave you his life; how much will you give him?” He then claims that such ideas are intended as paying back the debt which we owe to God. The fact is that thankfulness and payback are two quite different things. Piper confounded them in *Future Grace* and continues to do so in this book on pastoral theology – or at least a book written to pastors. Piper claims in both books that the motive of thankfulness is virtually missing in Scripture. This reviewer, along with the reformed confessions, disagrees entirely with Piper’s assessment about this motive. It is neither a “debt-ethic” as Piper calls it, nor is it so absent in Scripture as Piper would have us to believe.

He is careful to “hedge his bets.” He uses terms like “almost totally lacking” and “not explicitly mentioned.” Of course, the reformed hermeneutic (and any Trinitarian view) holds that the implications, as well as the explications, of Scripture bind the conscience. Further, while it is good to see a doctrine ripple throughout all Scripture, this one does. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* rightly teaches at Q&A #2 (Lord’s Day 1), “How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort,¹ mayest live and die happy?” The catechism explains, “Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.” In this answer one sees the

1.1 emphasize the words “enjoying this comfort” because Piper writes as though the enjoyment of God and gratitude toward God were somehow different and even contrary motivations.

threefold division of the catechism into “Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude.” The importance of this answer is that it very clearly teaches that the fruits of the Christian life are altogether distinguished from the salvation of the Christian. As Ursinus² commented on the second answer, he pointed out several things about the answer, among which were “God ...will not have us to be grateful under any other form than that which he has prescribed in his word.” Ursinus also explained, “whatever duties we perform towards God and our neighbor, are not meritorious, but are a declaration of our thankfulness; for that which we do from gratitude, we acknowledge we have not deserved.”³

We should note carefully that the motive of gratitude is precisely the motive of those who have received something they did not deserve. But so far is such a motive from being a “paying back” that Ursinus regarded it as an important proof of the motive that it decries all merit from the works we do as Christians. In similar fashion, Johannes Vanderkemp, in his *Commentary* (sermons) on the *Heidelberg Catechism* stated, “The compilers of the catechism were induced to adopt this method by the example of Paul, in his epistle to the Romans. For that highly enlightened man speaks there first of the misery of the sinner from chapter 1:8 to chapter 3:21. At which place he begins the doctrine of the deliverance, which he concludes with chapter 11:36. And to this he annexes the doctrine of gratitude, in the five last chapters. In this excellent way doth the Lord God also conduct the sinner to the only comfort.”⁴

Having spoken against Piper’s earlier condemnation of gratitude as motivation, one should also note that he has modified his previous views in *Future Grace* in such a way as to allow that there is a right place for gratitude as motive. But even so, Piper continues to make a category error. He subsumes gratitude under joy (not too great a problem, because the HC seems to subsume it somewhat under comfort), then proceeds to make works meritorious – not of past

blessings, but of future blessings (hence the title of his previous book). Piper states, “the way our joy expresses the value of free grace is by admitting we don’t deserve it, and by banking our hope on it and doing everything we do as a recipient of more and more grace Good deeds do not pay back grace; they borrow more grace.” Piper concludes, “Gratitude does help motivate the radical obedience of love, but it does so indirectly through the service of faith in future grace.”⁵ Piper claims that his concern is with what he calls “the debtor ethic” turning into legalism. But in this reviewer’s opinion, the legalism is more in view in thinking that we work for future outpourings of “grace” (which is not really grace but wages).

Piper is at his best, in the opinion of this reviewer, when he writes to those embroiled in controversy. The warning Piper gives is not to confuse humility with uncertainty. Even among many conservative so-called Presbyterians, this writer has heard terms like “that may be truth for you,” or simply “that is only your truth.” When one stands in conservative presbyteries and uncompromisingly refers to the church’s constitution as the truth, he ought not to be greeted with such warnings as “beware the sin of arrogance and pride” or “it is better that you say such things with an element of humility.” Of course humility is a Christian virtue and arrogance and pride are sins. That much is incontrovertible. However, it is not pride to speak of truth in absolute terms and it is not humility to pretend that God has not revealed truth in his Word. But it is not enough to say what humility is not. If it is a Christian virtue that ministers are called upon to practice, then it is important to us to know what it is. Piper does well here.

1. Humility begins with a sense of subordination to God in Christ.
2. Humility does not feel a right to better treatment than Jesus got.
3. Humility asserts truth not to bolster the ego with control or with triumphs in debate, but as service to Christ and love to the adversary.
4. Humility knows it is dependent on grace for all knowing, believing, living, and acting.
5. Humility knows it is fallible and so considers

2. Ursinus was the principle author of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

3. Both quotations from *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, First Lord’s Day.

4. Johannes Vanderkemp, *The Christian Entirely the Property of Christ, in Life and Death*. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books), 1.12-13.

5. Piper, *We Are NOT Professionals*, 38.

criticism and learns from it, but it also knows that God has made provision for unshakable human conviction and that He calls us to persuade others.⁶

It is important for every minister of God to develop and demonstrate humility. Calvin adduced Augustine, claiming that the three requisite virtues in a minister are humility, humility, and humility. Yet Piper (following G.K. Chesterton on this point, by the way) is careful to point out that humility does not require uncertainty and conviction does not consist in arrogance.

Piper has some other things to say that will not set well with paedobaptists, but we must understand that we are not his primary audience either. Piper is more reformed than most of the people who read him and the point is that many do read him. I have talked to Baptist ministers who claim that he is way over the heads of the average Baptist minister. I cannot say if that is true. But he is speaking to them in a way that perhaps we are not doing. ✠✠✠

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6. Piper, *Professionals*, 162-66.

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