CALVIN500/ARMINIUS400

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An Introductory Lecture and Three Sermons

Dr. Ralph Blair

CALVIN500/ARMINIUS400: An Introductory Lecture

Calvin500. It's not the new line from Calvin Klein. And Arminius400 isn't Armani's new fragrance.

See, *some* gay men are *queer* enough to get into something more than fashion and fragrance. That's us, right! Back in the '80s, the *New York Times* said that our Friday night Bible study "is not what most people think New York gay men do on Friday nights." And, most still don't.

At least here in New York, very few gay men meet on Friday nights for Bible study. More do as a *New York Press* writer testifies he does: "It's Friday night and I'm headed to the East Side Club, one of the last two remaining gay bathhouses in New York City." He describes it as a "labyrinth of interconnecting dark hallways lined on either side with innumerable clapboard rooms." I don't think he intended the pun.

And yet, according to evangelical pollster George Barna, across America, "a substantial majority of gays cite their faith as a central facet of their life ... and claim to have some type of meaningful personal commitment to Jesus Christ."

Well, try telling an average New Yorker or evangelical Christian that a bunch of gay men are meeting in Ocean Grove this weekend in honor of two 16th century Protestant Reformers and to hear some biblical preaching and you'll get *any* response but, "Well, duh!" Yet, here we are! One gay Christian emailed me, saying that he and another gay Christian would skip our event so they wouldn't miss what he called the "historic" Equality March in Washington. But I'd say what we're doing *here* is really more *historic* than yet another staged rally of gay rage in Washington.

Calvinists celebrate Calvin with gusto. Arminians celebrate Arminius—but with a little less gusto. And each group can be rather hostile to the other. This year, around the world, there are many celebrations of Calvin and at least one other commemoration of Arminius. But *our* event here in Ocean Grove seems to be the only one that's remembering *both* theologians—*together*.

Maybe it's not so strange that *we're* the ones celebrating both groups' guys. After all, *we're* two groups' guys—evangelical and gay. So it's not such a stretch for us to see things from two perspectives—together.

On July 10, 1509, a little boy was born to the Calvin family of Noyon in France. He was named Jean. Now, he's known as John Calvin, second only to Martin Luther in significance among the Protestant Reformers—and ahead of Luther as the Reformation's *systematic* theologian. Yale church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette called Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "the most influential single book of the Protestant Reformation."

For historical perspective, Calvin was born two weeks after the coronation of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. Erasmus had just written *In Praise of Folly*. When Calvin was born, Luther was 26 and tormented with guilt, still looking for the *gracious* God he'd find 3 years later in the latrine of the tower in Wittenberg. When Calvin, himself, was 26, he wrote his first Latin edition of *The Institutes*. Calvin was 37 when Luther died. The two men never met. But Luther's closest friend, Philip Melanchthon, became a dear friend to Calvin. Calvin met John Knox when the Scot sought refuge in Geneva. Michelangelo, too, was Calvin's contemporary. Both he and Calvin died in 1564, though the artist was 89 and Calvin only 55. Another notable contemporary was Miles Coverdale. In 1535, he did the first English translation of the entire Bible. Others of Calvin's day were the English composer Thomas Tallis and John Foxe, author of the famous book of martyrs, published the year before Calvin died.

It was probably in 1559, though the exact year is not certain, that Arminius was born in Holland, at Oudewater, near Utrecht. That year, Calvin was 50 years old—the age the younger man would reach in the year he'd suddenly die. Over in England, the Catholic queen, "Bloody" Mary, had died in November of 1558, and now, in 1559, a Protestant, Elizabeth I, was England's queen. In the Act of Uniformity, she decreed that all her royal subjects would worship in the Church of England each Sunday or they'd pay a hefty fine for not doing so. And John Knox had just returned from exile in Geneva to lead the Scottish Reformation.

Just as little Jean Calvin was only later "John Calvin"—after Latinizing his name to Johannes Calvinius, as was the custom for classical scholars little Jacob Harmenszoon was only later Arminius—after he Latinized his name in honor of the 1st-century Germanic fighter who resisted *other* Roman legions.

Placing Arminius into historical perspective, when he died in 1609, at around the age of 50, the King James Bible translators were hard at work. Henry Hudson was exploring the forested site of the future New York City and sailing his "Half Moon" up the river that would one day bear his name.

When Arminius died in 1609, Sir Walter Raleigh was 47, Shakespeare was 45, King James I was 43, the astronomer, Johannes Kepler, 38, poet John Donne, 36 and poet George Herbert was but 16.

It was also in 1609, and there, too, in the town of Leiden where Arminius died, that John Robinson arrived from England. He and his congregation were seeking refuge from religious persecution. Eleven years later, Robinson would bid Godspeed to these "Pilgrims" as they set sail on the "Mayflower."

Also, in 1609, in Amsterdam, two other English Christians were seeking asylum from religious persecution. They were John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. They were holding Bible studies in the back room of an Amsterdam East India bakery owned by a Mennonite. Today's worldwide fellowship of Baptists traces its beginnings to that little back room Bible study 400 years ago.

A half-century later, Non-conformists were still being persecuted by the Anglicans. One was the Baptist tinker, John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. For preaching the Gospel, he was imprisoned in the Bedford jail for 12 years. All Baptists believe in believer's baptism, congregational autonomy and separation of church and state. Some Baptists follow Calvin while others follow Arminius.

A few weeks ago, one of the assistant ministers at Redeemer Presbyterian Church said that he and his wife had visited France this summer. I le mentioned it was "so disorienting—the old narrow streets, the foreign language and all." Well, if France in 2009 is disorienting, you can imagine how disoriented we'd all be to time-travel to the France of 1509 or the Holland of 1609. Or the Ocean Grove of 1909! I have here a copy of the Ocean Grove annual report from 1909. Here's an item under the heading: "Garage." According to the report: "The question of a place for automobiles in Ocean Grove has been for some time past an embarrassing one. The machines have come to stay. Ocean Grove people own them, and the law will not permit their being kept in the vicinity of a dwelling. We have no place specially provided for them, except a very much circumscribed portion of the stable grounds."

The report urges that the Real Estate Committee find "space where suitable buildings can be erected for their keeping"—hence, the heading, "Garage." And then there's this strangely worded instruction to the auditorium ushers: All who are "passing out will please use the nearest aisles." Don't you suppose that all who are *passing out* could not do other than use the *nearest* aisle?

Well, it's really not possible to wrap our minds around what it must have been like to live even 100 years ago, let alone as long ago and as far away as 16th century Europe. It was a whole other world and a whole other time—not only old narrow streets and foreign language, but innumerable sights and sounds and smells and yes, even stench. Customs, conventions, assumptions and expectations *familiar* to us would *not* be there. Customs, conventions, assumptions and expectations *unfamiliar* to us *would* be there. So, for us, it would be very

strange, indeed. Whether we, in the 21st century, try to "get" life back in the 16th century—or back in the day of 1st century Christians—we must be humble and cautious and aware that we really *can't* "get" back there as well as we might suppose.

But, it must be said that it was also a very strange time and place for the people back there in the 16th century, for it was an era in which so much that had remained *unchanged* for centuries was now changing rapidly.

One of the biggest changes was the change from rural life to city life—with all its difficult displacement from families of origin and from the habituated agrarian routines. There were consequent changes in commerce. And the old familiar church was now splitting up. Young vandals were smashing stained glass windows for sport. The religiously persecuted were fleeing from place to place and, though safer in their strange new environs, they nonetheless were viewed as aliens.

What you may think you know or have heard about Calvin and Arminius, or about Calvinism and Arminianism, before this weekend may be more *caricature* than *credible*. Calvin and Arminius stirred things up and, as Bob Jones, Sr. used to say: "You can't move without causing friction." Since Calvin and Arminius *moved* people and ideas, friction followed them. And friction can lead to fiction.

Fisher Humphreys, a freshman friend of mine from old Bob Jones University days, has now retired from the theology faculty of Beeson Divinity School. (I'm glad to say he'll be a keynoter at our Kirkridge weekend in June.) In his review of a recent defense of Arminianism, he notes the "misunderstandings of Arminian theology that are often held by Calvinists—and Arminians!" So don't think *you* should know Calvinism and Arminianism better than do many self-styled Calvinists and Arminians. Calvinist R. C. Sproul says this about such caricatures, misinterpretations and misrepresentations: "I frequently hear criticism of Calvinistic thought that I would heartily agree with if, indeed, it represented Calvinism. So, I am sure, the disciples of Arminius suffer the same fate and become equally frustrated." As do we, we might add—we, who are gay people and routinely caricatured, misinterpreted and misrepresented by many Calvinists and Arminians.

A common caricature of Calvin is that he was harsh, hateful and humorless. There can be some truth to that. After all, to use a good Calvinist term, we're *all* "totally depraved."

In his preface to his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin recounts that when he was around 21, God "turned my course in another direction [and] tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years." Then, with the heart of a committed servant, he thereafter adopted, as his personal

motto, *Cor meum tibi offero, Domine, promptc et sincere*, "My heart I offer to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely." A heart in a hand is a common symbol of Calvin.

Calvin saw that true Christian commitment meant *freedom* from guilt and despair, and release from the pointless penance that cannot resolve the problem of sin. For Calvin, as it was for Luther and the other Protestant Reformers, God's unmerited grace in Christ was the *total* solution to our sin and guilt. Gratitude to God through, for example, one's vocation and in learning all one can about God's world and rendering service to all in need—these were some of the appropriate and God-honoring responses to God's undeserved goodness to us.

Calvin saw himself in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets' ridding the land of idolatry. He dedicated his legal brilliance to focus on responsible legislation for the civic good. He dedicated his classically trained mind to a systematizing of biblical revelation. And it was clearly Calvin's insight and emphasis, as Max Weber noted, that produced the Protestant work ethic and led to the expansion of business for the employment of the poor. He refined the principles of representational government that were foundational to the formation of the U. S. government. And he argued for the idea of separation of church and state.

Calvin challenged the old theological tradition on usury, the charging of interest. In spite of all the Bible verses opposing usury—from Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel and Nehemiah—Calvin came out *for* usury. He taught that while interest-*free* loans should be made available to the poor, the longstanding Christian ban on the charging of interest hobbled commercial enterprise that could ultimately benefit the poor. This was one of the ways that Calvin laid the theological groundwork for capitalism.

Calvin subsumed the whole question of interest under the larger concern that love for the welfare of another is key to Christian conduct. He argued that the circumstances in biblical days did not match the circumstances of the 16th century. He wrote: "Our situation is quite different. For that reason I am unwilling to condemn [usury], as long as it is practiced with equity and love. Hence, I conclude that we ought not to judge usury according to a few passages of scripture, but in accordance with the principles of equity." Calvin believed that the *full* revelation of scripture should be taken so seriously that, in his words, we don't "play around with God in a childish way, regarding mere words more than the truth itself."

When conservative New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson wrote that loving concern for our gay neighbors trumps a traditional take on some antigay proof-texts—even if they may, indeed, be antigay—he was roundly dismissed by antigay Christians as trampling on the Bible. But was Johnson doing something different from what Calvin did? Traditionalists thought of the anti-usury position as a settled issue in 16th century Bible interpretation, just as traditionalists today think the antigay position is a settled issue. But Calvin proved it wasn't a settled issue—regardless of those proof-texts. And today, regardless of so-called "clobber passages," there's an overarching *biblical* reason to read those verses in light of the *whole* Bible.

Calvin's biblical concern for the marginalized, the oppressed and the refugees who were fleeing to Geneva due to religious persecution in England, France and elsewhere is obvious in his saying: "We cannot but behold our own face as it were in a glass in the person that is poor and despised ... though he were the furthest stranger in the world. Let a Moor or a barbarian [or, we might add today, a *gay* person] come among us, and yet inasmuch as he is a human being, he brings with him a looking glass wherein we may see that he is our brother and neighbor." If Calvin could see a *barbarian* as brother, how can descendents of Calvin refuse to see a *gay Christian* as brother?

Calvin rigorously reprimanded the rich—especially the wealthy mercantile class, accusing them of selfishly oppressing the poor. He ridiculed them, saying: "They would, if they could, snatch the sun from the sky for their own use, leaving the poor in the dark." He lashed out at warmongers, too. But his deepest disdain and disgust—as was his Lord's—was for all the self-righteous, the hypocrites and evil ecclesiastical leaders.

What were some of Calvin's opinions on sex and gender? Well, we must frankly admit that, along with his contemporaries, he was something of a male chauvinist. He blamed women for many of the sexual sins of men, including their husband's sin, saying: "Husbands are often corrupted by their wives into debauchery." He said: "A lascivious woman is worse than all the adulterers she captivates with her enticements" and he illustrated this by saying that a young man might resist devils and remain pure, but "when a shameless and wanton woman entices him, it's all over for him." And he was repelled by the thought of *elderly* women still seeking the "delights of the bridal bed." Even today's politically correct can share *this* aversion.

He blamed Bathsheba for David's sexual sin, saying that she should have hidden herself so that David could not possibly have gazed upon her. Calvin defended Joseph's initial reaction to Mary's pregnancy, saying that Joseph "was not of such a soft and effeminate mind as to shelter a crime [of adultery] under his wing on the pretext of compassion!" In his commentary on John 8:11, Calvin was troubled by what he took to be Jesus' leniency toward the woman taken in adultery. Calvin worried that this report might be interpreted as *excusing* sexual sin and might push people down a slippery slope to "poison, murder and robbery."

He denounced dancing as a prelude to fornication—unlike the old Fundamentalists who denounced fornication as a prelude to dancing. And he defended the euphemism, "to sleep with," as less likely to arouse erotic temptations than a more explicit term.

He lashed out at what he saw as women's "silly vanity" in clothes and fancy hair. He denounced dieting to allow for the wearing of more provocative dresses. In one of his sermons from the pulpit of St. Pierre's, he mimicked the high-pitched voice of a petulant wife to her pestered

husband: “Oh! That lady over there has a pretty petticoat made of such and such fine cloth. And look over there, that one has a collar made in such a way and she wears it everyday, not just on holiday. And there’s one who has such a well-made dress. And she’s of lower rank than I. Don’t I deserve as much as these others?” He faulted “foolish little women” who flit from altar to altar while sighing and muttering into midday, avoiding going home to do their housework.

But Calvin also went against the grain of his culture. For example, he opposed his era’s arranged marriages—which, after all, went back to Bible days. He argued that both men and women should wed whom they will. And in doing so, he said they should “take beauty into account” and that, if the two “do not love each other, it is a desecration of marriage and actually is no marriage at all. For the most important bond is that they both want it.”

Calvin also spoke out against enforced, lifelong celibacy.

Today’s antigay Calvinists could be instructed here on both counts, when they themselves push “arranged marriages” between persons of mismatched orientations, or insist that all gay people commit to lifelong celibacy. And today’s Calvinists might be surprised to read Calvin’s perceptive and practical advice that men not insist on virginity in their brides, given the contingencies of real-life situations.

Curiously, when he told his friends that he’d be open to having a wife, he informed them: “I am none of those insane lovers who ... are smitten at first sight by a fine figure. This only is the beauty which allures me—if she is modest, if not too fussy or fastidious, if thrifty, if patient, if there is hope that she be interested in my health.”

Certainly, Calvin’s reputation for being overly austere is overdrawn. For example, he would warn: “If you suppose that you may not permit yourself a nicer meal, in the end you will not eat normal bread or an ordinary dinner with a clear conscience before God when you realize that even more simple nourishment would do for your body. ... Finally, things will go so far that you think it sinful to step over a straw that blocks your path.” He reasoned: “If wine is a poison to the drunk, does that mean *we* are to have an aversion to it? Please, not. We do not let that spoil the taste for us, for on the contrary, we delight with the taste of wine.” Here, Calvin’s delight in wine—as with Luther’s fondness for beer—proved a bit of a shocker to their teetotaler fans of a later day.

As is clear, Calvin was no *legalist.* His doctrine of justification would not permit that. “Justification,” he wrote, “is the principal hinge by which religion is supported [and] the sum of all piety.”

An historian points out that, “Despite the number of studies and biographies which continue to appear on John Calvin, the man himself remains elusive. ... Calvin is all but entirely concealed

behind his theological writings." Another historian puts it humorously: Where Calvin tells us almost nothing about himself, Luther tells us all too much—and he has here, in mind, for example, Luther's earthy discourse on his bowel movements.

But it's in those very theological writings—plus Calvin's theologically informed and informative letters, that we can see how his firm confidence in *God's Fatherly love and full sovereignty over everything* got him through all the ups and downs of his life. And there definitely were downs along the way. His only child died 22 days after birth. His wife died eight years into their marriage. He suffered terribly from malaria, kidney stones, hemorrhoids and insomnia. He'd been hounded out of France and then, for a time, was forced out of his adopted Geneva. And, there were accusations of "sodomy" which, though *published* after his death, may have been lurking around in the background during his lifetime.

Oxford evangelical scholar Alister McGrath reminds us of these allegations in his 1990 biography of Calvin. They came from Calvin's fellow Frenchman, Jerome Bolsec, a one-time monk, then for a time a Reformed clergy-wannabe, and finally, once again, a Catholic and a physician back in France.

It was in 1577, more than a decade after Calvin's death, that Bolsec wrote a biography of Calvin. He alleged that, as a young man, "Calvin resigned his benefices at Noyon on account of the public exposure of his homosexual activities." Bolsec said Calvin was both homosexually *and* heterosexually active throughout his life, but he gives no documentation for homosexuality or for any extramarital heterosexuality. How are these allegations to be taken?

Do they shed any light on Calvin's having relentlessly pressed for Bolsec's execution, ostensibly for Bolsec's opposition to his doctrine of double predestination? Might Calvin have feared that, were his fellow Frenchman permitted to live, he *would* reveal what he finally did *claim* to reveal? Who can say? But Calvin's own cohorts opposed his pushing for Bolsec's execution and, in 1551, they simply banished Bolsec from Geneva.

Calvin's pressing for Bolsec's execution was uncovered only rather recently, during extensive doctoral research by Calvin College professor Philip Holtrop. In 1993, he published his findings in an exhaustive two-volume tome running to over 1,000 pages. As a committed Calvinist, he was, of course, shocked and disgusted by this hitherto unknown side to Calvin's character. However common it was for both Catholics and Reformers of that day to resort to capital punishment for heresy, and notwithstanding Calvin's own part in the execution of Michael Servitus for his calling the doctrine of the Trinity a "dogma of devils," Calvin's hostile *obsession* over Bolsec begs for an explanation that escapes us.

Holtrop tried to rationalize away what he found, but he couldn't. He concludes that Calvin's rabid reaction to Bolsec was, in his word, "ugly."

Needless to say, his findings have not been well received by Calvinists. Over the years, they've been embarrassed enough over the Servitus affair but could take a bit of solace in Calvin's having argued for a less painful execution than burning the man alive at the stake.

Incidentally, on October 27, 1903, 350 years to the day Servitus was executed, and at the very spot where he went up in flames, Calvinists gathered to place a "tablet of penance." It read: "We, the respectful and thankful sons of Calvin, the Great Reformer, condemning an error which was the error of the age in which Calvin lived, and valuing above all things liberty of conscience according to the true doctrine of the Reformation and the gospel, erect this monument of penance."

Well, probably no theological notion is more prominently linked to Calvin than is the dogma of predestination—the decree that God's determination, and God's determination *alone,* fully accounts for whatever happens inside and outside of history.

Of course, Calvin was neither the first nor was he the last to teach this dogma. Augustine had taught it before Calvin did. They both held that predestination was to be found in the Bible. However, in their dealing with this perspective in scripture, both men were probably too strongly influenced by Aristotle's philosophical views of causality.

But it was Calvin's *double* predestination that troubled Bolsec, Arminius and Wesley and, indeed, all Arminians ever since. Calvin's understanding of predestination was this: *God eternally decrees which individuals will be saved and which individuals will be lost*. In contrast, Arminians believe that God grants *ability to all* individuals to believe in Christ. To those who *do* believe, God grants special grace, resulting in their salvation.

Now ironically, but for a few diehard Calvinists who espouse an almost caricatured double predestination or reprobation, recent Reformed scholars have tended to tread lightly in its emphasis and, in effect, to be somewhat closer to Bolsec, the "heretic," than to Calvin, "the Reformer." Prominent Reformed scholars who clearly reject reprobation include Barth, Brunner, Berkouwer and Boer—the last of whom was an early friend of EC.

The big difference between Calvin and Arminius, so far as predestination was concerned, was that Calvin saw the doctrine of predestination from what he took to be the *necessity* of God's *absolute sovereignty* over everything whereas Arminius viewed predestination as linked to God's *foreknowledge*. To Calvinists, their view is required for God's glory. They argue that Arminians give that glory to human will. Arminians see the Calvinist view as insulting to God's character of love.

Arminius was among the first to argue that Calvin's explanation of the dogma of predestination was "repugnant" to God's justice. Arminius maintained that, as Calvin expounded

predestination, most of humanity would be lost by God's *absolutely arbitrary will.* Arminius did not *deny* the predestination *per se,* but he did deny that God *willed* to save only some.

It was always clear to all that not all turned to God. Indeed, Calvin formulated his idea of double predestination, at least in part, out of his painful observation that the same preaching of God's grace elicited very different responses from different people in his congregation in Geneva. How could he account for this? But whereas Calvin, in his effort to protect God's *sovereignty* in the matter, explained predestination as due to God's *divine decree,* Arminius, in his effort to protect God's *fairness,* explained predestination in terms of God's *foreknowledge* of human response.

Before going further into the theologies of Calvin and Arminius, let's look a little more into the life of the lesser known of these two men.

Little Jacob Harmenszoon was but a child when Calvin died—so they never engaged each other in stimulating theological debate. The heated debates would remain for their followers to enjoy. But Arminius himself held Calvin's *Commentaries* in the highest esteem. He endorsed Calvin's Bible exposition with an enthusiastic crescendo of praise: "I recommend that the *Commentaries* of Calvin be read ... for I affirm that in the interpretation of the Scripture, Calvin is incomparable and that his *Commentaries* are more to be valued than anything that is handed to us in the writings of the fathers ... so much so that I concede to him a certain spirit of prophecy, in which he stands distinguished above others, above most, indeed, above all."

Decades earlier, when he was but an infant, Jacob's father died. The young boy's intellectual promise was soon obvious to a local gentleman of means who took on the responsibility of sponsoring his schooling. It was when Jacob was about 15 and away at boarding school in Leiden that Spanish invaders besieged his hometown and massacred many of the town's citizens. Trudging 50 miles of roads to reach the home he'd known, he found that his mother and siblings were among those who'd been killed. The town iself was now but scorched wreckage. And he was an orphan.

Grieving, he made his way back to Leiden, resolved to continue his education. He later enrolled at the Geneva Academy under the tutelage of Calvin s successor and elaborator, Theodore Beza Unfortunately, the Calvinism he heard from Beza tended to be a rigid, and some would argue, overblown distortion of Calvin's doctrine. Where Calvin had thrilled to the Bible's emphasis on the Father's *majestic providence,* Beza thumped an all too abstract *absolute sovereignty*. Where Calvin had handled *providence* as a component of his doctrine of justification—it was not even a separate discussion in the first edition of his *Institutes*—in Beza's hands, predestination became the overreaching and rigid dogma that, indeed, was the "nerve center" of an entire theology. (David C. Steinmetz)

Arminius had serious questions about Beza's brand of Calvinism but he left Geneva without a major confrontation and went off to study at Basel. There, his professors were so impressed with his prowess that they offered him a doctor's degree He declined it modestly saying he was too young to accept such an honor. He was about 24. He then traveled to Italy for further study—a sojourn that his later Calvinist opponents would use to caricature him as a "Jesuit."

While serving as the pastor in the major church in Amsterdam, he undertook an intense study of Paul's letter to the Romans and concluded that Calvin was not right to attribute election to God without a person's faith's having a significant role in the matter. He affirmed that "as much good as possible should be ascribed to God's grace, provided an injustice is not done to God by teaching that He denies us free will."

Arminius had a pacific personality. In 1606, while teaching at the University of Leiden, he gave a lecture on "Reconciling Religious Dissensions Among Christians." He affirmed: "Religious dissension is the worst kind of disagreement for it strikes the very altar itself. It engulfs everyone; each must take sides or else make of himself a third party."

But dissensions continued—often mean-spirited and worse. So, as the leading pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church, Arminius called for a national synod to try to deal amicably with dissensions between Calvinists and anti-Calvinists that now were spreading all across Europe.

But the strain of the conflict was too much for a gentle man like Arminius. On the eve of the meetings, he collapsed and died on October 19th, 1609.

The synod would not meet for another nine years. But a year after he died, his colleagues formed what is known as the Remonstrance to publish the key points of Arminius's understanding of God's grace and human free will. Contrary to Calvinism, the Remonstrance contended that Christ died for all people but that they could, indeed, resist God's grace. These followers of Arminius taught, too, that believers could lose their salvation.

An acronym, "TULIP," represents the so-called five points of Calvinism. TULIP refers to Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and the Perseverance of the saints. But, the TULIP, as such, doesn't come from Calvin. It constitutes the Calvinist response to parallel points brought against Calvinism by the Arminian Remonstrance of 1610. The Calvinist response was produced at the Synod of Dort in 1619.

Calvin, himself, did not teach what is often misinterpreted as the meaning of the "L" in "TULIP," i.e., *limited* atonement. The misinterpretation of limited atonement is that Christ died for the sins of only a limited number of people and not for the sins of the whole world. Calvin had written: "There is ready pardon for all sinners, provided they turn back to seek it." The trouble is, as Paul puts it: "no one seeks God." (Romans 3:11) So, Calvin reasoned, if *anyone*

seeks God, it must be by God's will and not by that person's will. Calvin's logic can conclude only that *God must therefore ordain that many sinners will perish*. And lest believers become proud of their own turning to God, Calvin's doctrine would remind them that, *but for God's grace*, they would *not* have turned to God. So they dare not be puffed up with pride. In other words, their *election* to salvation is *unconditional*— the "U" in the TULIP. Their salvation is *all* due to God's grace.

The "T" in TULIP stands for the tragic reality of humanity's *total depravity*. By "total depravity," Calvinists mean that sin extends to all aspects of all of us in all we are and in all we do—in our intentions, our thinking, our feelings, our physicality—in *everything.* But it does *not* mean we're totally no good. We are all, after all, created in God's image, no matter how that image has been damaged and distorted by our disobedience. It does mean, however, that, on our own, we cannot and do not turn to God. Thus, if we are at all to turn to God, it must be by God's doing.

That's what the Unconditional election is about. God elects the elect on the basis of his inscrutable will and not on the basis of any *merit* on our part.

The "I," the *irresistible grace*, means that the elect *cannot resist* God's gift of salvation—not merely that the elect *won't* resist it. God s *unconditional* election is entirely *irresistible*. Again, there's no room for boasting. There's room only for humility and gratitude to the God of grace and peace.

The "P" in TULIP, the *perseverance of the saints*, means that the unconditionally elect who find God's grace irresistible, shall, by that same grace of God, *persevere* in it and *cannot lose* God's gift of salvation. The One who initiated our salvation will see to its completion.

Probably the main problem in any theological dispute—whether involving Calvinism, Arminianism, Dispensationalism or any other "ism"—is that everybody tries to be more precise than is possible, more "the whole works" than is wise. We try to be so thorough that we leave no loose ends to be tied up at the End. But didn't Paul remind Timothy that the "Lord of lords, who alone is immortal, lives in *unapproachable* light, whom no one *has seen* or, indeed, *can* see"? (I Timothy 6:16) Even with God's gracious Self-disclosure in his Son—the "One and Only, who, as John says, "*revealed* the God whom no one has *seen*" (John 1:18) and even with God's revelation in his image in *us*, in his revelation in the *world*, and in his *written* Word with the Spirit s guiding us through it, the best of our *theological systems* are but hieratic hints and feeble formulations of The Ineffable.

Calvin, himself, wrote quite critically of those he said, "prefer always to draw conclusions as the philosophers do, that everything should be put in order so as to exclude all diversity [in doctrine] as though there should be total agreement everywhere. But," he conjectured, "evidently such

people have never known what it is to be touched by God and to endure his judgments." Said Calvin: "God treats us so fiercely that everything becomes obscure."

Calvin drew the analogy to our own conflicted experience of ourselves, admitting that *we're* all torn asunder inside—"sometimes wanting to live; sometimes wanting to die." He argued that, if we can't understand even ourselves any better than we do, why in the world do we think we can so fully understand the great mystery that is the unseen God's hidden ways? He granted that, "There is by no means universal agreement even among those who have not been found lacking in zeal for godliness or piety and moderation in discussing the mysteries of God. ... Even though it were otherwise highly desirable, we are not to look in the present life for lasting agreement among us on the exposition of passages of Scripture." And Calvin concluded: "When God makes an end to teaching, we should make an end to trying to be wise." In this, Arminius agreed. He added that we should: "Distinguish between the true and the false according to Scripture, but also distinguish between the essential articles of faith and the less essential articles by the same Scripture."

While some of the opinions of Calvin and Arminius are too embedded in their own time and place, so, too, are some of ours. There will be those who'll come after us who will hold opinions on some of our opinions that will resemble our opinions on some of the opinions of Calvin, Arminius and other forebears in faith. What else is new?

* * *

Well, perhaps this evening's lecture has helped you discard wrong-headed notions and discover useful insight into these two men, their minds and their movements. More importantly, by the end of this weekend, we want to have gained a greater gratitude for the truly amazing grace and peace of the God they both worshipped and tried to serve—as we're all called to do—by way of theological reasoning and reflection done, albeit, through dark glasses and even blinders.

In closing, we could do worse than to give Calvin the last word. Here's something he said in his commentary on Paul's Letter to Titus: "We must exercise moderation, so as not instantly to declare everyone to be a 'heretic' who does not agree with our opinions. There are some matters on which Christians may differ from each other without being divided into sects. ... Overbearing tyranny has sprung forth already as the early blossom in the springtide of a reviving Church. ... Venture boldly to groan for freedom."

"DO JUSTLY!"

If you know anything at all about the 8th-century prophecy of Micah, you know one or both of the book's two most famous passages. This morning, this afternoon and tomorrow, we'll be looking at one of these two passages.

Matthew tells us that Herod, Rome's puppet king for the Jews, heard that foreign astrologers were in Jerusalem looking for a *newborn* king of the Jews. As you'd expect, he didn't like what he heard. So, in his self-serving obsession to thwart any threat to his throne, Herod consulted his theologians, he learned that, according to the prophet, Micah, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:5-6)

We've heard this text read, Christmas after Christmas. But the Bethlehem passage isn't what we'll be studying. We'll be looking at this prophet's other famous passage. Here it is: Micah 6:1-8—a courtroom scene in which Yahweh, the Lord, is bringing his case against his people.

Listen to what the LORD says:

> "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains;
> let the hills hear what you have to say.
> Hear, O mountains, the LORD'S accusation;
> listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
> For the LORD has a case against his people;
> He is lodging a charge against Israel.
>
> "My people, what have I done to you?
> How have I burdened you? Answer me.
> I brought you up out of Egypt and I redeemed you from the land of slavery.
> I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.
> My people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, counseled and what Balaam, son of Beor, answered.
> Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the just and righteous acts of the LORD."

Then Israel responds with, in effect: "Oh, but have I got a deal for you, Yahweh!"

> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow before the exalted God?
> Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?
> Shall I offer my firstborn for my sin, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Then Micah responds to Israel's having missed the whole point:

> He has shown you, O people, what is good
> And what the LORD requires of you!
> It's to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God!

Given all the grace he'd shown them, Yahweh was grieved by his people's ingratitude. So he'd summoned them to court, surrounded by the witnessing mountains, earth's firm foundations.

The Lord has a charge to make against his people. Yet in his very first words, he asks them what charge *they* have against *him.* He very *tenderly* calls them, "*My* people." His concern for their welfare takes precedence over his own.

"What have I done against you? How have I burdened you?" He invites them to express whatever grievance they have against him, for what but some *grievance* would account for their disdain and disobedience? Of what in his bringing them into being to be his very own chosen people and of what in his saving them from slavery and giving them a land of their own, are they not thankful? What complaint do they have against his having given them the leadership of Moses and Aaron and Miriam?

As he did when he gave them his Covenant, he reminds his people that they've been liberated already. His gift of liberty is the *context* of the life to which he's *called* them. As always with their Creator and Redeemer, his gift of their *being* comes before his call on them to *do* anything at all, *is* comes before *ought.* The *imperative* is *based* in the *indicative.*

The Lord next mentions mileposts in their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. They're to remember that their enemy, Balak, king of Moab, was foolish enough to think that he could buy Balaam's cursing of God's people. But Balak's plot came to naught. Whenever his prophet for profit *tried* to curse God's people, nothing but blessings came out of his mouth. What did they think *that* was all about?

The people were reminded that, all along their homeward way, the Lord had intervened on their behalf. The Lord was by their side—"from Shittim to Gilgal"—from the last encampment on the former side of Jordan to the first encampment on Jordan's fertile side.

You may recall that it was at Gilgal that the Lord ordered them to be rendered unfit for battle on their own. Gilgal was Camp Circumcision! For four decades, they'd wandered in the wilderness without circumcising a single boy born during those years. Now, having just invaded Canaan land, Joshua is ordered to take a flint knife and go to work on all these young men. That's not what a great general would think would best prepare his soldiers for battle. But, of course, this was to be no *normal* conquest.

Gilgal means "roll away." As the reproach of Egypt was rolled away, so too were the foreskins to be rolled away. It would be in the strength of Yahweh that they were to roll over Jericho where the walls would come "a-tumblin' down." God's promise was not to be realized in merely *human* strength. The conquering of Canaan began with a post-op army nursing bloody penises.

It's with all this retrospective awareness of divine providence that the Lord addresses them very tenderly as "*My* people" and asks: "What's wrong? What have I done against you? What have I *not* done for you?"

Well, what does account for the Israelites' continued ingratitude and rebellion against the One to whom they owed their very life and everything else? The clue to their gracelessness is their cluelessness to grace. It's obvious in how they handle God's charge against them? What do they do? They haggle. They dicker. They try to cut a deal.

Now these folks are not unaware of their sin—just as we are not unaware of our sin. Unless aware, there'd be no defensive attempt to cut a deal.

When cornered with evidence against us—whether caught in the act or faced with the good fortune of a guilty conscience—don't we tend to make excuses for ourselves? Don't we minimize the seriousness of our sin? Don't we protest that we're not *that* bad? If this doesn't work, we slip into the passive to promise: "It won't happen again." We try to cut a deal. We promise the moon. But the moon isn't ours to promise. And even if it were, the moon wouldn't do.

What *would* do? Admitting a little guilt and making a little sacrifice? Maybe a few calves? Okay, maybe thousands of dead rams? How about tens of thousands of rivers of oil? My firstborn son—wouldn't that be enough? Not really.

Dickering to get God in *our* debt doesn't "get" what's going on, what's what or who's who. So it won't do. Pitiful pleas of "pretty please" miss the point. Puh-leeze.

God gives us his grace. The grateful "get" it. And they then get to pass it along to their neighbors and even to their enemies. That makes them even more grateful and gives them ever more grace to be more graceful still. But the ungrateful *don't* "get" it. So they've no grace to give. And that leaves them more ungrateful and more graceless than ever. See, it really is more fortunate to *give* than to *get* because we must already have *gotten* before we can *give.* What you don't or won't give away, you really haven't gotten to begin with.

As Micah proclaims: It's out of a humble gratitude for what the Lord God has done in his mighty acts of justice and mercy on our behalf that we are called to follow his lead, sharing justice and mercy with humility.

Micah puts it plainly: "Oh, people: He's shown you what's good! The Lord has shown you what He requires of you! It's to *do justly* and to *love mercy* and to *walk humbly* with your God!"

This morning we'll look into *doing justly*, this afternoon we'll look into *loving mercy* and tomorrow morning we'll look into *walking humbly* with God.

What does it mean to "do justly," to "do justice?"

The Hebrew prophets—Micah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and the rest—were all outspoken advocates for *justice.* But, of course, they aren't alone in calling for justice. Actually, *everyone* seems to advocate for "justice." It's just that everyone doesn't agree on what *constitutes* justice. When people talk of justice, what they mean by justice makes sense to them but it doesn't always make sense to others. And generally speaking, *why* it makes sense to them but not to others is that *their* agenda and the agenda of *others* isn't the same agenda—even though, and really *because,* both of their agendas tend to be *self*-serving.

Samuel Johnson, the great dictionary maker, was born 300 years ago last month. He famously quipped: "Justice is my being allowed to do whatever I like. Injustice is whatever prevents my doing so." Defining justice and injustice in terms of self-centeredness is as old as human history and as new as the nightly news.

The Left and the Right fight for what each calls "justice." They also fight against what the *other* calls "justice." What one side calls "just," the other side calls "unjust." What some say is a right, others say is a wrong. For example, some say justice is served by allowing more citizens to bear arms. But others say justice is served by more gun control. Some say citizens should have the *right* to bear arms and others say that's *wrong.* Some say justice is served by legalizing abortion on demand and some say justice is served by restricting or by abolishing abortion. Some say women should have the *right* to choose abortion and some say that's not *right,* it's *wrong*. Some say justice is served by legalizing same-sex marriage and some say legalizing such marriage is a travesty of justice. Some say gay people should have a *right* to marry and some say that's not *right,* it's *wrong.*

Notice that, in repeating each of these three examples, I exchanged the words, "right" and "just," and the words, "wrong" and "unjust."

The Hebrew prophets did the same thing. But they needed just *one* word that was just right for both "just" and "right." That's because one Hebrew word, *tzedek,* means both "just" and "right." The same is true in the New Testament. Paul used forms of the Greek word, *dikaios,* that's *just right* for "just" and "right."

Right-wing journalist Marvin Olasky criticizes Left-wing journalists for their favoring agendas of "social justice" over "righteousness." He includes a snide aside about same-sex marriage as he makes this distinction between "justice" and "righteousness." Advising that those who want to know the meaning of justice should bypass Aristotle and Ayers (Bill, that is)—I guess he couldn't resist the alliteration—Olasky makes much of what he claims is a *difference* between two Hebrew words: *mishpat* and *tzedek.*

At Micah 6:8, the word rendered "justice" is *mishpat*. And, as Hebrew words so often do, *mishpat* multitasks. That is, in the words of a Hebrew scholar, *mishpat* is "a word of many

meanings." (R. N. Whybray) Yet, in spite of the Hebrew prophets' railing at the injustice against the *poor* and the *aliens*—the socially marginalized—Olasky isn't comfortable with a *social* justice implication to the "justice" of *mishpat.* He insists that justice be linked with *tzedek*.

But Olasky's choice for the meaning of *tzedek* is "righteous" or "righteousness," apparently with a "church lady" sense that slights its *social* "justice" implications. Well, you see where he's headed. He's spinning against the *social* justice concerns of those with whom he disagrees by insisting that, "a central purpose of justice is to increase righteousness." He cites Isaiah: "If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness." (Isaiah 26:10) Olasky's paraphrase of Isaiah might run something like this: If "special rights" are granted to homosexuals, they don't learn righteousness.

Righteousness is something without nuance on the Religious Right. To the Religiously Righteous, it's pretty clear who the "righteous" are and who they're not. Now, we must note that, though the Religious Left doesn't usually use the term, "righteous" in self-reference—"progressive" is the Left's preferred moniker for its own "righteous"—it's clear who the Left's righteous are and who they're not. They're those the Left likes and they're not those it doesn't. But whether Right or Left, what either "righteousness" amounts to is a one-sided *moralism,* even a *legalism.* It's *our* side over against *their* side.

The "righteousness" of Olasky and his antigay Right-wing cohorts is, in effect, their own moralism. But even antigay evangelical John MacArthur warns against what he calls "the deadly dangers of *moralism*." He writes: "Moralism was never the message of the Old Testament prophets. It was never the message of the Messiah. It is never the message of the New Testament apostles and prophets. It has never been God's message to the world because, when all is said and done, listen to what Isaiah said: 'All your righteousness is filthy rags'." And when Isaiah spoke of "filthy rags" he was referring to ritually contaminated *menstrual* rags.

So, what does *tzedek* really mean? And might it, after all, be modified by *mishpat*? What does *mishpat* really mean? And might it, after all, be modified by *tzedek*?

An evangelical Hebrew scholar explains that these terms "seldom denote the specialized concept of ... legal equality, with which the term justice is presently associated." (J. Barton Payne) He says that, to "do justice," as is required in the *mishpat* reference of Micah 6:8, has more to do with what *we'd* mean by saying, "Do the right thing," or as Bob Jones, Sr.'s homely but helpful saying had it: "Do right!"

And on *tzedek*, the word with which Olasky wants to offset "social justice," Britain's Chief Rabbi states: "*Tzedek*/*tzedakah* is almost impossible to translate, because of its many shadings of meaning: justice, charity, righteousness, integrity, equity, fairness and innocence." So, take your pick: all those things are good. And over against Olasky's objection, they're all compatible with and expressive of "social justice" as such. If there's any incompatibility, it stems from the content and not from the call to justice.

The Chief Rabbi goes on to point out that this matter of justice, so important to the prophets, is distributed throughout the Torah—the five books of Moses. Justice is balanced, weighted, with concentrations in the first and last books of Moses—the distant *past* and the distant *future.* And it's also there in the very midst of the middle book, the holiness code of Leviticus.

In *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, we're told by Reformation scholar David Wright that, "Calvin loved the Hebrew prophets." Wright reminds us that Calvin "thundered down upon the congregation about those who exploit the poor, fail to pay a living wage, or perform shoddy work. He lived with a biblical vision of the reign of God as a reign of love, peace and justice. The church's task is to make that reign of God increasingly more visible to the world. And so Christians must reform not only church institutions but also society so that justice will reign."

Now notice, as I quote Wright further on Calvin's rigorous concern to *do right* by all people, how different is Calvin's view from that of so many of Calvin's professed followers these days—especially in, for instance, their hostility to helping homosexuals meet the basic human needs that Christians seek for themselves. Wright explains: "As much as Calvin stressed the solidarity of Christians within the body of Christ and their need to serve one another, he also stressed the solidarity of all humanity made in the image of God. Therefore, any human being in need, however sinful or apparently unworthy of help, lays an ethical claim upon Christians to use whatever resources they have to meet that need, because they share the image of God and a common humanity."

In his exposition of Micah 6:8, Calvin comments: "The Prophet now inquires, as in the name of the people, what was necessary to be done: and he takes these two principles as for granted: [first] that the people were without any excuse and were forced to confess their sin, and [second] that God had hitherto contended with them for no other purpose and with no other design, but to restore them to the right way; for if his purpose had only been to condemn the people for their wickedness, there would have been no need of these questions." The reformer goes on to point out: "Whenever God chides his people, he also opens to them the door to hope as to their salvation."

With reference to the two verses that precede Micah's reminder of what the Lord requires of his people, Calvin is psychologically perceptive. He understands Micah's voicing of the people's attempt to do a cheap deal with God and put God in their debt. They start off with the very least they might get away with. Calvin comments: "They pretend by circuitous courses to approach God, while they desire to be ever far away from him. ... Hence they wish to discharge their duty towards God as a matter of necessity; but at the same time they seek some fictitious modes of reconciliation, as though it were enough to flatter God, as though he could be pacified like a child with some frivolous trifles."

But as the prophet, Amos, declared in Hebrew parallelism: "Let *justice* roll down like waterfalls and *righteousness* like an ever-flowing river!" (5:24)

Do *we* "let justice roll down like waterfalls?" Are *our* lives splashing springs of justice or cesspools of self-centeredness? Are *we* rushing rivers of righteousness or parched ravines that quench no thirst? Are we fair in our treatment of others or do we make more allowances for ourselves than for them? What we call "doing justice": Does it tend to be *our* insisting on *our rights* and insisting on *others' responsibilities* to insure our rights? In our judgment of *others*, are we *just* or *unjust*? Is our assessment of "them" well-informed or uninformed, thoughtful or superficial, mature or premature? And are we at least sensitive to the fact that we're all *insensitive to our insensitivities*?

And even in our judgment of *ourselves*, are we too up-close to our subject? Can we get ourselves in proper focus? Might we, in our self-serving simple-mindedness, be oblivious to our blind spots? And can we ever *afford* to be judged by the standard by which we judge others? Jesus said it's by the standard by which we judge others that we ourselves will be judged. (Matthew 7:2) Do we want *that* standard to be the standard for ourselves?

You see, all our seeking of justice for ourselves and all our failure to seek justice for others is symptomatic of our sense that we need to be justified. We know we're not just. We just know it. Our defensiveness demonstrates that we do. But our notion that *we*, *ourselves* need to justify ourselves fails to account for how very unjust and unrighteous we are.

And that is just why we need to listen to what the prophet, Habakkuk, proclaimed: "The just, or the righteous, shall live by his faithfulness." (2:4) An Old Testament scholar explains that this "justification derives, not from man's own, rugged 'faithfulness,' but from his humble dependence upon God's mercy." (J. Barton Payne) Another adds: "this *tzedek* is a Divine effect ... produced in the world by God." The justice and righteousness that is God's justice and righteousness—the God who is, therefore, Savior—becomes the believer's own justice and righteousness. (Cf. Isaiah 45:21; Philippians 3:9)

Another scholar adds: "To be righteous means, throughout the Bible, to fulfill the demands of a relationship." (Elizabeth Achtemeier) But, she explains, when Habakkuk writes that the "just" or "righteous"—the *tzedek*—shall "live by his faithfulness," this "does not mean moral steadfastness, rectitude and earnestness. It does not signify the proper performance of ethical or cultic duties. Rather, faithfulness here means trust, dependence, clinging to God; it means living and moving and having one's being in him alone; it means relying on him for the breath one draws, for the direction one takes, for the decisions one makes, for the goals one sets and for the outcomes of one's living. Faithfulness means placing one's whole life in God's hands and trusting him to fulfill it, despite all outward and inward circumstances; despite all personal sin and guilt; despite all psychological and social and physical distortions. Faithfulness is life by God's power rather than one's own. (Cf. I Corinthians 1:30-31); and therefore it is truly life, because it draws its vitality from the living God who is the source of life."

So, in our relationship with *this* God, this *just*, this *righteous Savior-God* who *justifies* us, giving us *his righteousness* that we might *live*, we get to *do* what's *right* as we rely on *his righteousness*. We get to *live* the *lifestyle* of doing what's right as we *live out the gift of his righteousness*.

God's people *live* by reliance on God's righteousness. Do *we* crave to live like that? Do we want to do the right thing in the gracious freedom of God's righteousness instead of trying, and failing, to do it on our own?

"LOVE MERCY!"

> He has shown you, o people, what is good, and what the LORD require of you: It is to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. *Micah 6:8*

In Micah's summing up of the actions God require, he links love to the aforementioned justice. As an English rendering has it: "love mercy." The Hebrew word for "mercy" is *chesed*, and as we've seen is true in Hebrew vocabulary generally, *chesed* has a wide range of meanings. It means more than *mere* mercy. The word is found some 250 times in the Hebrew Bible—half of them in the Psalms. This mercy, love, cherishing—is *rooted*, itself, rooted in Yahweh's mercy, love and cherishing, expressed *by* Yahweh's faithful commitment to his Covenant people. "Lovingkindness" became the term that Calvin's contemporary, Miles Coverdale, coined for *chesed*. His rendering first appeared in the Bible translation published 474 years ago last week.

God requires *mercy*, a *cherishing love* or *lovingkindness* in his people. These words all express a motive power that looks for ways to do real good for others—even for our enemies. Again, these actions imitate God's actions. As John points out to Christians: "God is love, [so,] we love because he *first* loved *us*." (I John 4:16,19) Our love begins in God, in whom *all* love begins and in whom all love *ends*—that's to say, in whom all love reaches Love's goal.

The Old Testament idea is carried into the New Testament by the term, *agape*. But never before had that, now familiar, Greek word ever had the profound depth of meaning it received by Christian adaptation. *Agape* became the keyword in Christian ethics—the action that fulfills all the Law and the Prophets.

Israel repeatedly broke Covenant and sinned against Yahweh. But, as he was Lovingkindness *himself*, Yahweh repeatedly kept the Covenant intact and, over and over again, he forgave Israel her sin. (Exod. 34:6; Num 4:18; Joel 2:13; Ps 86:5, 15) His lovingkindness *is* his everlasting Covenant-keeping toward his people. (Deut 7:9, 12) In over two dozen lines in one psalm alone, we read that, "his *chesed* endures forever." (Psalm 136) An Old Testament scholar explains: It's this "steady, persistent refusal of God to wash his hands of wayward Israel [that's] the essential meaning" of *chesed*. (N.H. Snaith) And so the *chesed* of God is commanded by God. We, his

people, are to *live out* God's love in all our dealings with others—whether friends or foes—for the God we worship deals that way with us and with all.

In the New Testament, the word, *charis*, also corresponds to *chesed*. This word means "grace" and, of course, *chesed* is the grace of God.

Given Micah's summary link between justice and mercy, some are tempted to try a rank ordering of the two. Depending on the age in which one finds oneself, expectations of one's society and church culture as well as one's own personality, proclivities and politics, one may wish to privilege one or the other, justice or love. But Micah calls the same attention to both, without subsuming one to the other. We're told to *do* both justice *and* mercy, that justice *and* mercy are God's requirements.

It's when justice and love get *caricatured* that there's a conflict. And, even then, it's not *love* in conflict with *justice* so much as it's a *false* love in conflict with *true* love, a *false* justice in conflict with *true* justice. So-called "sloppy agape" or "cheap grace" is not *biblical* love and grace. And any "justice," so-called, that's more a *raging revenge* than anything else, is surely not *biblical* justice. Love isn't license and justice isn't vengeance. Both love and justice can be very costly and they're never self-indulgent. After all, they're to flow from and follow after the unconditional love and the unimpeachable justice of the Lord God, who, at his own expense, gave himself for our welfare, over and over again.

Last week, in the aftermath of the arrest of an alleged blackmailer of David Letterman, the comedian joked on camera about this extortion attempt that forced him to publicly admit to having had sex with several young women on his staff. At this announcement, his hip New York studio audience burst into applause of support. After a commercial break, the show went on as usual. And though there's been lots of press coverage since that show, there's been apparently little adverse fallout for Letterman among his fans.

But it's strange how poor a sense of a just proportion Christians can have. It's strange how Christians can be so lacking in lovingkindness. When Knoxville newspapers and newscasts leaked another guy's attempt at blackmail—in this case the attack was against Kirk Talley, for being gay—most of Kirk's "Christian" fans and associates in the Gospel music business shunned him like a leper and worse. Instead of responding with mercy, understanding and awareness that they wouldn't want their own difficult secrets published in front-page headlines and at the top of the evening news, they condemned him. His concert career was wiped out overnight because self-righteous "Christians" had no fundamental grasp of fairness, no sense of proportion, no mercy. Many of them went out of their way to hound and harass him—anonymously and out in public.

Recently in Los Angeles, some Episcopalians who've left their denomination over ordination of gays tried to walk off with church property. Opposed, they sued the L.A. diocese in Superior Court, thus violating Paul's clear instruction that Christians are *not* to sue each other. That's

Paul's whole point in a passage from which these moralistic drop-outs take an ambiguous term and turn it into a weapon against their gay neighbors and fellow Christians. Their flagrant disobedience to clear Bible teaching is done for the sake of their pious, prejudice-fueled "fidelity" to the Bible,

And here's news from the Georgia -Tennessee state line. It, too, sadly illustrates *lack* of love and justice by silly, self-centered "Christians" who seem utterly unaware of the unbiblical attitudes and behavior in which they indulge in order to, as they think of it, "witness for Christ."

It seems that the Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe High School cheerleaders have had a tradition of building huge banners of Bible verses for their football players to bash through as they rush onto the field. Their "Warriors" have bashed their way through Bible verses such as Philippians 3:14: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me in Christ Jesus." Little did Paul realize that the goal of which he spoke was a goal *post*! They've also bashed through Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Did Paul know that the "all things [to be done] through Christ" included trouncing the team from Roswell's Blessed Trinity?

Well, as you might imagine, a local "non-Christian" takes this weekly Bible verse bash-through as a very serious failure to separate church and state on the Georgia-Tennessee state line. So after she consulted with lawyers, the school superintendent ruled that there'll be no more bashing of Bible verses on the football field. This ruling *should* mean that, mercifully, Bible verses *won't* have to endure any further bashing on behalf of Christian "rights" and "witness." But, not so fast. Wouldn't you know that the youth minister at a local Baptist church wants the bashing of the Bible verses to continue. So he organized a protest rally at a Chick-fil-A. When over 500 of his fellow Christians showed up, they had to move the rally to a nearby athletic field. Other youth ministers have joined in the raging sense of persecution and entitlement. A Facebook page is collecting thousands of signatures and hundreds of wall posts to bring back the bashing of the Bible verses. The Christians say: "The cheerleaders are just using Scripture to show motivation and inspiration to the players and the fans." But isn't Paul's point about something a bit *more* inspiring and motivating than a football game? And is taunting unbelievers in a Wal-Mart parking lot the best way to witness for Christ?

And in all the petty grievance collecting and the raging indignation, where's even a whit of witness to Micah's summing up God's requirement—to *do justice*, to *love mercy*? Where is any evidence that these Christians—"persecuted" as they may *perceive* themselves to be—take seriously what their apostolic "cheerleader" meant when he wrote: "*Bless* those who persecute you! Bless, and do not *curse*" with revengeful political power and the presumption that a self-styled moral majority's might makes right? (Romans 12:14) Even granting some guilt to those who may be glad to stick it to Southern Baptists, what permits Southern Baptists to retaliate in kind? Might they not rather retaliate with kindness? Might they not endure, even pardon, such "persecution" for the sake of what's really more at stake: the truer witness to the Gospel of

God's amazing grace and peace to all? After all, C. S. Lewis pointed out that, "the essential act of mercy was to pardon, and pardon in its very essence involves the recognition of guilt and ill-desert in the recipient."

Lewis critiqued what he called "The Humanitarian Theory" that "wants simply to abolish Justice and substitute Mercy for it." Isn't this what antigay Christians do when they claim to be "loving" gay people while they *insist* that gay people either remain celibate throughout life or marry someone completely inappropriate? As Lewis explained, you "start being 'kind' to people before you have considered their rights, and then force upon them supposed kindnesses which no one but you will recognize as kindnesses and which the recipients will feel as abominable cruelties. You have overshot the mark. Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful."

In 1992, in *The Banner*, the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, eminent philosopher and EC's friend, Nicholas Wolterstorff, blasted his denomination's "fixation on right doctrine [as] a rampant,' destructive disease." He lamented that, in the process, "Love goes out the window, resulting in an appalling sense of hatred." He noted that, fundamental fruits of the Spirit are missing [in] our unrelenting judgmentalism [and as a result] societal and cultural crises [are left] unaddressed [and] our tradition is depleted."

Well, are these enough examples of Christians' lack of love? Keep in mind they're mirror images of *ourselves*. Just as happens in group therapy, we more readily see what's wrong in others than we see what's wrong in ourselves. But, then, just as in the therapy, self-recognition hits us at a slant. At least, let's hope it does.

Now here's a true-life story of a Christian businessman's having shown mercy for over half a century.

In all of the news of failures and bailouts of banks, no doubt you missed news of the demise of a small savings and loan called Dwelling House Savings & Loan. Since the late 1950s, it had been a beacon of hope in the largely African-American Hill District of Pittsburgh. I remember seeing its ads in the now defunct *Other Side* magazine back in the '70s and '80s. Dwelling House was begun by Robert Lavelle, now 93 years old. His business was always a ministry and, as such, it succeeded through lending practices of biblical justice and mercy while lenders like Fannie Mae failed. Rather than foreclose over a missed payment, the folks at Dwelling House would pray with clients and counsel them to budget and continue payments. Through this compassionate patience, home ownership in the Hill District was increased from 13 percent in the 1950s to 40 percent today. Urban decay and crime was reduced.

But sadly, Dwelling House was looted by cyber thieves. So, in August, the bank regulators shut it down and sold its $13 million in savings account assets to the larger, more computer savvy, PNC regional bank.

Robert Wauzzinski, a professor of religion at Ball State University, described Dwelling House as, "the most biblically sensitive and Christian institution I have ever seen." He says it "brought racial reconciliation, mercy, justice, goodness, stewardship and love to the business of buying and selling."

Robert Lavelle is widely known—especially among the poor of Pittsburgh—as one of Jesus' disciples. Why? It's because of his love. As Christians, we need to know that it's by our *love* that we're to be known as disciples of Jesus. Jesus, himself, said so: "If you love one another, everyone will know you're *my* disciples." (John 13:35) But is this descriptive of *us*? Are *we* known for our *love*—in our homes, at work, in stores, on the subway, in the streets?

In last Sunday's Order of Worship at Redeemer, there was an excerpt from a letter written in AD 360 by Julian, Rome's last *pagan* emperor. Tim Keller noted Julian's grumpiness in writing to a friend: "Why do we not observe how the benevolence of Christians to strangers ... has done the most to advance their cause? For it is disgraceful that ... the impious Galileans [i.e., the Christians] support not only *their* poor but *ours* as well, while everyone is able to see that our own people lack aid from us!" Do *today's* pagans observe this about us?

Well, Jesus commanded his followers to: "Love one another—just as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34) He called this commandment "a *new* commandment." How so? As John Wesley noted, it was "not new in itself." But it was "new as to the degree of it, *as I have loved you*." That's what was *new*: "Love ... *as I have loved you*." What does *that* mean—as Jesus loved us?

It means to be *willing* to lay down our *lives* for another. Yet we're loath to lay down a pet peeve or prejudice for another! We resist laying down some *money* or some *time* for another. Forget about taking up *the way of the cross*! Just how far *out of our way* do we usually go for another?

Later, the beloved disciple would remember his Lord's words and remind his readers: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (I John 3:16) He goes on to illustrate what that can mean. We're not to wait around until we might have to give up our very *lives* for each other. Before it comes to that, we can give up other things for one another. And here he *specifies*: material possessions that can address another's need. John urges: "Now let's not love in mere words but in actions and in truth." (I John 3:18)

You see how *love in action* is related to *truth*. Too often our grasp of truth, as we may like to call it, is but a string of words. Our self-serving sense of "truth" is too often but a pathetic pile of proof-texts to prop up our pretexts and prejudices. *Truth* is the living Person, the living Love of Christ who *died in order to love us into life eternal*.

John writes: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." (I John 3:11) What did John have in mind by speaking of this love command being from "the

beginning"? Evidently he had the *very* beginning in mind for, in the same breath, he reminds his readers of Cain's *not* loving his brother. Love was what it was all about from the beginning—and, indeed, from before that beginning.

John writes: "We love because he first loved us." (I John 4:19) This was the Bible verse that Anna B. Mow chose for this day, October 10th, in her devotional book on living with God each day of the year. Anna Mow was a missionary to India and, later, taught at Bethany Seminary in Virginia. She was a good, close friend of both Genie Price and Ros Rinker, two of EC's earliest friends. She wrote: "God loved us first and we responded to His love. This is the way it will work for you each day." But, never a writer to leave things at the merely descriptive level, Anna Mow went on to ask pointedly: How can you do this today?" And then, she added even more specifically: "For whom?"

"HOW ELSE BUT HUMBLY?"

> He has shown you, o people, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: It is to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. *Micah 6:8*

Augustine said: "All sin begins in pride." And, of course, it does. All sin begins in *self*, distorted into a god. At the very center of our English word, "pride," there it is: the self-centered, self-inflated "I."

The pride of our primeval parents prompted *them* to sin. And the pride of their perverted progeny prompts *us* to sin. They fell for sin's fallacious premise. And we've all been suckers for sin ever since.

Adam and Eve knew what it was to walk with God in the cool of the garden. But they became preoccupied with themselves. They switched from God's glory to delusions of grandeur. They turned away from God and tried to turn themselves into gods. But such plots of pride are delusional. So their intended dream turned to unintended death. There's no life in pride, for there's no life in lifeless gods. There's life in God alone. The sage of Proverbs called overreaching pride the prelude to perishing. (Proverbs 16:18)

Pride used to be something to hide. Now, pride's something to be proud of. And it's humility that's humiliated. In fact, we may be rather unfamiliar with *real* humility. Where do you see any real humility in our 21st century society of celebrity? Where is the humility on MySpace, Facebook and Twitter? And here, since 1528, Webster and I thought a "twit" was simply a silly annoying fool! Who knew? Now there's XuQa, where you can compete for popularity points by accumulating virtual hugs, kisses and status levels. You might even get rich and be made a model or a member of a rock band!

In a more serious vein, in the *New York Times*, David Brooks wrote of his recently having heard an NPR rebroadcast of an episode of the old radio variety show, "Command Performance." This episode was from the very day that World War II ended. It featured Frank Sinatra, Dinah Shore, Cary Grant, Bing Crosby, Marlene Dietrich and others. Brooks remarks that, "the most striking feature of the show was its tone of self-effacement and humility." He says: "The allies had, on that very day, completed one of the noblest military victories in the history of humanity. And yet there was no chest-beating." He says Bing Crosby "expressed it perfectly" in these words: "All anybody can do is thank God it's over. Today our deep down feeling is one of humility." Brooks observes: "When you look from today back to 1945, you are looking into a different cultural epoch, across a sort of narcissism line. Humility, the sense that nobody is that different from anybody else, was a large part of the culture then.

But that humility came under attack in the ensuing decades. Self-effacement became identified with conformity and self-repression. A different ethos came to the fore, which the sociologists call 'expressive individualism.' Instead of being humble before God and history, moral salvation could be found through intimate contact with oneself and by exposing the beauty, the power and the divinity within."

Wasn't it with exactly such "intimate contact" with themselves that Adam and Eve *each* tried to tap a supposed "power and divinity within" so as to "save themselves" from the Gracious Power without? But what were they (and, what are *we*) thinking when conjuring up such delusions? If *they* could trip themselves into such a trap of their own making *there*—between their walks with *God* in the cool of the garden—why in this *foolishly secular* world of ours would *we* think we could avoid tripping ourselves into such a trap while *avoiding* walks with God and keeping company with atheists and agnostics?

They tripped into a trap of their own making and we trip into traps of *our* own making when failing to realize that, in Calvin's words: "Our true and genuine wisdom can be summed up as the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves." If we don't "get" God, we don't "get" ourselves.

While our first parents were walking with God in the cool of the garden, how much were they paying attention? And how much did they carry over into the heat of the day or the darkness of night? How much were they really listening to God? How much were they listening to themselves? How well were they learning *who* they were? How well were they learning *whose* they were? How well were they learning *where* they were? How well were they learning *how* they'd come to be in the first place? How well were they learning how *fortunate* they were that all the world was good and for their good the totally undeserved *gift* of their loving Creator/Companion.

So long as they walked with God in humility, they remained on course. As soon as they strayed into hubris they went down a dead end. So long as we walk with God in humility, we remain on course. As soon as we stray into hubris we go down a dead end.

Said Calvin, in revelation-informed wisdom: "If it be asked why the world has been created, why we have been placed in it, why we are preserved in life to enjoy innumerable blessings, why we are endued with light and understanding, no other reason can be adduced, except the gratuitous love of God."

So, it's no wonder that "walking humbly with God" is a crucial part of what God requires of us. This requirement isn't arbitrary. If we want to escape the temptation of hubris, humility is required. If we're to avoid making fools of ourselves and victims of others, we must take heed of our hubris and walk with God in humility. We *must!*

God wants only *good* for us. It's good for us to walk along with him. And how else but in *humility* would we expect to walk with the Creator, the One from whom we've received our very life and everything else that's good.

In his commentary on Micah's statement about God's requirement that we do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with God, Calvin said. It is evident that, in the first two particulars, he refers to the second table of the law; that is, to do justice and to love mercy. Nor is it a matter of wonder that the prophet begins with the duties of love; for though in rank the worship of God precedes these duties and ought rightly to be so regarded, yet justice, which is to be exercised toward people, is the real evidence of religion."

And didn't we see this in the justice Jesus lived out and in the love he put into action? Unless justice is *done* and unless love is *lived*, how is it to be *seen* and *experienced* by anyone? Yet it is in the justice and love that can be *seen and experienced* in *the people* of God that *others* can *see and experience* the justice and love of the unseen God himself.

Calvin continues: "The prophet, therefore, mentions justice and mercy, not that God casts aside what is first in importance—the worship of his name—but he shows by evidences or effects, what true religion is. He afterwards adds what in order is first, and that is, literally, to be humble in walking with thy God." No doubt as the name of God is more excellent than anything else in the whole world, so the worship of him ought to be regarded as of more importance than all those duties by which we prove our love toward each other. But the prophet, as 1 have already said, was not so particular in observing order. His main object was to show how men were to prove that they were seriously in awe of God."

This double duty—toward God and toward our fellow humans—is in Jesus' mind when he responds to a lawyer's question. (Matthew 22:37-39) The lawyer wants Jesus to name the

greatest commandment. I guess there's nothing new in fascination with a "No. 1." But these theological games among scribes and rabbis, it was argued, ran the risk of a prioritizing of laws so that laws further down the list would lose out.

Still, there was precedent for prioritizing. The rabbis saw Moses' 613 commandments reduced to 11 (Psalm 15), to 6 (Isaiah 33:1516), to these 3 (Micah 6:8) and finally to but one in Amos (5:4) and Habakkuk (2:4).

Jesus cites the *Shema,* recited twice daily. He notes its command to, "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength." Then, using the Hebrew apparatus of "equal category," Jesus adds a command from Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." I le declares that all the Law and Prophets—essentially, the *whole* of Hebrew scripture—hangs on this double commandment. A New Testament scholar states that Jesus' two-fold commandment functions as "nothing less than a 'hermeneutical [i.e., interpretational] program' for the understanding and application of the law and the prophets." (Donald Hagner) He states further that, "Such love is constant and takes no regard of the perceived merit or worth of the other person."

Another biblical scholar notes that this double commandment "recapitulates Jesus' teaching ministry as a whole." (Douglas Hare) And, of course, we need to realize that the *love* of which Jesus speaks, is *not* something "touchy-feely." It's not *mere emotion*—though emotions may be involved. It's love that's simply our most reasonable *duty* to all.

Jesus' twin commandment is understood as "a distant parallel" to Micah's call for the people to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with God. Such justice, mercy and faithfulness are "forms of behavior demanded by the prophets but beyond legal regulation." (Hare)

The law of the Sabbath is an illustration of this. Look at the way Jesus put together our relating to God and each other. As our scholar observes: "Presumably Jesus regarded the Fourth Commandment as a particular manifestation of the broader requirements of love for God, and yet [Jesus] argued that observance of the Sabbath should not take precedence over human need." (Matthew 12:1-14) Here's the rather astonishing point: "Love for neighbor must teach us how to love God!" It's explained: "Conversely, [Jesus'] radicalization of neighbor love to include enemies makes sense only to those whose love for God empowers them to imitate the Creator's generosity." Remember, it was *while* we were yet sinners that Jesus died for us!

The Apostle Paul picks up on the teaching of Jesus in his letter to the Romans. He writes: "The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and *whatever other commandment there may be,* are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'." Paul observes that, "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore," he concludes, "love is the fulfillment of the Law." (Romans 13:9-10) Paul picks up on this in his letter to the Galatians, too. He writes: "The whole law is summed up in one commandment: Love

your neighbor as yourself." James, too, repeats this note when he references what he calls "the royal law found in scripture—"Love your neighbor as yourself." (James 2:8)

If we're to walk *humbly* with *God*, we must make room for justice and love, because—all along the way—God, our Companion, makes room for justice and love. But, if we're walking *humbly* with God, the justice and the love for which we make room, must be *God's* justice and love, not *our* self-serving, so-called justice, our self-serving, so-called love.

We tend to call for justice when *they* oppress *us,* when we're in the *right* and they're in the *wrong*—at least as we want to see it. And we *don't* call for justice when *we* oppress *them,* when *we're* wrong and *they're* right—at least as *they* want to see it.

And we tend to call for love when we favor those we say should be loved—such as—oh, say, *ourselves*! We're less likely to call for love for those we dislike—such as those we call our enemies. Yet they—for example, our antigay Christian brothers and sisters—may be in real need of our longsuffering lovingkindncss. Many of them are of mixed minds and motives in their opposition to us. They're not always sure they're right and we're wrong. Many of them can see the Golden Rule discrepancy in their meeting their intimacy needs while demanding that our intimacy needs be condemned as abominable.

Well, again, if we're to show the lovingkindness of which Micah speaks—the lovingkindness which God clearly requires—it's not necessarily going, to be a love that comes naturally to us. But some of our brethren say we gay Christians are old hands at "unnatural" love, so let's not disappoint them. Even if they mistreat us, we're still duty-bound to do them good, to be fair, to be merciful, to make allowances, to be patient and kind.

And if we're to walk with *God*, how in the world that God created and redeemed *should* it be otherwise than *humbly*? How *can* it be otherwise than *humbly*? Otherwise than *humbly*, it would *not* be a walk with *God*. Otherwise than *humbly*, what sense would it make and what comfort could it give? Listen to Calvin again, that we might learn humility: "For what is more consonant with faith than to recognize that we are naked of all virtue, in order to be clothed by God? That we are empty of all good, to be filled by him? Blind, to be illuminated by him? Lame, to be straightened out by him? Weak, to be sustained by him? To take away from us all occasion for glorying, that he alone may stand forth gloriously and we glory in him?"

Hear again from Micah's prophecy:

> Let the hills hear ...
> Hear, O mountains, listen,
> you everlasting foundations of the earth.

Those majestic mountains that had witnessed the human family's founding and the human family's fall were crushed by the weight of that fall. The mountains now moan and the crippled cosmos cries out against the catastrophe of our sin against the Lord. And in the wake of the aftermath, all worlds await the awakening of the promised new day and the glory to come.

But that new day would never dawn and the glory we now await would never be given but for the gore of Golgotha and the eternal glory of the Lamb who was slain for the world's sin from before the world's foundation.

No longer do we have to come up with a plan of our own that never could work and never did work. No longer do we have to pretend to have on our own what it takes to atone for our sin. No longer do we have to say, in the words of the accused in Micah 6:

> Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?
> Shall I offer my firstborn for my sin?

No. You *shall not* offer the blood of animals or barrels of oil. Listen to the Gospel of God's Grace and Peace from John's account: "God so loved the world that he gave *his* only Son that whosoever trusts in him should not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through him, might be saved." (John 3:16)

The Triune God, our Father, is justice and mercy *himself*. The Triune God *in Christ, our Savior,* is justice and mercy *himself*. The Triune God's Spirit is justice and mercy *himself*.

In Christ, the Triune God dealt with himself *unjustly* that he might *justify* all others. On the cross, he showed himself no mercy that he might show mercy to all others. Having borne our sin and death, God gives us his life that we might *live* in and by his life—for the good of all and the glory of God.

In his first epistle, John says that when we love others, God's love is realized in our lives. Isn't this love evidence of our walking humbly with the God of love? If so, we're on our way Home.

"But for right now," as Paul reprises the prophet, "we have three things to do: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love." (I Corinthians 13:13)