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The Centrality of Judicial Theology

Peter Leithart

Humanism may be **helpfully described** as a systematic denial of God's judgment. Paul writes in Romans 1 that **all** men know that God condemns lawbreakers, but **unrepentant** men practice and approve what they know God hates (vs. 32). Many of the Psalms teach this same principle. In Psalm 94, for example, the **Psalmist** calls on the Lord to avenge Himself against the wicked, who say, "the Lord does not **see**; the God of Jacob pays no heed" (vs. 1-7). Both David and Paul **summarize** man's rebellion thus: "There is no **fear** of God [of God's judgment] before their eyes" (Ps. 36:1; Rem. 3:18).

When men suppress the knowledge of God's **judgment**, they create substitutes. A particularly instructive example of this pattern is the history of the doctrine of Hell since the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment philosophers attacked the medieval Church's doctrine of Hell as an instrument of social **control**. Yet Hell persisted, and, in the **twentieth century**, **intellectuals have created replacements** of varying degrees of sophistication. Freud tried to explain the universal belief in Hell as a sublimation of anxiety. **Sartre's** definition of Hell is **famous**: "Hell is other people."

At the level of popular culture, other substitutes for God's judgment are common. The other day I **heard** this quotation from Donald **Regan**: "**History will be** my judge." Another example is especially irksome to me. In the **heyday of** Puritan New England, "natural" disasters drove the devout to **their knees** in fasting and prayer. Today, an **earthquake** or flood is an example of the anger of "Mother Nature." It is hard to believe that adult, educated, apparently intelligent journalists continue to spout this puerile paganism with a straight face, but they do!

In contrast to modern secularism, the Bible gives God's judgment a central place in theology and the Christian **worldview**. Nearly every aspect of the Christian faith can be viewed from a judicial perspective, as a part of judicial theology. Judicial theology views Biblical doctrine as it relates to

God's courtroom. God is Judge. Judicial theology answers the question, How does this fact affect our understanding of life and theology?

The significance of judicial theology may be illustrated by reference to **soteriology**, the doctrine of salvation. The Biblical doctrine of salvation is fundamentally juridical in character. Christ's death on the cross was a legal satisfaction of God's perfect justice. Calvary has judicial significance in another sense as well. Jesus said that His death was the judgment of the world (John 12:31). On Calvary, the world was judged and **destroyed**, to be transfigured in the **resurrection**. Moreover, the application of redemption is a judicial activity. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and we

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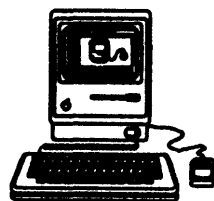
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Editorial

The "Value" of Non-Profits

Michael R. Gilstrap



The end of the year and the beginning of a new one is a time when most non-profit and religious ministries make an annual appeal for funds. Having been in this "non-profit" (specifically **religious**) world for a number of years, very **little surprises** me when it comes to raising money. All non-profits echo to one degree or another the **refrain** of that immortal Bobby **Bare** tune:

*Praise the Lord/ and send me your money,
I'm happy, you can be happy too,
If you'll praise the Lord, and send in your
money,
That's what Jesus wants you to&.*

The most recent Oral Robert's **fundraising** campaign, however, breaks new ground! On January 4, Oral told his people that if he doesn't raise \$4.5 million by March, God is going to kill him. On his nationally televised show (1.4 million households, 200 television markets), Oral told his supporters, "I'm coming to you today to talk to you **in** a way I've never shared with you." He went on to talk about the university and the City of Faith, and then said God told him, "I want you to turn the medical **school** around in one year. And **He** said if you don't do it, **I'm** going to call you home in one year." (religious euphemism for "you'll **sleep with the fishes**.") He followed Up **his** TV spots with about a million letters to "prayer partners" asking donations to extend his life.

The ministry received over \$1.6 million in cash and pledges the **first** 10 days! That's \$160,000.00 a day! Pentecostal chicanery can sure raise the bucks. Don't be too concerned about Oral, either. The ministry is confident it will **reach** its goal. His son said the 68 year old evangelist is in excellent health, and should live through many **more** annual **fundraisers**.

I laughed out **loud** when I **first** read about Oral's latest stunt. Then I became angry thinking of my grandmother sitting in **front** of her Sony **Trinitron** at her retirement home worrying about "Bro. Roberts" going down the tubes because she (and others like her) hasn't given enough to the Lord. And then it struck me that what Oral was doing wasn't that much different than every reli-

gious **fundraiser**, albeit cataclysmically different in degree and bizarreness.

Oral was **trying** to impute enough value to his ministry to **get his supporters to send him** \$10.00 rather than **spending that** same \$10.00 at **McDonalds**. If his people didn't think the medical school was important enough to forego one or two trips to the Golden Arches, then perhaps **his** own life would be deemed valuable enough to miss the Big Mac 99 cent **Special**.

Whether we like it or note, each non-profit group competes in the marketplace. In a sense, we are "selling" the value of our ministry in exchange for the support of individuals and churches who deem that value of sufficient worth to sacrifice something else of value in order to make a contribution. If what a particular group **is** "selling" is not perceived as more valuable than a trip to **McDonalds**, then the contributions do not come in. If on the other hand, enough value is imputed to the ministry by presenting a particularly important project or a vitally urgent need (in this case, "God's **gonna** kill me... **HELP!**"), then the money flows in.

What is it "of value" that makes an individual give to Geneva **Ministries**? We have no fancy hospitals or medical schools to give to. Our work is basically done in the marketplace of ideas (and there aren't that many people who think the way we do). Our mission is to apply the **standards** and teachings of the Bible (in all of its fullness) to all areas of contemporary society. Through the work of Geneva **Ministries** (and sister organizations like ICE and American Vision), scores of Christian families and churches have been revitalized and equipped with the Biblical plan of Creation and Redemption resulting in an expansion of their goals and activities for the Kingdom of God. Geneva Ministries has **been effective in this way**.

None of this is particularly flashy. Nor is it messianic. The world will not be noticeably better next Tuesday as a result of our work. We publish newsletters, books, produce tape series and sponsor conferences. Nothing incredibly **world-changing** there (at least in the short term). The work of Geneva Ministries is for the long-term. Our world may not be better tomorrow, but we trust it shall be a better place for our **great-grandchildren**.

It is our hope that you **readers find** this ministry of value, that you will continue to support it financially and otherwise and that each of you will ultimately share in the realization of Geneva Ministries' vision. But.. **if** that's not good enough...I think I feel a tumor coming on. . . . ☐

The Firmament-Heaven Studies in Genesis One

James 8. Jordan

*And God called the firmament Heaven.
Genesis 1:8*

The highest heaven was created in Genesis 1:1, and so was the earth. Much of the book of Revelation takes place in heaven, so we have some idea of what it is like. This is apparently the "third heaven" to which Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 12:2, and which John entered in Revelation 4.

There is a problem with Paul's language, in that the Old Testament only mentions two heavens. **Indeed**, the Hebrew term heavens is not plural but **dual**, indicating a **related** pair of heavens. Where does Paul's "third" heaven fit in? **Good question**, and one debated by scholars. The simplest explanation has been that the three heavens **are** the atmospheric, the stellar, and the **paradisiacal**. The Bible nowhere distinguishes the atmospheric **from** the stellar heavens, however. **Indeed**, in Genesis one both are lumped together as the firmament-heaven. There is another possibility, however, though an equally speculative one.

My speculation is that the extra heaven (let's not worry about numbering it) is the ceiling and walls of the Tabernacle. Remember that the Tabernacle was a symbolic model of the world, and had a blue curtain embroidered with cherubim (the heavenly host) that covered the walls and ceiling within, just as the blue sky with its hosts **covers** the world outside. (The walls and ceiling of Solomon's Temple were gold, not blue [1 Kings 6:20-22], which may be where Medieval artists got the idea of painting the sky gold when they depicted heavenly scenes.) The firmament-heaven depicted on the Tabernacle's ceiling could be the extra heaven of which Paul was thinking when he referred to the highest heaven as "third." (This interpretation may receive some support **from** the **language** of 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul speaks of a heavenly tabernacle and compares it to our earthly bodies. He uses the word "tent, tabernacle" to refer to our **Adamic** bodies, and this language may be seen to connect with the Tabernacle of Moses. Maybe. If any readers have any better ideas, I'd like to hear them.)

Let us now look back at the two heavens of Genesis one. Genesis 1:2 tells us that originally the earth was without form and empty, 'dark' and covered with water. Then, **after** making light, God

mated a "firmament" to separate **waters** above **from waters** below (Gen. 1:6, 7). **This** firmament **He called heaven**. Now there **are** two heavens, the one the dwelling place of God and the angels, **made on the first day, and the second created within the original earth** as a reminder of the original heaven. **The fact** that the **word heaven is used for the firmament** means that the **firmament** is analogous to the original heaven, and thus is symbolic of it.

On the fourth **day**, God placed lights **in** the firmament-heaven, **to** be symbols and to act as clocks (Gen. 1:14-18). This means that the sun, moon, and stars are not part of the original heaven, but part of the original earth. The original earth is being differentiated into the globe on which we live on the one hand, and upper waters and lights on the other hand. On the **fifth** day, God created birds to fly **on the face of** the **firmament-heaven** (Gen. 1:20).

What is this firmament-heaven? The **related** verb in Hebrew means "**to beat out, or flatten out.**" The idea is of a shell or surface cast over the earth. A synonym for firmament (**raqia**) is **aggudah** (Amos 9:6), which means a vault made of **strong** bands.

Now as a matter of scientific fact, there is no hard shell around the earth, nor do **birds** fly inside a hard shell. Thus, we need to see the language **here** as pointing to a symbolic structure. The blue sky (firmament) is a symbolic boundary between waters above and waters below. Looking at the sky, we see an image of heaven. The things found in the sky (stars, birds) symbolize things found in heaven (angels).

What we have here is phenomenal language, language of appearances. The Bible frequently uses phenomenal language, as when it refers to rodents, reptiles, and insects as "creeping things"; language not acceptable in Biology 101, but perfectly adequate for the Bible's theological purposes. This is not at **all** to say that the Bible is irrelevant for science; but it is so say that we must interpret the Bible **correctly**, on its own terms, if we are to make proper applications to the questions of modern science.

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Correction

The last newsletter was incorrectly numbered "No. 33, Ott/Nov 1986." It should have been correctly numbered "No. 34, Dec 1986." We apologize for the duplication.

Lawsuits Among Believers

Part Two of Three

John F. Southworth, Jr.

(The first article in this series considered Paul's arguments concerning lawsuits among believers in 1 Corinthians 6:1-6. It covered the four reasons Paul gives for prohibiting lawsuits in secular courts by believers against each other.)

Having disposed of the immediate problem of the reasons believers in Corinth should not resolve their disputes before secular courts, Paul turns to the wider implications of the problem. He makes his second point in verse seven: "**Actually**, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be **defrauded**?" As **R.C.H. Lenski** states in his commentary on this verse "The trouble in **Corinth** lay, not only with the litigants who would run to pagan courts, but with the entire congregation which interposed no check upon such actions. Hence Paul first addresses the litigants and then turns to the church as such."

Paul wanted the **Corinthians** to see the depth of the problem with their litigiousness. He has dealt with the external factors in verses 1-6. Now he deals with the internal motivational factors of those involved. By demanding vindication at the expense of their brothers, they were trampling upon one of the **fundamental** tenets of Christianity. **Lawful** love of neighbors and enemies excludes a malicious or **greedy** pursuit of even an **otherwise** just cause.

Probably the best illustration of the point Paul is making in this section is **found** in the parable of the unmerciful **servant** (**Matt. 19:23-35**). Having been shown mercy, we too should show mercy. Not that we should be "doormats"; not that we should encourage evil through **kenotic** non-resistance; but, rather, that we must preserve the attitude of mercy that alone turns "getting even" into true Biblical justice.

The Corinthians were thinking only of themselves, not of their brother believers. Only of their "**rights**," not of their duty. Paul sets this inversion of priorities in focus by the rebuke of verse seven.

From his third point, Paul switches his attention to the underlying problem at Corinth that has brought about the litigation in question. In verse eight, he **reasons** that, for one to have had his rights taken away, someone must have taken them. It is to this one — the unrighteous believer,

whether **plaintiff** or defendant — that Paul speaks his last **word** of exhortation. Yes, he argues, we should bear wrongs when possible and, yes, we can, when this is impossible, seek redress in a proper forum and manner. But the problem would never come to this point if each of us were more **careful** to see that we did no harm to another.

This, finally, must be the basis of any dogma of litigation, because at this point the problem is in the **clearest** focus. Each believer is responsible **primarily** not to harm **others**, and if each would be **more careful** to **fulfill** this primary duty, the need for dispute resolution, if not completely eliminated in a **fallen** world, would be greatly reduced.

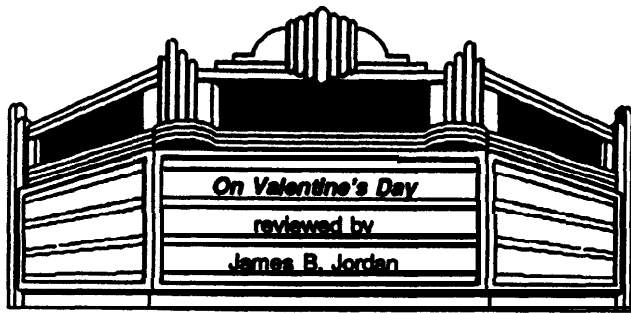
It is to this third point that **Paul** attaches his ending exhortation in verses 9-11. By ending his teaching on lawsuits with this list of unrighteous acts, he shows the root that creates a litigious spirit among people. But, he argues, because of their regeneration, the **Corinthian believers** are different. For some of them to **practice** the evils that would, among other things, cause lawsuits among them, shows that they have no part in God's Kingdom. This final emphasis of Paul is well **calculated** to show that the matter was greater than who was right in a given case. Rather, the matter was whether the **Corinthians** would betray, by their attitude and actions, the position they had attained through their washing in **Christ** by the Holy Spirit.

In the final article in this series, we will discuss an application of this passage in deciding whether litigation is a proper course of action. ☐

On Valentine's Day, continued from p. 5

since age twelve, had worked hard and become a pillar in the community, a man to whom everyone looked for counsel. Initially, he was furious that his daughter Elizabeth had **married** the poor and fatherless Horace **Robedaux**, but in the course of the story we see Horace becoming more and more like his father-in-law. He is frugal, and is constantly helping **people** in distress. (Indeed, the film is filled with interruptions.) As a result, people **are** turning to him, as they turn to Mr. Vaughn.

Perhaps I've given away too much, but the interpretation of a **Horton** Foote play is such a joy that I cannot resist. **There** is plenty more. This is a **film** to watch over and over again. I cannot recommend it too highly. ☐



Horton Foote's *On Valentine's Day* has now been released in videocassette. Foote is best known for his films *Tender Mercies* and *The Trip to Bountiful*. Less well known but equally interesting to Christians are *1918* and *On Valentine's Day*, which are two parts of a trilogy called *Story of a Marriage*. The remaining play, *Courtship*, will hopefully be filmed soon.

While *1918* was first made, it is actually third (or possibly second) part of the trilogy. *On Valentine's Day* precedes it, being set in 1917. Based on its title, I assume *Courtship* is actually the first in the set. Why they are being filmed in (apparently) reverse order I do not know. At any rate, if you have not seen *1918*, then check out *On Valentine's Day* first.

In watching this film, it is useful to bear in mind that it is made from a three act play. The three acts are Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and a day in early February or late January.

Like a number of Foote's plays, *On Valentine's Day* deals with moral character and interpersonal relationships in a world that has largely lost its faith. The stories of several individuals are woven together and their characters explored. As in *1918*, the central characters are a young married couple named Horace and Elizabeth Robedeaux. And again, in this film there are hints and flashes of Christianity, as if to show that men are missing the most important Help they could have, but they remain hints (unlike in *Tender Mercies*, which explores the dynamics of conversion and restoration).

We meet, for instance, Mr. Bobby. He is the town drunk. Unable to pray, he is estranged from his mother (perhaps a hint of the Church?), for whom he searches. Society is unable to help his drunkenness except by administering strong drugs, which threaten to addict him. As in *The Trip to Bountiful*, it is to physicians rather than to pastors that men turn in distress. Alternately pitiful and obnoxious, he shows us man in need of Help, but no one is really able to help him.

More central to the story is George Tyler.

Burdened with guilt because of unfulfilled promises, he is subject to spells of schizophrenia and paranoia. He seeks to atone for his wrongs by giving of his sizable wealth to Horace Robedeaux, and by seeking subtly to effect reconciliation between Horace and his estranged father-in-law, Mr. Vaughn. In his unhappy search for Help, Tyler voices most of the *double entendres* that point to the True Fountain of salvation that he has missed. He has forgotten the name of his wife, but he remembers a girl named Mary (another reminder of the Church?) whom he once loved. He is desperate to find her. On Christmas Eve, confused by what day it is, he announces that he is going to church. On another occasion, he brings up the subject of Easter.

In a remarkable conversation with Elizabeth Robedeaux, he asks her if she can bake "Dixie biscuits." He explains that his wife does not know how. After discussing his need of bread, he states that he is going to the river. If this hasn't reminded us of the sacraments, he then goes on to say that he always takes a gun to the river because it is full of deadly serpents.

Later, in a conversation with Horace Robedeaux, he pleads for help, saying, "I've had a life of misery since I betrayed Mary. Can you take me home? I don't know the way. I need help, but nobody here can help me." Mary, bread, river, Church, help, home — these are what Mr. Tyler needs.

As Tyler's son takes him home, Elizabeth tells Horace that when she was a little girl, she wanted to visit the grave of her sister. A kindly man in the town took her to the graveyard, but told her that her sister was not there. Rather, she was (home) in heaven. This conversation is interspersed with scenes of Mr. Tyler's being taken to his home. By these subtle devices, Horace Foote points us to the Answer that modern man is missing.

As in *The Trip to Bountiful*, the subject of home is important in *On Valentine's Day*. Visiting Horace and Elizabeth in their room, Mr. Vaughn (Elizabeth's father) complains that they do not have a home, only a rented room. A month later, however, Mr. Vaughn drops by to visit, and has changed his mind. "There's peace in this room, and contentment," he says. "I think that's why I like to come here." Mr. Vaughn has a house, but his home is a wreck because his son is becoming a wastrel.

Another major theme in the play/film is responsibility. Mr. Vaughn, poor and fatherless

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Realized Ethics

Beatitudes — Part One

Ray R. Sutton

The Jews never did obey the law of the Old Testament. They constantly lapsed into polygamy. They seldom **circumcised** themselves. They failed to produce a king who could establish a Biblical theocracy. The **Pentateuch** was even lost at one point, only providentially to be found by one of King Josiah's priests. They were driven into captivity because they failed to keep their sabbaths, of which the feasts **and** the year of Jubilee were part. And after they returned from captivity, they quickly degenerated into the same apostasy that had initially gotten them expelled. **In short**, they never **realized** their ethics.

There is a real myth in modern Christianity. It is that **Israel** kept the law and this law was inadequate; so Jesus had to come to inaugurate "new" law. Nothing could be **further** from the truth. The Old Covenant man **never kept the law**; hence, Jesus practiced what **had never been practiced. He realized** what had not been actualized. He transformed the disobeyed law into the **living** Word of God by dynamically observing it in its true intended sense (**Heb. 4:12**). Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not think I came to abolish the Law or the **Prophets**; I did not come to abolish, but to **fulfill**" (**Matt. 5:17**).

Jesus did not use the word "fulfill" (*plerao*) in the sense of "static maintenance," as Greg Bahnsen has maintained in his book, *Theonomy and Christian Ethics*; for this interpretation would not **truly allow** for any change. Nor did Christ use the word to mean "fulfilled and done away with," as too much of modern Christendom has misled us; for this interpretation negates the plain sense of "I did not come to abolish." Rather, the Son of God meant that He brought the Law to its "fullest expression." Jesus pulled the Old Testament Law into force like never before.

The beatitudes are perhaps the best example of the "**realized ethic**" of the New **Covenant**. Let us consider how the broader contexts of the Book of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, and the beatitudes as a whole converge on this theme.

First, the Book of Matthew presents the message of a **new creation**, a creation that **realizes** what the first creation could not. The Gospel is patterned after Genesis. It begins, "The book of the **genealogy [generation]** of Jesus Christ," just as Genesis is divided by the statement, "This is the book of the **generation of**" (**Gen. 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9;**

10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). Matthew's Gospel is specifically organized around the five-fold covenant pattern, analogous to the Torah structure. (I have provided a detailed explanation of the covenant structure of Matthew in *That You May Prosper: Dominion by Covenant* [Tyler: I.C.E., 1987], Appendix Three.) It has five sermons followed by the phrase, "When Jesus had finished these things" (**Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1**). This Gospel **strikingly coalesces** creation and law, reminding the Biblical reader of the ten words of Genesis 1 (w. 1,3,6,9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29), which parallel the ten words of the giving of the law (**Deut. 4:13**). Matthew's point is that as the **first** creation was actualized by the application of God's Word — "God **said...and** there was whatever He said" — so the second creation of the world was issued into existence by the same type of application of the Word, the **realization** of Biblical ethics.

Second, the Sermon on the Mount has an **octave structure, also** pointing to the new creation theme. (Eight is "new creation" because the first day after the sabbath was viewed as a new beginning.) It begins with eight beatitudes (**Matt. 5:1-10**), and then it explains them in reverse order. Note Figure 1 for an outline detailing this eight-fold structure.

(8) Persecuted	Matt. 5:11-16: First Section
Law and Prophets	
(7) Peacemakers	Matt. 5:21-6: Second Section
(6) Pure in heart	Matt. 5:37-7: Third Section
(5) Merciful	Matt. 5:38-6:4: Fourth Section
(4) Hunger and Thirst	Matt. 6:5-18: Fifth Section
(3) Meek	Matt. 6:19-34: Sixth Section
(2) Mourners	Matt. 7:1-6: Seventh Section
(1) Poor in Spirit	Matt. 7:7-11: Eighth Section
Law and Prophets	
Conclusion	1. Mar. 7:13-14: Two Gates
	2. Matt. 7:15-23: Two Trees
	3. Man 7:24-27: Two Builders

Figure 1

Christ's emphasis throughout the sermon is a realized ethic. He describes a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of **the** pharisees. He attacks their hypocrisy because they never truly applied the law of God. In fact, Christ's description of applied holiness in the beatitudes was so neglected by the religious leaders of Israel that some modern scholars have tried to contrast them

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are accepted as just at the bar of God. As Robert Brinsmead has said, "While legal metaphors are not the only ones used in the New Testament, they overwhelmingly **predominate**" (*The Pattern of Redemptive History*, p. 124).

It was the Reformers' emphasis on the judicial dimension of the gospel that fueled the Reformation. Justification by faith was, as Philip Schaff put it, the "material" principle of the Reformation. Justification was not, however, merely a theological position for the **Reformers**, but a living truth. Calvin's letters reveal how **often** he drew encouragement from the fact that he was accepted by the Judge, however much he might be **maligned in human opinion and judgment**. It is no exaggeration to say that it was the doctrine of justification by faith that enabled the Reformers to defy Emperor and Pope with such gusto and courage.

The Reformation's juridical emphasis cut to the heart of the subjective medieval doctrine of salvation. God's judgment, and the work of Christ on which it is founded, took place *extra nos*, "outside of us." **Therefore**, the **Reformers** emphasized, salvation does not depend in any way on moral improvement or piety or religious affections. For similar reasons, the judicial emphasis in **soteriology** prevented a legalistic undemanding and pursuit of sanctification. The medieval Christian pursued holiness with the nagging fear that he was not doing enough to please God. By emphasizing that sanctification grows out of our prior acceptance before God, the Reformers were able to restore freedom, confidence, and joy to the Christian pilgrimage.

Unfortunately, as Brinsmead observes, many modern evangelical churches preach an "experiential gospel" of regeneration and conversion that "is in profound harmony with the **soteriology** of classical Romanism" but "has little in common with the gospel of the Protestant Reformation" (*Patterns*, p. 161). A judicial emphasis in **soteriology** is therefore as necessary today as it was 450 years ago. ☐

Jordan, continued from p. 3

To paraphrase what Genesis One says about the firmament-heaven, we can say that God created the appearance of a shell to separate the (blue) **waters** above from the (blue) waters below. **This** shell symbolizes the boundary between heaven and

the heavenly sea (Rev. 4:6) and earth, as we shall see. If we look up at this blue shell, it looks as if the "greater light and the lesser light" and the stars **are fixed in the shell**. As we look up, it appears that the **birds fly on the face of**, or in front of the surface of this blue shell. Not the atmosphere nor outer space, however, but the shell itself is the **firmament-heaven**.

Why is this shell called "heaven"? Because the phenomena that appear in the sky are signs and symbols of things in the original heaven. Clouds reminds us of God's glory cloud. Rainbows remind us of the rainbow around His throne. Stars speak of angels. The sun speaks of Christ. The blue speaks of the heavenly sea before the Throne. And so forth. (Cf. ps. 19:1; Dan. 12:3.)

The firmament is best situated to show heaven to us because it is the symbolic boundary between heaven and earth. It is as if the shell were translucent, and we can see dimly through it into heaven — through a glass darkly. Thus, when Moses and the elders ascended the mountain to eat with God, "they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky [heaven] itself" (Ex. 24:10). The blue sapphire pavement is the firmament, which here becomes temporarily transparent enough to enable the elders to see the King of kings. The same picture is given in Ezekiel 1 :22–26, where the cherubim are positioned just under the **firmament**, to carry out God's will in the world, while God is enthroned above the firmament boundary.

In the Old Covenant men were not permitted into heaven, because the gates were closed. In the book of Revelation, however, John and then all the saints are permitted in. They get to stand with God on top of the firmament, which turns out to be a sea of glass (Rev. 5:6; 15:2). While the blue **firmament** blocks our vision of heaven (perhaps due to sin?), from the other side it is as clear as glass.

It seems, then, that when God established the **firmament** to separate the waters, He took some of the waters into the original heaven to form the heavenly sea, leaving the rest on the earth. Many Bible-believing scientists today, however, believe that Genesis one indicates that the "waters above" were a water-vapor canopy around the earth that collapsed at the time of the Flood. [It is possible that Genesis one is indicating both things **at once**, with both a theological-symbolic implication and a natural-physical implication. **We shall have** to take up this question in our next essay. ☐

Instructions for My Funeral

George Grant

I've just gone **through** one of the most harrowing experiences in my entire life.

Funerals are never pleasant. But this one was so disturbing I've made a few resolutions. Just a few resolute requests **really**. Insurance against that day when my final call is issued.

First, please don't let them sing "I did it **My Way**" at my funeral. I know when I'm gone, I won't have much to say about the conduct of the bereaved, but please don't let them do it. And if an accordionist comes within five blocks of the funeral home, shoot him.

Next, frisk the **mourners** to make sure no one has a pocket **instamatic** or, worse, a home video recorder.

Now really, as a minister of the Gospel, I have always conducted myself with dignity at the **funerals** of others. I have never cracked my knuckles during a eulogy, asked the widow about the deceased's shoe size, or badgered the family about tithes on insurance pay-offs. Could I not be repaid in scale?

Is it too much to ask that when my time comes, I be buried in something other than polyester? I would hate for my suit to hold up better than me. And the last thing I want to do is make life easier for some future archaeologist: "Check the label, boys. Another one who died during that big Sears men's suit **bonanza**."

Please don't let them use an organist who has ever played at a skating rink, or during the seventh inning stretch at the Houston Astrodome. And choose any funeral parlor, really any one at all, **EXCEPT** the one that features video games and dollar bill changers in the lobby.

You know me, I'm not a man of patrician tastes or expensive indulgences. I **would** never ask to be buried at the wheel of a **Ferrari** or embalmed with vintage Dom **Perignon**. I'm a pastor, after all, and not an evangelist. But, even so, please don't let them **serve** corny dogs and **onion rings** at my wake.

I **would not** want to take words **from** the mouths of my eulogists but, I beg, O Lord, I beg, let them lose their notes before they have a chance to recite in a pastoral sing-song the 23rd Psalm, or to quote **Kahlil Gibran**, Edgar Guest, or Rod

McKuen. And **if** anyone shows up spouting Helen Steiner Rice, have them ejected at once.

Don't permit anyone **in** the **funeral** procession who is driving a car with one of those clever horns that **plays** "The Eyes of Texas." And even though I'm sure things tend to be a bit boring **at** traditional graveside **services**, please keep it simple. Don't let anyone talk about Amway, NeoLife, HerbsLife, Tupperware, or **PTL's** Tree Top Tennis Condos at Heritage Village.

Now I know there **is really** nothing that I'll be able to do to stop **those** normally rational souls compelled by grief, sentimentality, or Jack **Daniels** to carry out some thoroughly foolish final salute, Lord, but please don't let them hold the dog up to view the casket.

It's bad enough to be subjected to these kinds of scenes of **horror** at the funerals of others. So send upon this weebegone child the simple grace of an earthly send-off, simple and spare. Is it too much to ask? ☐

Sutton, continued from p. 6

to Old Covenant law. This is not the case, as we see in the third point of our contextual overview.

Third, the beatitudes are a dynamic application of the law of God. They cannot be understood by convoluted lexical studies of the Greek words, as is the situation with most studies of the beatitudes. They should be examined in light of their **Old Testament** background. Each beatitude begins with the key Old Covenant sanction word, "blessing," which was associated with **faithfulness to the law**, and the beatitudes are the same in number as the blessings in Deuteronomy (28:1ff.). Also, each beatitude draws out an ethical application **from** some concrete classification in the Old Testament. For example, the **first** beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit," alludes to the laws of the poor, gleaning. Thus, Jesus applies the laws of gleaning to the whole ethical structure of the Christian walk. This is a new creation of the law of God because this is an application of the law in its fullest sense.

In conclusion, the beatitudes are part of an **over-all** presentation of realized ethics. They **fall** under the theme of the new creation, which is itself the ultimate realization of the original Word of God. In our next study, we will examine the **first** beatitude in detail. ☐