OUR MISSION IS TO SUPPORT THE CHURCH IN HER CHARGE OF PRESENTING EVERY PERSON MATURE IN CHRIST (COL. 1:28).

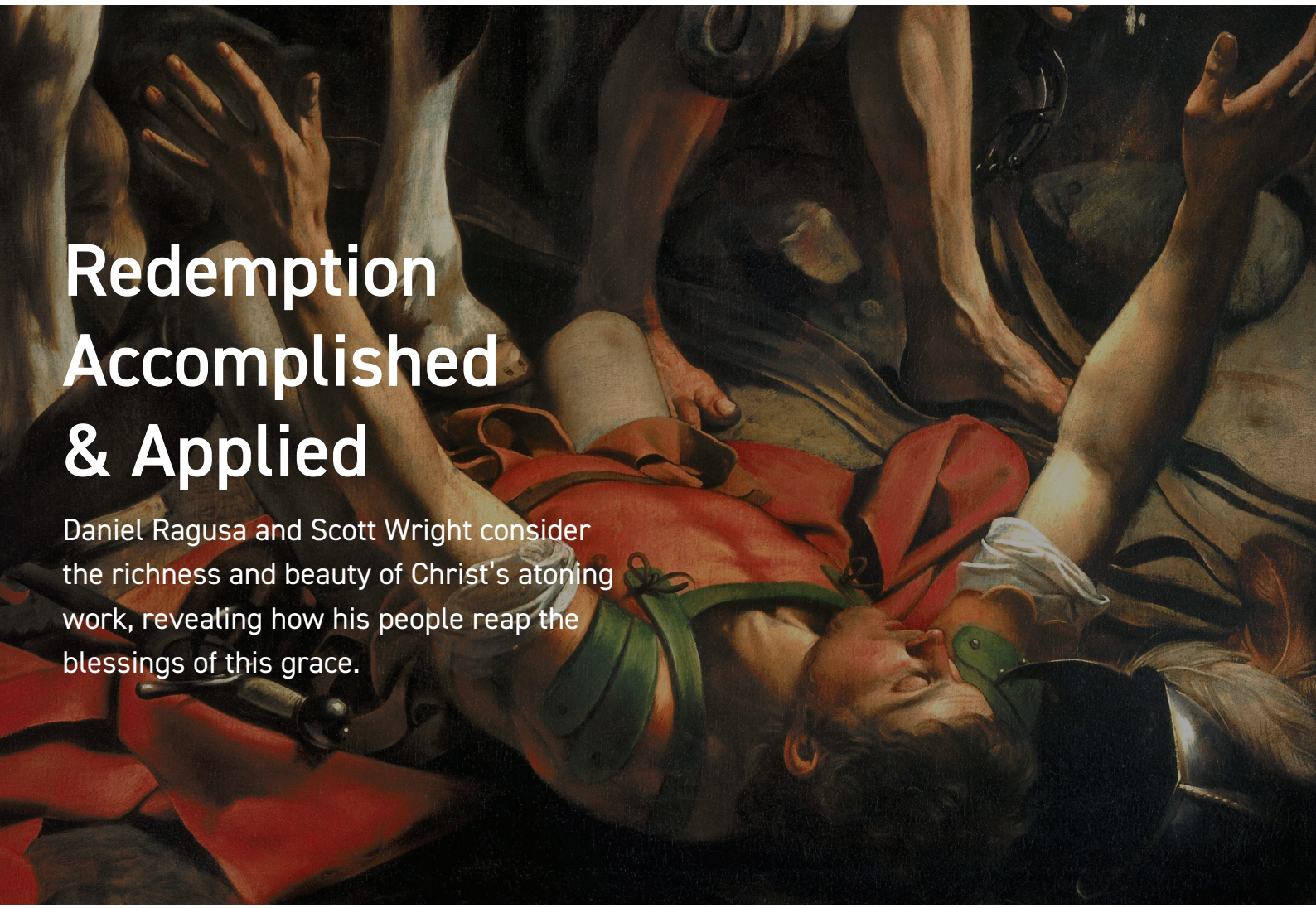
# REFORMED FORUM

FALL/WINTER
2023
MAGAZINE

**THE DPC OF REDEMPTION APPLIED**
Daniel Ragusa correlates the deeper Protestant conceptions of covenant, image of God, and original sin with redemption applied in union with Christ. p. 5

**REGENERATION AND REDEMPTIVE HISTORY**
Scott Wright explores the redemptive-historical character of regeneration. The believer's new birth is an eschatological intrusion into the present world. p. 8

**NEW REFORMED FORUM PUBLICATION**
Emphasizing Christ's accomplishment of redemption, Scott Wright's book develops readers' appreciation for the truth and fullness of the doctrine of regeneration. p. 11



## Redemption Accomplished & Applied

Daniel Ragusa and Scott Wright consider the richness and beauty of Christ's atoning work, revealing how his people reap the blessings of this grace.

For more than fifteen years, I have had the honor of witnessing our community's growth. From its humble beginnings with just three individuals recording a podcast in a small Philadelphia apartment, Reformed Forum has grown into a vibrant global community of impassioned people. This transformation is a testament to God's handiwork and the commitment of like-minded believers advocating our shared theological convictions.

This year, I have dedicated a substantial portion of our organization's resources to enhancing our community. Our objective is to enrich every member's experience and the value they derive from their contributions. My aspiration is for each member to establish and nurture relationships within our community.

To encourage community participation, we recently launched community.reformedforum.org. This new platform enables us to learn, engage, and grow together, regardless of geographical boundaries. It is a digital hub for thought-provoking discussions, sharing news, and nurturing fellowship.

Moreover, we introduced an online symposium, an event that will foster scholarly discourse and thought leadership in Reformed theology. This format provides an exceptional opportunity to expand our knowledge and challenge our viewpoints, enhancing our collective growth through academic discussion.

While digital platforms allow us to connect more frequently with our global community, the value of in-person interactions remains irreplaceable. To cater to this need, we have hosted local meetups aimed at deepening our bonds of friendship and faith in a more intimate setting.

Our annual conference continues to be a cherished tradition. Inaugurated in 2014, we strive to enhance each year's gathering, offering a unique combination of intellectual dialogue and spiritual encouragement in a warm, convivial environment.

We trust these initiatives will invigorate our community, cultivate deeper relationships, and ignite meaningful conversations. We eagerly anticipate your active participation and engagement. This community is for everyone who desires to grow in their understanding of Scripture and the theology that faithfully summarizes its teachings.

In this issue, we feature two valuable members of our community: Daniel Ragusa and Scott Wright. Both brothers articulate with clarity and conviction our rich redemptive-historical theological tradition. Let us, together, follow their example, promoting the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ and what we call the "Deeper Protestant Conception," which directs us toward God's original provision for consummate fellowship with him in the highest heavens.

In Christ,

Camden Bucey
Executive Director

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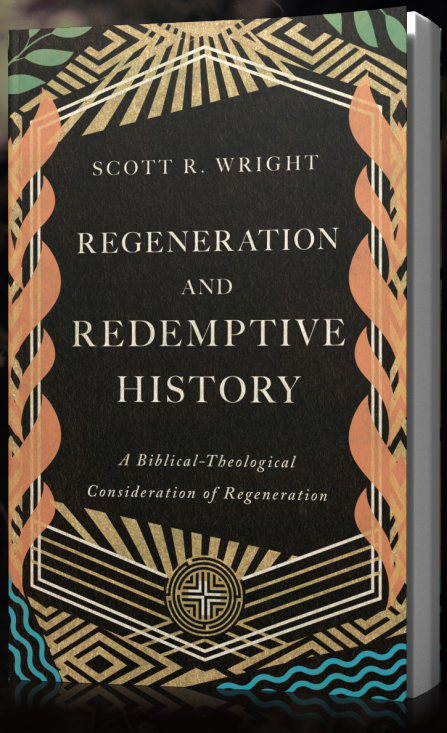
Cover image is Caravaggio's *Conversion on the Way to Damascus.*

Graphic design and illustrations by Marc Scaturro.

# REGENERATION, IN ITS FULLNESS, IS MORE THAN JUST A MATTER OF TIME.

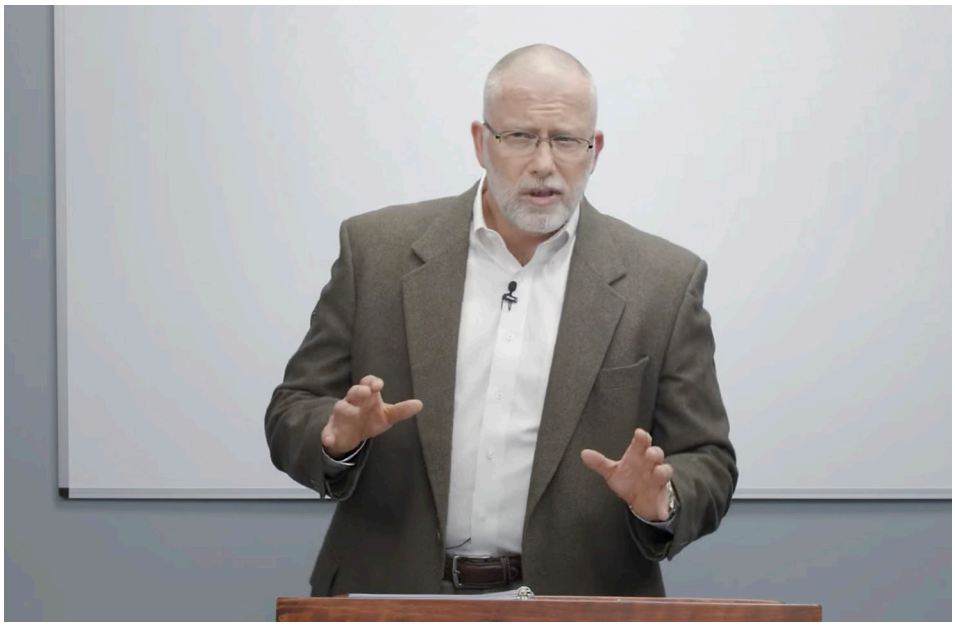
**New creation happens in context.** Learn how a doctrine so central to the Reformed faith, the doctrine of regeneration, has largely been relegated to the logical categories of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) since Dort, and how Dr. Scott Wright guides students, pastors, and lay people in developing a new appreciation for the truth and fullness of it through the lens of the *historia salutis* (history of salvation).

**Available in late September from Reformed Forum.**



# UNION WITH CHRIST: THE BENEFITS OF HIS SUFFERING AND GLORY

## LANE TIPTON



Taught by Dr. Lane Tipton, this course aims to build up the saints in their understanding of two basic features of Reformed theology: (1) redemption *accomplished* by Christ for the church in his humiliation and exaltation, suffering and glory; and (2) how that redemption accomplished by Christ is *applied* by Christ's Spirit, working through the Word, uniting the church to Christ by faith in effectual calling. Further elaboration is given to the benefits of that union in justification, sanctification, and adoption, all of which serve communion with Christ and the worship of the triune God. At every point, special attention is devoted to how the cross and resurrection of Christ shape and empower both union with Christ and the benefits of that union. Designed for the advanced Sunday school level, the course material is organized in terms of the teaching of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, questions 23 through 38.

Upon successful completion of this **free-on-demand course**, students will be able to do the following:

- Articulate how Christ has accomplished redemption as prophet, priest, and king in the estates of humiliation and exaltation; and how the Spirit of Christ has applied that redemption in faith-union with Christ.
- Identify, distinguish, and relate the benefits of redemption, including justification, sanctification, and adoption.
- Apply redemptive-historical hermeneutics to see the gospel as both the central redemptive subject matter and *telos* of the Old Testament.
- Analyze and evaluate views that abstract the benefits of redemption from Christ the benefactor or otherwise downplay the centrality of union with Christ in terms of the application of redemption.

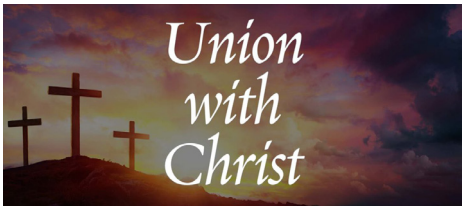
VIDEO LESSON TITLES:

### REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED

- Redemption Accomplished and Christ's Two Estates
- Christ's Work as High Priest
- The Gospel, The Old Testament, and the Two Estates in Romans 1:1–4

### REDEMPTION APPLIED

- Original Sin and Effectual Calling
- Effectual Calling and Faith
- The Nature of Union with Christ
- The Benefits of Union with Christ
- Union with Christ and Justification
- Union with Christ and Adoption
- Union with Christ and Sanctification




**ACCESS THE FULL COURSE HERE.**

# THE DEEPER PROTESTANT CONCEPTION OF REDEMPTION APPLIED

DANIEL RAGUSA

The Reformed have long rested in the unity between redemption accomplished and redemption applied found in Jesus Christ. As the mediator of the covenant of grace, Christ was tasked not only with *accomplishing* the redemption of all whom the Father gave him through his humiliation and exaltation, but also *applying* that redemption to them in union with him by faith in the power of his Spirit. Thus, at every point in the whole complex of redemption, the redeemed in Christ may consciously and gratefully give all glory to God alone.

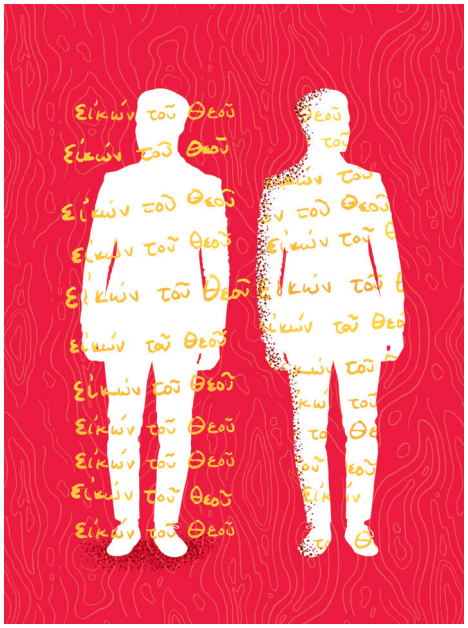
This essay will explore this deeper covenantal framework for the application of redemption and its correlation with the deeper Protestant conceptions of the image of God and original sin. We will advance down the path mapped by Geerhardus Vos in his 1891 inaugural address, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology."[1] This address set the trajectory for his teaching, including his lectures on Reformed dogmatics. Following our positive articulation of the deeper Protestant conception of redemption applied, we will briefly contrast it with two shallower conceptions—namely, those of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth.

## *The Deeper Protestant Conceptions of Covenant, Image of God, and Original Sin*

The doctrine of the covenant is a distinctly Reformed doctrine. It developed wherever theology was done on the basis of the Reformed principle, which takes its starting point not in man but in God. It prioritizes God's glory above all else in creation and redemption and organically grows from Scripture's "deepest root idea."[2] Vos writes, "God does not exist for man's sake, but man for God's sake. This is what is written at the entrance of the temple of Reformed theology."[3]

What follows when the Reformed principle is applied to man's relationship to God? Vos answers that a threefold demand arises that the covenant idea alone satisfies: (1) All of man's work must rest on an antecedent work of God. (2) In all his works man ought to show God's image and be a means of revealing God's attributes. (3) The latter should not occur unconsciously or passively, but the revelation of God's attributes must proceed through the understanding and will, through the conscious life, and actively come to external [*buiten*] expression.[4] Reflected here is the correlation between the covenant idea and the deeper Protestant conception of the image of God. Neither is satisfied with what is merely external to man but press deeper into his conscious life, into the "deepest depths of his being."[5] In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vos writes,

> [The image of God] means above all that [man] is disposed for communion with God, that all the capacities of his soul can act in a way that corresponds to their destiny only if they rest in God. This is the nature of man. That is to say, there is no sphere of life that lies outside his relationship to God and in which religion would not be the ruling principle. According to the Roman Catholic conception, there is a natural man who functions in the world, and that natural man adopts a religion that takes place external [*buiten*] to his nature. . . . According to the deeper Protestant conception, the image does not consist only in likeness [*overeenkomst*] to God but in being disposed toward God.[6]



The word *deeper* is a comparative adjective. When comparing the Protestant conception of the image of God with the Roman Catholic conception, Vos sees the former as deeper than the latter. The Roman Catholic conceives of the image in a shallower sense as something external to man's nature.[7] The Protestant—and more specifically the Reformed—conceives of it in a deeper sense as something inherent

1. Geerhardus Vos, *De Verbondsleer in de Gereformeerde Theologie* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Mazijk's Uitgevers-Bureau, 1939). Translated as "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology" in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 234–67.

2. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 241.

3. Vos, *De Verbondsleer*, 18; my translation. The translation "God does not exist *because* of man, but man *because* of God" (Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 242) emphasizes causation or origin rather than goal and purpose.

4. Vos, *De Verbondsleer*, 18; my translation. Cf. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 242.

5. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Volume 2: *Anthropology*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 2:14.

6. Vos, *RD*, 2:13–14; The following edits were made to the translation: "beyond his nature" was changed to "external to his nature" and "exists only in correspondence to God" was changed to "consists only in likeness to God."

7. Vos speaks of Roman Catholicism's "principle of externalization" in *RD*, 4:95. Specifically, he speaks of the application of this principle to faith which results in a shallower conception of it as nothing more than "an historical assent to the truth." In contrast, the deeper Protestant conception of faith is "heartfelt trust" (*RD*, 4:95). "True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word; it is also a wholehearted trust…" (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 21).

to man's nature. It is a deeper conception because it sees the image of God in "the deepest depths of man's being."[8] This is an echo of what Vos said in his address that man "in his deepest being and in his proper destiny . . . must receive the glory of God in him and let it shine through him."[9] This too is an echo of the threefold demand of the Reformed principle: "the revelation of God's attributes must proceed through the understanding and will, through the conscious life, and actively come to external expression." In the shallower Roman Catholic conception, the image of God is a mere likeness to God; in the deeper Protestant conception, it is an internal disposition toward God that must actively come to external expression in every sphere of life.

Thus, when God relates to man by way of covenant, he relates to him in a manner consistent with his creation in his image as wholly disposed toward him in the deepest depths of his being. The covenant, in other words, is the deeper Protestant conception of the way God relates to man. For Vos, therefore, the essence of the covenant is a fellowship of life, something deeper than a legal relationship mechanically added to the natural relationship, which man is created with as God's image. Explaining Vos' distinction, Anthony Hoekema writes, "Every covenant in the first sense [legal relationship] looks forward to and is intended to become a covenant in this second sense: a living fellowship, or a *fellowship of life*. The covenant in the first sense remains unfruitful and misses its goal when it fails to become a covenant in the second sense."[10] We see this in the covenant of works in which Adam's natural relationship to God as his image bearer was made to serve a positive purpose. The covenant did not set aside the natural relationship but incorporated it into something higher.[11] This means Adam's attainment of the eschatological goal of the covenant—a higher, permanent fellowship of life, sacramentally present in the tree of life—had to take place in a way congruent with his nature as the image of God. So, Vos writes, "The image of God within him must be brought out in the full clarity of his consciousness. In a certain sense it must be extended, for in that he can still sin and die man is not God's image bearer. In his life it must be formed by keeping the divine law. With deep moral earnestness he is immediately directed not to his own bliss but to the honor of the Creator, and assigned a task so that, by completing it, he might enter the full joy of his covenant God."[12]

Adam, however, disobeyed the Lord, transgressing the covenant. Rather than experiencing an escalation of life, he incurred death. What follows is the deeper Protestant conception of original sin. Vos writes, "By falling away from something to which he was wholly disposed, which constitutes his proper and highest destiny, man will be changed *in the deepest depths of his being*; a radical reversal will take place *within him*."[13] The shallower Roman Catholic conception of original sin sees only the removal of that which is external to man's nature, leaving it weakened and sick but still intact and capable of some spiritual good. "What clings to us outwardly can be removed without making us different inwardly," says Vos.[14] But, according to the deeper Protestant conception, man in his fallen estate "is dead and therefore does no good toward God."[15]

We have seen the correlation between the deeper Protestant conceptions of the image of God, covenant, and original sin—all in step with the Reformed principle organically drawn from Scripture's deepest root idea. In the next section, we will draw out a further correlation with the deeper Protestant conception of redemption applied.

## *The Deeper Protestant Conception of Redemption Applied*

A radical reversal has taken place within man, which determines the way in which he can be redeemed, if he is to be redeemed at all. It means, first and foremost, he cannot redeem himself; another must redeem him, and he must redeem him in a manner congruent with his nature (image of God) and God's relationship to him (covenant). From this arises the distinction between redemption accomplished and applied—a twin task given to Christ, the mediator, in the covenant of redemption, which provides the guarantee for its fulfillment in the covenant of grace. As the mediator, Christ must not only accomplish the redemption of the elect but also apply that redemption to them, for they are otherwise dead in their sin, incapable of any spiritual good.

Furthermore, in keeping with the threefold demand of the Reformed principle, this application of redemption by Christ must (1) not merely be external but internal, penetrating to the deepest depths of man's being, and (2) occur in such a way that he is conscious of it at every point that he might give glory to God. Redemption must be, as Vos says, "impressed upon the consciousness of the elect and be actively expressed through their lives."[16] Grace, therefore, must not be applied mechanically, like in the shallower Roman Catholic conception in which grace is received externally through the sacraments working *ex opere operato*. Rather, as Vos writes, "God's work of grace . . . must renovate the image *in* man."[17] This can only take place when life flows into life, when the deepest inner principle in man is transformed, and this happens only by way of Spirit-wrought union with Christ by faith. Vos writes,

> The application of Christ in its entirety occurs because of and in union with Christ. Only when the believer understands how he has to receive and has received everything from the Mediator and how God in no way whatever deals with him except through Christ, only then does (1) a picture of the glorious work that God wrought through Christ emerge in his *consciousness* and (2) the magnificent idea of grace begin to dominate and to form in his *life*. For the Reformed, therefore, the entire *ordo salutis*, beginning with regeneration as its first stage, *is bound to the mystical union with Christ*. There is no gift that has not been earned by Him. Neither is there a gift that is not bestowed by Him that does not elevate God's glory through His bestowal.[18]

Union with Christ, in other words, is the deeper Protestant conception of redemption applied that correlates with the deeper Protestant conceptions of image, covenant, and original sin. This becomes all the more apparent when we contrast it with the shallower conceptions of Aquinas and Barth.

According to Aquinas, "Grace is nothing else than a participated likeness of the Divine Nature" and, as such, it "perfects the essence of the soul."[19] This is in keeping with the shallower Roman Catholic conception of the image of God as consisting "only in likeness to God," as Vos observed earlier. Accordingly, redemption is conceived in terms of participation in the divine nature and grace is applied to reorder and reproportion man's nature to this end. But how is this grace applied? Aquinas answers, "Christ's Passion is, so to say, applied to man through the sacraments according to the Apostle (Rom. 6:3)."[20] The sacraments ad-

8. Vos, *RD*, 2:14.
9. Vos, *De Verbondsleer*, 40; my translation.
10. Anthony Hoekema, *Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of the Covenant* (Clover, SC: Full Bible Publications, 2007), 234. Italics in the original.
11. See Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 244.
12. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 245.
13. Vos, *RD*, 2:14; emphasis mine.
14. Vos, *RD*, 2:14.
15. Vos, *RD*, 2:14.
16. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 248.
17. Vos, *RD*, 2:15; emphasis mine.
18. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 248; emphasis mine.
19. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Cincinnati, OH: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Q. 62, articles 1 & 2.
20. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 61, article 1.



minister grace like medicine. This is in keeping with what Aquinas says elsewhere, "He [the natural man] is like a sick man able to make certain movements by himself, but unable to move like a man in perfect health until he has had medicine to heal him. In its integrated state, then, man's nature required strengthening by grace-given powers to do and will goodness surpassing nature. But in its disordered state it first needs even its natural strength healed, before it receives added strength to do what is supernaturally good and deserving."[21] Note, this sickness is not the effect of the fall *per se* but man's nature as created without the aid of the superadded gift of original righteousness, which was lost in the fall.

Vos, however, rejects this shallower conception of redemption applied. He writes, "[It is not] the case that grace as *materia medica* is poured into the sinner; for then he would fail to appreciate its divine beauty."[22] The entire order of salvation is not bound to the sacraments but to union with Christ who is embraced by faith.[23] This is the deeper Protestant conception in which redemption is not merely applied *onto* man's nature to raise it beyond itself but *to* man's nature to restore and raise it to its inherent eschatological goal through covenant.

Whereas Aquinas has an external application of redemption via his sacramentalism, Barth conceives of an unconscious application of redemption via his reconfigured doctrine of election. For Barth, all men *as men* are elect in Christ, who is elected man, whether they are conscious of it or not. Consciousness of God's work of grace, in other words, may be preferable, but it is not essential. From this is born the idea of anonymous Christianity, the epitome of the modernist principle that God exists for the sake of man and not man for the sake of God.

This shallower conception of redemption applied, furthermore, abstracts God's work of grace from its deeper covenantal framework, robbing God of glory and his people of true comfort. Vos writes,

> It is not the case that man immediately and at once comes into possession of full blessedness, for then there would not be an opportunity to see the unfolding of the wonderful plan of grace. . . . The reality of his situation must be revealed in the consciousness of the sinner to whom God shows His grace. Hence, the Reformed Christian loves to express the work of grace in terms of conscious life. He often speaks about a powerful calling, occasionally in the sense of regeneration. He does not deny thereby that an immediate act of God is required to create spiritual life in the dead soul; rather he intends to express as strongly as possible that life first comes to its greatest fruition, its destiny, in the conscious recognition of God's grace.[24]

In this way, the application of redemption correlates with man as the image of God, who is to reveal God's glory through his conscious life. This can only come about through the mystical union with Christ by faith, as life flows into life, and his people are transformed from the inside out according to the deeper Protestant conception of redemption applied.

## *Conclusion*

We have endeavored to demonstrate that the deeper Protestant conceptions of covenant, image of God, and original sin correlate with the deeper Protestant conception of redemption applied in terms of the mystical union with Christ. The correlation between these doctrines reminds us that we are dealing with a theological system in which doctrines are not held side by side but as interpenetrating one another. In this sense, we might say that in each doctrine is contained the whole system. This means that to redefine any one doctrine must either redefine the whole system or be held in contradiction. It was the consistent outworking of the Reformed principle that led Vos to perceive the deeper Protestant conception of the image of God and with it the whole system of Reformed theology, structured according to the covenant idea, in which God does not exist for the sake of man but man for the sake of God.



*Dr. Daniel Ragusa is the pastor of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (URCNA) in New York City.*

21. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 308.
22. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 253.
23. See Belgic Confession Article 22.
24. Vos, "Doctrine of the Covenant," 253.

# REGENERATION AND REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

SCOTT R. WRIGHT

Three things converged that ultimately led to the writing of this article. First, at the age of twenty-three, having very little church experience and practically no knowledge of Christian doctrine, I was born again through the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit. That began, among other things, a deep fascination with this amazing experiential phenomenon (the new birth), which I had not been seeking and knew very little about. Second, while in seminary, I had another watershed moment when I learned that Scripture's primary concern was not with my personal, subjective experience but with the objective *historia salutis*, or the history of salvation. This stimulated within me a keen interest in the relationship between regeneration and redemptive history. Third, I was asked to write this article for Reformed Forum.

The doctrine of regeneration is "that factor which more than any other has come to distinguish" Reformed soteriology.[1] Indeed, the Reformed tradition has always steadfastly maintained that in regeneration, God *alone* is at work in changing the heart and renewing the will of a sinner. For centuries, the doctrine of regeneration was broadly formulated to comprehend the Christian life as a whole and, in so doing, made it almost identical with sanctification. But in response to the Arminian challenge, later Reformed theologians at the Synod of Dort, which met in 1618–1619, tightened the doctrine's scope to focus on the precise moment of spiritual rebirth, or the Spirit's instantaneous act of generating new life in the believer. In defense of this truth against the theological error of the Remonstrants, the scope of this doctrine was consciously curtailed.

We ought to be grateful for the Synod's vigorous defense of the truth; however, in limiting the scope of regeneration, the eschatological significance of regeneration was overlooked. Hence, it seems clear to me that while the Reformed doctrine of regeneration as defended by the Synod of Dort and




maintained throughout the centuries that followed is gloriously *true*, it is not completely *full*. We may not only rejoice in the goodness, truth, and beauty of the Reformed doctrine as it stood, but we should also realize there is more to be said about this verity from a redemptive-historical perspective. A biblical-theological study helps us better appreciate its fullness and theological richness as well as enables us to understand its character more fully. Perhaps a useful analogy would be the following: consider the difference between the *truth* of a two-dimensional, black-and-white photograph and the *fullness* of a three-dimensional, color hologram.

The eschatological character of regeneration was not revealed all at once in the beginning but (akin to the plan of salvation itself) was gradually unfolded through the historical progress of redemptive revelation. You see, God did not make himself known, or reveal his salvific purpose, through a constant and continuous stream of communication. Instead, he conveyed this revelation over a long span of time periodically at historical, epoch-making intervals through various revelatory means—that is, "at many times and in many ways" (Heb. 1:1). This revelation was connected to and inherent in God's redemptive activity; hence, we discover a "word-deed-word" phenomenon in God's plan of salvation.[2] The Lord's redemptive deed was usually preceded by a preparatory word to make ready his people for what he would do. The deed was then followed by an interpretative word to explain to his people what he had already done. Geerhardus Vos claims that the Old Testament provides the preparatory word, the Gospels the redemptive deed, and the Epistles the interpretative word.[3] The person and work of Jesus Christ was the zenith and conclusion of God's redemption work and revelation. Christ's death and resurrection inaugurated the long-awaited eschaton and brought about an epochal change of such magnitude that all else in human history pales in comparison. His finished work has imbued the entire period between his two advents with an eschatological quality. Of this, the New Testament authors were keenly aware. For example, Paul describes the Corinthians as those "on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11), and he declares that we are living "in the last days" (2 Tim. 3:1).

Since the whole inter-adventual period is eschatologically qualified, it raises the question as to how that eschatological quality has influenced the complexion of the Reformed tradition's most distinctive doctrine. If other benefits in this new covenant era are qualified eschatologically, would regeneration not be as well? In the Synod of Dort's defense of divine monergism, it expressed this doctrine from a distinctly *ordo salutis* perspective. In so doing, it treated this dogma as something of an ahistorical truth regarding a believer's spiritual renewal, as if the watershed events of Christ's mission did not exert a radical impact and make any appreciable difference. As a result, its eschatological complexion was overlooked. The Synod's formulation was true but not full. If we approach the doctrine from a *historia salutis* perspective, the truth of regeneration becomes more deeply edifying and soul-enriching.

This *historia salutis* perspective is implicitly evident—for example, regarding the ministry of reconciliation, Paul says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), which would be rendered more accurately as "he is new creation."[4] The *historia salutis*

1. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987), 141.

2. "The usual order is: first word, then the fact, then again the interpretative word," Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), 7.

3. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

4. εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις.

is preeminent: Paul is emphasizing not the individual's conversion experience, though present, but the eschatological character of the believer's regeneration. In other words, what is highlighted is not the new creature but the new creation in which the regenerate believer is now a participant. To use the language of Geerhardus Vos, regeneration is not simply a change in "individual subjective conditions," but rather the creation of "a totally new environment, or, more accurately speaking, a totally new world, in which the person spoken of is an inhabitant and participator. It is not in the first place the interiority of the subject that has undergone the change, although that, of course, is not to be excluded. The whole surrounding world has assumed a new aspect and complexion."[5]

We conclude, therefore, that regeneration should not be viewed as an ahistorical truth divorced from the significant watershed events of redemptive history. Regeneration is tightly connected with those events and possesses distinctly eschatological character. From the Pentateuch through the Prophetic Books, its eschatological character came into increasingly sharper focus until it was most clearly revealed in the New Testament canon.

Throughout the Old Testament, regeneration was something for which Israel was encouraged to hope, something tied inextricably to God's redemptive activity in Christ. For example, Moses anticipated Israel's covenant infidelity and predicted God's future act of circumcising their hearts (Deut. 30:6). Jeremiah foresaw the day when God would give his people a heart to know him (Jer. 24:7) and would put his law within them, writing it upon their hearts (31:33). Ezekiel prepared Israel for a future heart transplant and the infusion of a new spirit (Ezek. 11:19). These and other Old Testament texts refer to regeneration with a distinctly futuristic orientation. In short, the fulfillment would be an important part of Israel's eschatological hope so that "not repair, but regeneration of the present lies in the womb of the future."[6]

From the perspective of the New Testament authors, "the eschatological state has arrived and the one great incision in history has already been made."[7] We discover in their divinely inspired writings that regeneration is imbued with an eschatological complexion. Consider the words of Jesus himself who said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, *in the new world*, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28, emphasis mine). That phrase "in the new world" is literally "in the regeneration." Our Lord himself acknowledges its eschatological character. He viewed regeneration from a *historia salutis* perspective and referred to it as a monumental cosmic renewal that will be fully revealed and experienced in the future and in which believers participate proleptically even now. Other New Testament texts couple regeneration with the corpus of redemptive events associated with Christ, such as the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost (John 3:1–15). Regeneration is associated with "the last hour" (1 John 2:18), "the last days" (James 5:3), and "a living hope" that is oriented futuristically (1 Pet. 1:3).

Therefore, any formulation of the doctrine of regeneration should acknowledge its eschatological character. The new birth as experienced by believers is an eschatological intrusion into the present world. Certainly, there is *experiential* continuity between the regeneration of new covenant believers to that of their old covenant counterparts. But a Christian's regeneration differs dramatically from that of an old covenant believer when considered from the standpoint of redemptive history. The old covenant believer depended on the work of Christ *yet to come*—a proleptic participation in the eschatological kingdom of God before it arrived in Christ. The new covenant Christian is based on the work of Christ having been *completed*—a participation of the eschatological kingdom now present. There are aspects of it that remain *not yet*, but what is *already* make new covenant regeneration more full than its pre-messianic complement. The person and work of Jesus Christ has made all the difference. Both old covenant and new covenant believers participate in the eschatological kingdom and experience true eschatological power through the mediation of Christ. But the one's redemptive-historical vantage point is radically different from the other's. In these last days, the eschaton has pierced time and space in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As a result, compared to the condition of the old covenant believer, the new covenant Christian enjoys greater privilege, clarity, and nearness to the consummation. He becomes a subject of the kingdom now present, rather than of the kingdom yet to come.

The great benefit of regeneration is rooted in, based upon, and qualified by the great corpus of redemptive-historical events associated with Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is important to recognize that in Scripture, regeneration is introduced and expounded primarily from a *historia salutis* perspective. The Reformed tradition has rendered valuable service in developing its doctrine of monergistic renewal in the sovereign work and gracious power of God's Spirit who gives new life to elect sinners. But to appreciate the doctrine more fully, regeneration must be considered from the standpoint of redemptive history. There is a historical *newness* to the regeneration of new covenant believers, a newness that is tied to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and as Geerhardus Vos observes, "its entire character must correspond to this source."[8] It is our hope that we would more clearly understand and more deeply appreciate the relationship of regeneration and redemptive history.



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5. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton University Press, 1930; reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1991), 47.
6. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 189.
7. Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 26.
8. Geerhardus Vos, "The Spiritual Resurrection of Believers: A Sermon on Ephesians 2:4, 5," trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Kerux* 5:1 (1990), 5.



# REFORMED ACADEMY UPDATE

RYAN NOHA

Reformed Academy is devoted to supporting the church's mission to present every person mature in Christ. We long to see redemption applied by the Spirit of Christ to all of God's people as the church labors faithfully in the Word, sacraments, and prayer. Therefore, "Him we proclaim" (Col. 1:28) in all of our courses, from the introductory to the most advanced, and across all of the theological disciplines. Committed to building up the church in her preaching of Christ crucified and risen, Reformed Academy serves more than 5,000 students in 86 countries with biblically robust, confessionally faithful resources that keep Christ the center.

## *Fellowship in Reformed Apologetics*

The summer publication of *Van Til and Barth* and *Van Til and Idealism* marks the completion of Dr. Lane G. Tipton's Fellowship in Reformed Apologetics, an eight-part curriculum on the theology and apologetics of Cornelius Van Til. This series consists of more than forty hours of video lectures that cover the full breadth of Van Til's theology with close attention to his historical and polemical contexts. Far from being a narrow, parochial contribution to Van Til studies, Dr. Tipton's work especially employs Van Til's Trinitarian theology and covenant theology to open the deepest mysteries and most glorious vistas of the Reformed faith; and he does so against the shallower and ultimately dark conceptions of those theological giants within and without the visible church who have compromised on the immutability of the self-contained triune God—whether in his decree, condescension to relate to creation, work of redemption in historic, calendar time, or consummation of all things. For card-carrying "Van Tilians" and the "uninitiated" alike, this curriculum will require you to "gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Pet. 1:13, KJV), but with God's blessing, it holds forth the promise of rich edification in Christ and increased readiness to defend his gospel against all opposition.

Building upon the antithesis between Reformed theology and Thomism on the knowledge of God demonstrated in *Van Til's Doctrine of Revelation*, Dr. Tipton will close out 2023 with two new ThM/PhD-level courses. These will set the Reformed theology of perichoresis and endoxation comprehensively and systematically against Thomas' Trinitarian theology, carefully presenting and assessing Thomas' theology of processions and missions in light of Colossians 1:15–20 and the deeper Protestant conception.

## *Adult Sunday School Courses*

Reformed Academy strives to be useful to the diligent pastor and teacher looking for solid materials that will help his flock grow in the knowledge of Christ. To this end, we're adding three new Bible study courses to our growing adult Sunday school catalog:

**1**) Dr. Jim Cassidy's *Gospel of John: A Study in the Truth* is an overview of John's Gospel that unpacks how Jesus Christ does not merely speak the truth but is himself the truth, the long-awaited Messiah who has come down from heaven in order to bring us up to heaven.

**2**) Dr. Kevin Chiarot's *1 Peter: Ethics for the End of All Times* urges the pilgrim church to set her hope fully upon the revelation of Christ in his second coming, adopting a thoroughgoing heavenly mindedness that does not produce detachment from the world but joyful and humble engagement with it according to the example of our Savior who suffered unjustly.

**3**) Dr. Mark Winder's *Introduction to the Pentateuch* devotes a single lesson to each of the first five books of the Bible. He briefly addresses matters of authorship, genre, and date before delving into the historical, theological, Christological themes that showcase the gospel according to Moses.

Each of these classes includes handouts with discussion questions that are geared towards an adult Sunday school, but may be adapted for individual study, family worship, continuing education for Christian teachers, or youth groups. Free from technical jargon and covering fundamental biblical and theological concepts, these courses aim to remove unnecessary stumbling blocks to (1) seeing Christ crucified and risen as the central redemptive subject matter of all Scripture and (2) attaining that Spirit-wrought maturity that flows from our faith-union with him.

## *Looking Forward*

In the remainder of the year, we eagerly anticipate welcoming two new teachers to our Reformed Academy, both of whom will

be familiar to our podcast listeners for their contributions to *Van Til Group* and *Proclaiming Christ*, respectively. Dr. R. Carlton Wynne, associate pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Atlanta, GA, will teach a course on one of the most important and enduring books of the Reformation, *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He will be followed by Rev. Robert Arendale, vice president of our Board of Directors and pastor of Redeemer Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Beavercreek, OH, who will set forth Christ from *Gospel of Mark*.

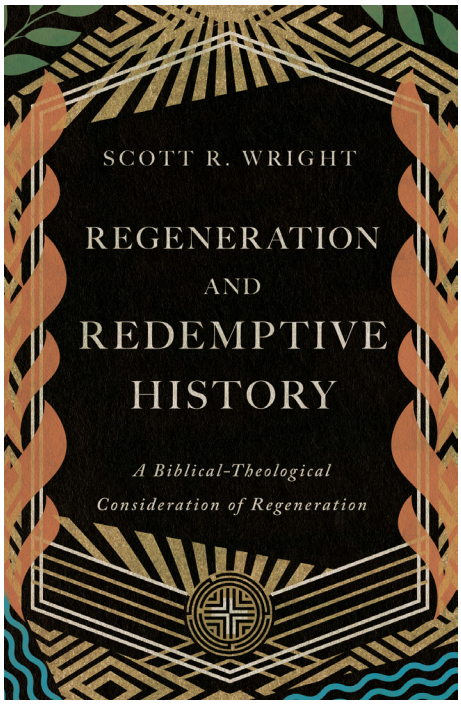
Through the generous support and contributions of all our donors, volunteers, and saints earnestly praying around the world, the Lord enables us to offer all of these Christ-centered video resources entirely for free on our streaming platforms and with a growing number of foreign language subtitles. Join us today as we come alongside the church in her proclamation of Christ for nothing less than the gathering and perfection of all the saints.



*Ryan Noha is Director of Education and Advancement for Reformed Forum.*

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# A NEW BOOK FROM REFORMED FORUM




With an appreciation for the redemptive-historical cast of Scripture, Dr. Scott Wright's *Regeneration and Redemptive History: A Biblical-Theological Consideration of Regeneration* aims to highlight the eschatological nature of regeneration and, in so doing, to strengthen the faith of Christ's church and cultivate the assurance of God's people. After providing an historical survey, Dr. Wright offers a careful consideration of pertinent biblical texts touching on the doctrine of regeneration. He emphasizes the priority of the *historia salutis*—the redemptive works of God in history. With pastoral gentleness and candor, Dr. Wright clearly expounds the theological, pastoral, and personal implications of the eschatological nature of regeneration as well as the significance of Jesus' accomplished redemptive work. This thorough, practical guide will assist students, pastors, and lay people in developing a new appreciation for the truth *and fullness* of the distinctive soteriological doctrine of regeneration.

This paperback book will be available directly at www.reformedforum.org/store as well as through several other reputable booksellers. Watch for announcements on social media, in your email inbox, and on community.reformedforum.org.

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The governing purpose of this book is to show that the understanding of regeneration that has been developed and maintained by Reformed theology is "true doctrine, but . . . not the full doctrine." Often missing in the important truth of regeneration seen as a distinct element in the application of salvation (*ordo salutis*) is the eschatological perspective of Scripture on this enlivening, faith-creating work of God in the individual sinner.

With a thorough treatment of relevant passages in the whole of Scripture, Dr. Wright demonstrates the richness of regeneration, whether in view prospectively (the Old Testament) or retrospectively (the New Testament), as it is grounded in and flows out of the accomplishment of salvation in the history of redemption that culminates in the once-for-all work of Christ (*historia salutis*).

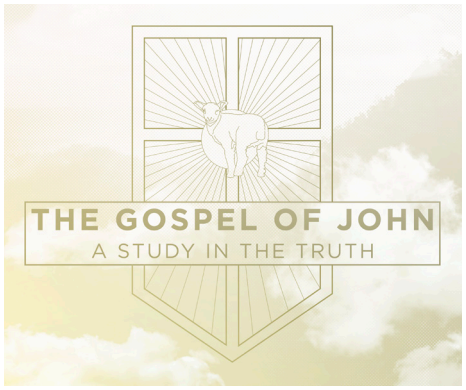
Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.
Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus
Westminster Theological Seminary

Stressing the *historia salutis* (history of salvation), Dr. Wright shows that regeneration is not simply a point at the beginning of one's spiritual life. The creation of a new age, a new people, the new heavens, and a new earth is the telos of Christ's regenerative work. Christ makes all things new. The author shows that the regenerated participate in the age to come irrespective of the administration of the covenant under which they have lived. Already, the new age intrudes into this present age.

Dennis Disselkoen, ThM, EdD
Retired pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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Dr. Jim Cassidy teaches an overview of the Gospel of John in this **free-on-demand** course of ten video lessons totaling five hours of instruction. Geared toward adults, it could be used individually, or in a group Sunday school class or Bible study. As an overview, the purpose of the course is to give students key themes in John's Gospel—for example, truth—that help in their interpretation of the book as a whole. And by showing the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture, students are further edified by the material. With completion of this course, students will by God's grace grow in the knowledge of who Jesus is and what he came to do. This, in turn, will equip students to share Christ more clearly and effectively with others. Be alert for the continuation of this course, which will address the remaining eleven chapters.



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