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## Reformed Systematic Theology: Spirit and Salvation

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## Reformed Systematic Theology: Spirit and Salvation

### Abstract

A book review of *Reformed Systematic Theology: Spirit and Salvation* by Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley.

### Cover Page Footnote

Donald C. McIntyre is a PhD student in Old Testament at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit PA, and concurrently a PhD student in Theology and Apologetics at Liberty University in Lynchburg VA.

***Reformed Systematic Theology: Spirit and Salvation (Vol. 3)***, By Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 1657 pp. Hardcover \$43.25.

Joel R. Beeke (PhD, Westminster) and Paul M. Smalley (ThM, PRTS) of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary continue their series, *Reformed Systematic Theology* with the third volume on *Spirit and Salvation*. Though many books would consider pneumatology and soteriology to be separate doctrines, they are combined into a singular part (Part 5) described as “The Doctrine of Salvation Applied by the Holy Spirit” (9). The topic is then divided into three sections: Section A is organized as an *Historia Salutis*, which covers the Holy Spirit and the History of Salvation, spanning 8 chapters. The second (Section B) covering the *Ordo Salutis*, covers 23 chapters beginning with Union with Christ (2 chapters), an introductory chapter on the order of salvation, and then multiple chapters detailing the order in multiple parts (General Calling, 3 parts; Effectual Calling, 2 parts; Regeneration, 2 parts; Conversion, 3 parts; Justification, 3 parts; Adoption, 2 parts; Sanctification, 3 parts; Preservation and Perseverance, 2 Parts). Section C concludes the work with the *Experientia Salutis* in 11 chapters, detailing the indwelling and assurance of the believer, and concluding with a series of chapters on sanctification as found in the beatitudes, fruit of the Spirit, and the ten commandments. The 41<sup>st</sup> chapter seems to be a catch-all concluding with topics like the fear of the Lord, self-denial, sober watchfulness, and recovery from backsliding” and a concluding chapter on prayer and the hope of glorification.

Throughout the work, Beeke cites typical reformed influences like Grudem, Van Gemeren, Hodge, Warfield, Bavink, John Edwards, John Owen, and of course, John Calvin, as well as the reformed confessions and catechisms. Beeke’s frequent citations of the puritans are expected as a personal distinctive of his academic endeavors. The puritan influence leads to a more devotional tone in many places, and perhaps due to that influence, the book is not hesitant to make emotional religious appeals, asking questions like “Do you love the Holy Spirit?” and quick to offer exhortations that are more common in pastoral works. Though these are not out of place in Christian literature, they are a departure from the more didactic nature of standard systematic works. Beeke notes that Christians ought to worship all three members of the Trinity, just as they are baptized in the name of all three persons (57). With being a Reformed systematic theology, expected theological dogmas are maintained. These doctrinal distinctives include eternal election, undeserved and irresistible grace, & perseverance (437).

In Chapter 3, when discussing the Old Covenant with Israel there are a few passages where the authors may overstate their case. Beeke argues that the Holy Spirit “performed essentially the same ministry of rebirth and indwelling for sanctification for the Old Testament saints as he does for Christians today” in

keeping with the Westminster Confession (116). For justification, Beeke relies upon 2 Davidic Psalms (51, 143) and an implicit argument from Ps. 119 and Proverbs 1. This is problematic on multiple levels; the OT clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit came to rest upon certain charismatic leaders (particularly prophets, priests, and kings) and that the Spirit could indeed leave these individuals. Secondly, there are no particular references whereby any saint who was not a prophet (including the writer of Ps. 119), priest, or king (David in this case) claimed to have the work of the Holy Spirit upon them in the OT. Thirdly, it is debatable whether wisdom personified in Proverbs should be related to the Holy Spirit. Many other reformed writers prefer to attribute personified Wisdom to the person of Christ. Within the same chapter, Beeke argues that regeneration was an experience of OT saints and cites Lewis Sperry Chafer and Billy Graham as potential opponents to that view before ceding that “there is no clear, explicit reference to God regenerating a sinner, causing new birth, or giving a person a new heart under the old covenant” (120). Beeke argues that Jesus shows that new birth was requisite for salvation in John 3 and concludes that this must have been true in the past dealings with man in the Old Testament as it was when Jesus said such to Nicodemus. This is an illegitimate totality transfer of the term “salvation,” as if God was bound to work salvation in the exact same way in both testaments. It is clear that the Spirit was not indwelling the believers of the Gospels until Pentecost in Acts 2, and to assume that there was a limited indwelling in the OT cannot be substantiated by the OT text or hold weight in light of Acts 2.

Beeke’s discussion on marks of sanctification is worthy of in-depth interaction. No one would question the role of the fruit of the Spirit as evidence of sanctification and virtues to be cultivated in the Christian. However, there is some debate on the beatitudes and the ten commandments. The use of the Beatitudes as marks of grace in the Christian is useful, though admittedly idyllic. If the Beatitudes are meant to describe life in the millennial kingdom (a dispensational position) then their direct application may be questionable. Similarly, there are debates concerning the role of the law in the life of the Christian. The reformed position of separating moral law (the ten commandments) from ceremonial law and civil law is untenable since these laws are interspersed amongst each other in the bible. However, the ten commandments form a distinct issue since all but one of them are repeated in the New Testament and would be unquestionably binding on the believer. The typical reformed position on the role of the law in the Christian life, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, which Beeke cites, is that, “spiritual life in Christ ‘is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works,’ and good works are ‘only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory’” (p. 1087). Beeke notes the common practice of reformed theologies to include sections expounding the ten commandments

(1087) and does likewise. However, there is debate concerning the role of Sabbath among evangelicals. Beeke, in line with the Westminster Confession, advocates a day of “holy rest” (1141). While this is prudent, there is a question on whether this is morally and legally binding on the believer.

Beeke’s work is a fine representation of reformed thought and an enjoyable read. His definitions are clear, concise, and relatable. His use of puritans and pastoral guidance makes the work palatable and applicable to a wide audience. Though there are aspects that a dispensationalist might disagree with, there is much to gain from interacting with this book representing a wonderful synthesis of historic reformed thought for a contemporary audience.