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The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



♦ Sinful Servants ♦ Baptism: The Issue of Continuity ♦ We Confess ♦ Heidelberg Catechism
♦ Judgment Day ♦ Childen in Covenant Observances (II) ♦ Keeping Commandments

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"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.'"
(Judges 7:20).

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Sinful Servants

“Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.”

(Acts 15:37-39)

Paul and Barnabas had a long history together. It was Barnabas who first risked visiting Paul shortly after Paul’s conversion and return to Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was suspicious of the reports that Paul had become a Christian and kept their distance. Perhaps it was a trap to draw Christians out into the open so they could be arrested and imprisoned. But Barnabas entrusted himself to God, and went to visit Paul to see if his conversion was real, and if so, to welcome him into the brotherhood.

Later, Barnabas was sent by the Apostles to check on reports of Gentiles becoming Christians in Antioch of Syria. When he found a fledgling group of believers in need of instruction, it was Barnabas who went to Tarsus to entreat Paul to come and help him teach the new believers. They taught side by side for a whole year. After that, they traveled together with a benevolent gift from the new Gentile congregation to the mother church in Jerusalem, which was suffering from a famine. When the Spirit gave direction to send out a missionary team, it was Paul and Barnabas who went on the first overseas missionary journey. Their first stop was the island of

Cyprus, Barnabas’ native land, and Barnabas led Paul from one end of the island to the other.

After leaving Cyprus, they sailed north to Asia (present day Turkey) and traveled together to Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra where Paul was stoned and left for dead. After Lystra they went on to Derbe and then revisited all the new groups of believers in each of the cities of Asia where they had preached.

After returning to Antioch of Syria, Paul and Barnabas again conducted a team ministry “for no little time.” When a controversy arose, they traveled together to Jerusalem to seek the help of the Apostles and church leaders regarding the problem of the Jewish Christians who insisted on Gentile Christians observing the ceremonies of the Mosaic law as a requirement for church membership. They weathered that controversy together and both received the commendation of the Jerusalem council in the letter the council sent out, being referred to as “our

beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then, at the start of their second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas, who had been through so much together, had a falling out over whether John Mark should accompany them on their trip. John Mark had been with them on their first journey, but had left just after they entered Asia. We do not know why he left the mission, but Paul uses a word to describe his leaving that makes it sound as if he deserted the group. Paul no longer had confidence in John Mark, and considered him an unworthy candidate to accompany them on a second journey. They anticipated more hardship and persecution, and they needed companions they could rely on to remain steadfast and supportive. Barnabas disagreed and wanted to give John Mark a second opportunity to prove himself.

Who was right? We cannot tell. Barnabas was a risk taker and encourager. His name means son of encouragement. The name was given to him by the Apostles when he sold a piece of land and laid the money at their feet. Barnabas may have seen that John Mark had learned from his mistakes and was ready for new responsibilities. Or

***Barnabas was a risk taker and encourager.
His name means son of encouragement.***

Barnabas may have been unduly influenced by the fact that John Mark was his cousin.

Paul had sacrificed and suffered much on their first journey. He depended a great deal on the help of those who were with him. If John Mark had failed him once, perhaps he would again. It is not unreasonable that Paul would not trust John Mark.

The fact that years later, Paul was reconciled to John Mark and spoke highly of him indicates that Barnabas may have been the better judge of character, but at the time, Paul may have had all the evidence on his side while Barnabas only had an intuition or family prejudice.

A dispute over the worthiness of John Mark – assessing his character – was what broke up the team of Paul and Barnabas. It is a black mark on the pages of church history – not of the magnitude of David’s adultery and murder or Peter’s denial of the Lord – but yet a sin that makes us all ashamed nonetheless. Paul and Barnabas should have had the spiritual resources to resolve their differences and be reconciled, but they did not – at least not for some time. The visible unity of the church is one of the things Christ prayed for, and is a sign to the world that the Father has sent the Son (John 17:21). Our disunity impedes the witness of the church.

What should we make of all this today?

First, we must recognize that even mature Christians do not always

act as they should. If Paul and Barnabas could easily fall into such an unresolved dispute, who are we to think that we are immune from such sins. Their sin should humble us all, and cause us to seek to be reconciled with fellow Christians, living at peace with all men as far as it is within our power to do so. God has given us many spiritual resources, and we must not fail to employ them to get along with one another. Our witness to the world that the Father has sent the Son is harmed by every unrighteous division among us.

Second, we should be encouraged to continue working in the church despite our own weaknesses and sins. Paul and Barnabas were ordinary men, just like us, with many shortcomings. Yet God used them mightily both before and after their dispute. God employs sinful servants with all kinds of weaknesses and failures, and we should not shy away from the work of the Lord because we feel we are too weak or sinful to be of any use to God.

Third, we should praise God for the way He overrules our sinful behavior and brings good out of evil. Because of the split between Paul and Barnabas, one team became two teams, covering twice as much territory and making many more contacts. We may never use God’s sovereignty as an excuse for our sins but we are comforted in knowing that all things work together for good for God’s people, including their sins. We stand in awe of God and give Him praise for the mercy He shows to poor sinners like us, not

treating us as our sins deserve and in all things bringing glory to Himself.

We are commanded to love one another as Christ loved us, to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us, and to live at peace with one another, striving to be of one mind and heart. God’s grace is sufficient for our needs, so let us not give up until we truly live as members of one body, working and serving together for the good of all.

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Jeremiah Could Not Keep Still

Jeremiah could not keep still! As you read through the Book of Jeremiah, you discover that the prophet suffered many things because of his testimony and his preaching. He was threatened so many times that he came to a point in his life where he decided to quit his career as a prophet. He would be silent and preach no more. How much easier life would be for him if he did not have to tell the people the truth he had received from God. After being silent for a while the prophet realized that he could not be silent. He writes in Jeremiah 20:9 “But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ then my heart, it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.”

In Acts 4, Peter and John were threatened by the Sanhedrin. They had been preaching in the name of Jesus and had just healed a cripple man. They were arrested and told that they could certainly continue healing people and they could go on with their preaching, but they could no longer preach in the name of Jesus nor heal people by His power. Peter and John reply: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking of what we have seen and heard.”

“We cannot stop!” They were irrepressible witnesses. They had seen and heard the Lord Jesus. How

could anyone expect them to stop witnessing for Jesus? They knew Him to be the Christ! They had seen Him die on the cross and they were witnesses of His resurrection. They knew that He was the one for whom all of Israel had been waiting. They had to tell others what they knew to be true!

Because of Pentecost, we should feel the same way as Jeremiah, Peter, John, and a host of others who have witnessed for Christ because they could do nothing else. How can we ever stop bearing witness of our Savior when we know what He has accomplished for us. We must proclaim that He is the ONLY way to heaven.

That truth is widely contested today. We live in an age when tolerance has become the latest fad and the most dominant religion. We are told not to argue with those who offer salvation through something other than Christ. Christ may be your way to salvation, but other people may attain peace with their god some other way.

It really does not matter how many people tell you that we live in a pluralistic society or that there are

several ways to heaven. They are wrong! First of all, it is not their decision to make. Only the One whom we have offended can declare the way that the offense against Him must be reconciled. How we are to be saved, then, is God’s decision to make. And He has — it is thru His Son.

The thing that boggles my mind is that if there were another way to heaven, that is, if you could be saved by works, or you could be saved by following Mohammed instead of trusting in Jesus Christ, why would God give up His one and only Son? Why would He who is very God of very God pour Himself out to become one of us? Why would He have to ask the Father, “If there is some way that this cup can pass from me...” Why would He ask for the cup to be removed from Him if there were some way for this human race to be saved without the Son of God needing to suffer and go to the cross to die? Why would He have to be forsaken by the Father if some other way of salvation were available. If you could be saved thru Joseph Smith, Buddha, or Mohammed, then Christ would not have had to drink that cup! There would have been another way. But drink it He did and believe in Him you must.

This is the story we cannot help but tell the world. Witnessing must become a very personal thing for

***It really does not matter how many people tell you
that there are several ways to heaven.***

us. It must be something that we cannot help but do. The trouble today is that so many of us think that we are witnessing for Christ when we talk about religion or about the church. Witnessing to others is not going around telling people that your church got new pulpit furniture. Witnessing to others is not talking about the differences that the URC has with the CanRC. It is not talking about religion, the church or, for that matter, talking about some of the doctrines of the church. Witnessing to others is bringing them to an understanding of how much they need Jesus Christ as their Savior. That means making them aware of the fact that they have sinned against the most holy God and that they need to be reconciled to Him.

If you take the time to read Peter's sermon on that first Pentecost day, you will notice that he does not mince his words. Peter is very straightforward in what he tells the crowd that has gathered together. He explains who Jesus is, and then tells them, "This Jesus, whom you crucified..." People have to know that they cannot go on living in sin; they cannot live an anti-God life and expect God to save them. If you know that is true, why aren't you telling people about that?

Read the testimonies of Paul. Paul tells people everywhere about what God had done for him through Christ. He was a changed man because of what Christ has done for him. By the power of Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit in you, you are a changed person, too. Why are you keeping it to yourself? "You will be my witnesses," Jesus said. How are

you going to be an effective witness if you are afraid to talk about what Christ has done for you?

When you witness for Christ, you are not doing that on your own. Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." That power comes from Christ. The Greek word that Christ used for "power" is the same word from which we get the English word for "dynamite."

What we receive is the dynamite of the Holy Spirit! It is the dynamite of the Holy Spirit that enables saved sinners like us to testify about Christ and His marvelous work. By the power of the Spirit, thousands of saints have had the courage to face persecution; they had courage to stand in front of kings and tell them about Christ. Hebrews 11:36, 37 tells us: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were put to death by the sword, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated" but they did not waver. The Holy Spirit gave them the power and the strength to continue to be witnesses for Christ in spite of the hardship they faced.

Even the wicked rulers in Acts 4, who told Peter and John to no longer speak about Jesus, marveled over the courage and ability these men had. Acts 4:13 puts it: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."

They had been with Jesus. Even the Sanhedrin had to acknowledge that a special power was enabling these men to do what they did.

That power is the Person of the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 11:13, the Lord promises that special power to the church. He will give the Holy Spirit to whoever will ask for Him. The one hundred twenty men and women in Acts 2 who received the Spirit as He was poured out were essentially the first New Testament church. Throughout the New Testament, the church received the gift of the Spirit. That has not stopped. With the power of the Holy Spirit leading you, you are to be His witness to all the world.

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Baptism

The Issue of Continuity Within the Covenant of Grace

If you want to understand what the Bible teaches about baptism or any other subject, you should begin the process in the Old Testament. This represents a major difference between Baptists and paedobaptists. Reformed people read the Bible as one book from the perspective of promise and fulfillment. In regards to baptism, if you begin the exegetical process in the Old Testament from the perspective of promise and fulfillment, then you will likely end up a paedobaptist. In contrast, if you stress the newness of the new covenant to the point that the new covenant is cut off from the Abrahamic covenant, then you will likely end up a Baptist.

Is the new covenant the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant? Another way of asking this question: Is there continuity within the covenant of grace between the Old and the New Testaments? If all the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled through Jesus Christ, then it stands to reason that the new covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Although this thesis is reasonable and logical we must ask ourselves if it is Biblical. I will demonstrate from the Scriptures that the Abrahamic covenant is eternal, and that there is continuity between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant.

The first time that we read about the promise that God will redeem his people is in Genesis 3:15. *And I*

will put enmity between you and the women, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

This verse teaches that there are essentially two seeds. First, there is the seed of Satan, and second, there is the seed of the woman. The seed of the woman is in reference to Christ. He will come from the woman (Mary), and through Jesus Christ, Satan will receive a mortal wound to his head. Christ will overcome Satan, but in the process of inflicting this fatal wound upon Satan, Christ will also receive a wound, but He will overcome this wound as if it was only a wound to His heel. This verse serves as a lens for understanding the unfolding of redemptive history. In this verse God has promised to bring salvation through the seed of the woman. As we read our Bibles we look for the fulfillment of this promise.

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (Genesis 17:7). You should notice that the Abrahamic covenant is eternal; this means that the covenant is still in place. If the Abrahamic covenant is eternal, then how does it continue apart from the new covenant? Our understanding of God's redemptive

plan must seriously take into consideration the eternal nature of the covenant of grace with Abraham. This covenant continues to shape the spiritual reality that we experience in Christ.

This promise was made in conjunction with the giving of circumcision as a sign and seal of this promise. We know that circumcision no longer has a place in the New Testament, but what about the Abrahamic covenant? Is God a liar? Has God broken His promise to maintain the Abrahamic covenant for eternity, or is it possible that with the forward movement of redemptive history, namely the establishment of the new covenant in Christ's blood, that Jesus has fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant? If the new covenant established in Christ's blood is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, then what has happened in regard to the external sign and seal of the covenant? Has the external sign and seal completely disappeared?

If it is true that the Abrahamic covenant has been fulfilled through Jesus Christ and the establishment of the new covenant, then it only stands to reason that the sign and seal associated with the new covenant replaces the former sign and seal of covenant membership. The change in the sign and seal of covenant membership serves as a witness regarding the forward movement of redemptive history.

From the Scriptures it can be demonstrated that the new covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. The most basic promise associated with the Abrahamic cov-

enant is fulfilled through the new covenant, namely that I will be your God and you will be My people.

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you (Genesis 17:7). This statement is the heart of the covenant of grace in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. *I will be your God and you will be my people.* Beginning with the Abrahamic covenant we can trace God's promise through the Old Testament and into the new covenant. This promise is fulfilled in the new covenant.

Jeremiah 31:33 *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

Ezekiel 37:26, 27 *Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

The author of Hebrews links the work of Christ originally established with Abraham and his descendants to a better covenant fulfilled in Christ.

Hebrews 8:10, *For this is the covenant that I will make with the*

house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."*

In regards to God's purpose these verses demonstrate the continuity within the covenant of grace. In the Old Testament the promise "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" was never fully realized except in a provisional way. The people of God looked forward to the fulfillment of this promise. This promise was realized through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, whereby Jesus established the new covenant in His blood. As the result of Christ's redemptive work, Jesus has given His Spirit in fulfillment of this promise.

2 Corinthians 6:16, *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."* The apostle Paul applies the Old Testament language of the temple to the people of God.

Paul applies the Old Testament language associated with the covenant of grace to the new covenant. There should be no doubt that Paul understands the new covenant as the fulfillment of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament.

In Galatians 3:15, 16 the apostle Paul appeals to the promises spoken to Abraham and to his seed. *Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.* The point that Paul is making has to do with the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant.

Paul clarifies this in verse 17 *The law, introduced four hundred thirty years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God, and thereby do away with the promise.* The law is in reference to Sinai and the Mosaic economy. The law is in reference to the whole system associated with the meeting between God and Moses on Mount Sinai.

In verse 18, Paul makes the explicit claim that the promise, the inheritance, was not realized through the law; but God gave it to Abraham through a promise. If the inheritance does not depend on the law, then what was the purpose of the law?

Four hundred thirty years after Abraham, the law was added, until the time that the Seed would come. Paul is clear that the law was inca-

The change in the sign and seal of covenant membership serves as a witness regarding the forward movement of redemptive history.

pable of imparting life, because the law was incapable of producing righteousness. The law revealed our transgressions and served as a means of driving us to Christ. *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith* (Galatians 3:24).

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. *Now that faith has come* is in conjunction with the coming of the Seed, Christ. With the coming of the Seed, Christ, the promise that God made to Abraham, is realized. This is in view in verses 26-29.

With the coming of Christ and the realization of the promise, Paul employs the new covenant language of baptism. With the movement from promise to fulfillment, the sign and seal of circumcision has been replaced with the sign and seal of baptism.

Baptism is the sign and seal of the new covenant established through the blood of Christ. This covenant is the fulfillment of what has come before. In the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15, and then with the restatement of this covenant and the giving of circumcision in chapter 17 as the sign and seal of the covenant membership, God established the pattern whereby the sign and seal would be applied. Every male under the authority of the covenant head, the Father, was circumcised.

With the forward movement of redemptive history, the sign and seal is no longer gender specific. In the new covenant, the sign and seal of covenant membership is applied to both males and females, because it speaks of better promises (He-

brews 8:6). In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God dwelt above the mercy seat, which rested on top of the ark of the covenant. As a result, God dwelt among His people, but there was distance between the special presence of God and the people. Now that Christ has come and atoned for the sins of His people, the special presence of God dwells in his people. *"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

This is what the author of Hebrews is speaking of when he says that the new covenant is made up of better promises. Through the new covenant, the promises contained in the Old Testament are realized and fulfilled in Christ and God dwells in His people by His Spirit. The replacement of circumcision by baptism as the sign and seal, and the application of the sign and seal to include both males and females speaks of that which Christ has already accomplished, the better fulfillment. The change in the sign and seal of covenant membership marks the forward movement of redemptive history.

This is a covenantal, or Reformed, way of reading the Bible. The question that you have to wrestle with is, which way is really Biblical? Is the new covenant the fulfillment of what has already been promised in the Abrahamic covenant, or is the new covenant completely new? This is an issue that will impact one's view of baptism.

The Baptist approach emphasizes the discontinuity between the Old and the New Testaments. Dispensational Baptists draw an even sharper line between the Old Tes-

tament and the New Testament; they draw a sharp line between Israel as God's people in the Old Testament and the Church as God's people in the New Testament. Dispensationalists do not understand the church in the New Testament to be spiritual Israel; as a result they deny that the new covenant is the fulfillment of all that has come before. In conclusion, the debate behind the debate is over the appropriate reading of the Scriptures.

The paedobaptist approach emphasizes continuity in purpose between the Old and the New Testaments (I will be your God and you will be my people).

Critics will likely accuse me of imposing my system of doctrine on the Scriptures, but in my defense I will argue that I am interpreting the Bible according to the way that the New Testament interprets the Old.

This is why New Testament authors continually refer to and quote Old Testament texts. For example, in the book of Hebrews almost half of the verses are in reference to Old Testament texts or quotations of Old Testament texts. It is helpful to think of the New Testament as a commentary on the Old Testament. For this reason the Biblical interpreter should proceed from the basis of promise and fulfillment, and not automatically proceed from the basis of discontinuity between the Old and the New Testaments.

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We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 34: Of Baptism

The pure administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the second mark of Christ's Church (art. 29) because they are the external means by which God "confirm[s] in us the salvation which He imparts to us" (art. 33). Christ creates His Church through the preaching of the Gospel, and confirms her as His new creation by the sacraments (cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 65).

We turn now from the general truth about sacraments to what the *Belgic Confession* says about baptism in particular. Baptism is a dramatic portrayal of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as the outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon the Church. In one of the longest and most interesting articles in our Confession, Article 34 ("Of Baptism") describes the Reformed view of baptism. This article lays out the biblical teaching concerning baptism by moving from the large theme of baptism's place in the history of redemption as the sign of initiation into the covenant community, replacing Old Testament circumcision, to the teaching about baptism's benefits, to the lawful recipients of this sign and seal.

The Place of Baptism in the History of Redemption

"We believe and confess that Jesus Christ...is the end of the law," the *Confession* begins, citing Paul's words to the church in Rome (Romans 10:4). Because our Lord is the

goal (Greek, *telos*) of all the Old Testament laws and ceremonies, He "has made an end, by the shedding of His blood, of all other sheddings of blood which men could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sin." Since all the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament were subsumed by our Lord and fulfilled in His work on our behalf, the New Testament writers teach that the sacrifices are ended (e.g., Hebrews 9:23-28). Among the many bloody rituals of the Old Testament was circumcision. Although itself not a sacrifice, the fact that it involved blood showed that it belonged to that epoch of redemptive history in which everything looked forward to a final shedding of blood by the seed whose heel would be bruised by crushing the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

We see this applied in the New Testament when circumcision was being demanded of Gentile converts to Israel's Messiah (Acts 15:1, 5). The Church rejected this "yoke...that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" in its pastoral letter to the Gentiles (Acts 15:23-29). The *Confession* follows the apostle Paul in saying that circumcision has been "abolished," for as Paul says, circumcision no longer "counts for anything" (Galatians 5:6; cf. Romans 2:25-29).

In the place of circumcision, Jesus "has instituted the sacrament of

baptism" for the New Covenant. What this teaches us is that both circumcision and baptism's place is that of an initiatory sign of membership in the covenant. There is one covenant of grace and this covenant always has a sign, yet, the administration of the one covenant of grace is multifaceted. Under the Old administration, circumcision was the rite of initiation, while under the New, baptism is the sign of initiation. As the *Confession* says, the sign initiates one "into the Church of God," that is, into the visible, covenant community. As an initiatory rite, baptism separates us "from all other people and strange religions" as the sign "that we may wholly belong to Him whose mark and ensign we bear." Under the Old administration of the covenant, slaves bought with money as well as foreigners who desired to join Israel were marked out with the sign and shown to belong to the LORD (Genesis 17:12-13; Exodus 12:43-48). We, too, have been marked out in baptism, in which "the honorable name" was placed upon our foreheads (James 2:7; Revelation 22:4).

These truths, that circumcision has been abolished, along with all other sacrificial rites of the Old Testament, and that baptism takes the place of circumcision, were vital for the ancient church fathers in their apologetics against Judaism.

The most famous usage of these themes is found in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. In it he said, "Wash therefore, and be now clean, and put away iniquity from your souls, as God bids you be washed in this laver, and be circum-

cised with the true circumcision” (18 cf. 19). He then described that we have not received “carnal circumcision” but “spiritual circumcision” through baptism because the blood of Christ has made the blood of circumcision obsolete (43 cf. 24).

Cyprian also used these truths to counter the argument that infant baptism had to be done legalistically on the eighth day just like circumcision in his *Letter* 58:4.

This first section of the *Belgic Confession* ends by saying that baptism is not only a sign, but also a seal (assurance), that is, “a testimony to us that He will be our gracious God and Father.”

The Administration of Baptism

As a sign and seal of the covenant of grace in Christ, “All those who are His [are] to be baptized with pure water.” The phrase “pure water” is mentioned because we are to administer baptism “according to the pure Word of God” and are to reject “all things contrary thereto” (art. 29). This means that we are to follow the example of the apostles, who simply used water, and not add all the additional ceremonies that have crept in over time such as anointing with oil, using salt, or saliva.

This water is to be accompanied by the words of our Lord, “Into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). The Trinitarian formula is evidenced outside the New Testament in the *Didache*, written sometime between the late first-century and early second-century A.D. (ch. 7) As John Calvin said so eloquently,

There are good reasons why *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*, are expressly mentioned; for there is no other way in which the efficacy of *baptism* can be experienced than when we begin with the unmerited mercy of *the Father*, who reconciles us to himself by the only begotten *Son*; next, Christ comes forward with the sacrifice of his death; and at length, *the Holy Spirit* is likewise added, by whom he washes and regenerates us, (Titus 3:5,) and, in short, makes us partakers of his benefits. Thus we perceive that God cannot be truly known, unless our faith distinctly conceive of Three Persons in one essence; and that the fruit and efficacy of *baptism* proceed from God *the Father* adopting us through his *Son*, and, after having cleansed us from the pollutions of the flesh through *the Spirit*: creating us anew to righteousness.

Baptism’s Benefits

The *Confession* then moves into a discussion of the benefits of baptism. This was one of the heated debates of the Reformation, between Rome, Lutherans, Anabaptists, and the various Reformed groups as typified by Calvin

and Zwingli. Baptism signifies to us,

that as water washes away the filth of the body when poured upon it, and is seen on the body of the baptized when sprinkled upon him, so does the blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath unto children of God.

The water of baptism is the sign and seal of the twofold benefit that Christ has won for us and that He gives to us, cleansing our souls from sin (justification) and regenerating us (this was the pre-Synod of Dort way of speaking of sanctification). Yet the *Confession* goes on to say,

Not that this is effected by the external water, but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God; who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and to enter into the spiritual land of Canaan.

Here the author of our *Confession*, Guido de Bres, draws upon the rich prayer of Martin Luther, his so-called “Great Flood Prayer”

We are to follow the example of the apostles, who simply used water, and not add all the additional ceremonies that have crept in over time such as anointing with oil, using salt, or saliva.

(German, *Sindtflutgebet*), which he wrote for the German people in 1523 as a part of the rite of baptism, and which was adopted in almost every Reformed baptismal liturgy. This prayer, as summarized into our *Confession*, is filled with the full biblical significance of baptism as a passing through death and an entrance into spiritual life.

What is so crucial to understand about these two paragraphs is that when our *Confession* speaks this way that it does not make a simultaneous link between receiving the sign and the thing signified. While never wanting to separate the sign from the thing signified, which would make the sacrament “empty” and “meaningless,” our Reformed forefathers were just as zealous not to equate them. The sacramental union between the outward water and the inward washing is not *physical*, contra the Roman Catholic Church. This means that it is not the water that cleanses us. Furthermore, this union is also not *local*, contra Lutheranism. This means that when the water is administered, so too is the grace which is “in, with, and under” the water. This is suggested by the *Augsburg Confession* when it says that original sin condemns all “that are not born again by baptism and the Holy Spirit” (Art. 2; cf. The Saxon Visitation Articles of 1592, Art. III.2, 4, 5).

Yet this view is what is taught by imprecise Reformed commentators such as William Goulooze, who said, “As we are washed externally with water, so we believe we are washed spiritually with the Holy Ghost... When we are truly baptized

with water we are also baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Although Goulooze went on to retract the force of these statements when he said, “We do not assert that infants are regenerated by baptism into a newness of life,” we are left wondering at how he could speak out of both sides of his mouth.

Confusing statements like these occur when the Protestant and Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) is forgotten in a discussion concerning the sacraments. The preaching of the Gospel and the holy sacraments both present Jesus Christ as their object, and He can and must be received only by faith. The Reformed view of the sacramental union is that it is a *spiritual* union, that is, the Holy Spirit effects it.

Several commentators on the *Belgic Confession* understand this and express our view. First, J. Van Bruggen of the Theological University in Kampen, The Netherlands, explains that “Holy Baptism is joined to the Gospel; it seals the *promise*” (emphasis in original). He goes on to explain what this promise is, and how one receives it, saying,

The promised benefit of cleansing is only received in the way of faith, to which the Lord also encourages us through holy baptism...to

receive what is promised in holy baptism one must go to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Cornelis Gerhardus Bos, a former minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), cites the case of Rev. L. E. Oosterhoff who, along with others in the 1960’s, taught that “all who were baptized have received the forgiveness of sins in reality” and “that this actual washing away of sins could be lost again.” In contrast, Bos stated, “This contradicts Scripture. Therefore the confession speaks differently. All the benefits God has promised are truly ours if we accept them with a believing heart.”

This section of the *Confession* is concluded by stating the parallelism between the sign and the thing signified without losing sight of what it has already stated, that the union and the benefits of that union come about “by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

The ministers, therefore, on their part administer the sacrament and that which is visible, but our Lord gives that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing, and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them

Confusing statements occur when the Protestant and Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone (sola fide) is forgotten in a discussion concerning the sacraments.

with all comfort; giving unto us a true assurance of His fatherly goodness; putting on us the new man, and putting off the old man with all his deeds.

One final note on this section is that the *Confession* rejects the error of the ancient Donatists, because although it is the minister who “administer[s] the sacrament and that which is visible,” it is the Lord who “gives that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace.” Just as Balaam preached the Word (Numbers 23-24), Judas was sent out to preach (Luke 9), and some preached Christ from wrong motives (Philippians 1:15-18), nevertheless, Christ was preached and offered to His people, just as He is by ministers in the sacraments, no matter how faithful or unfaithful they are.

The Life of Baptism

Another fascinating aspect of baptism is that although it is administered once, its benefits do not end once the water is poured, Christ’s words uttered, and prayer is made. Baptism does not “avail us only at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life.” The teaching of Martin Luther is clearly seen here, as well, as he is said to have said to himself every morning, *baptizatus sum*, “I am baptized.”

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into a life of discipleship. Discipleship involves repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought to recall our baptism continually as a testimony that we belong to the Lord, and there-

Baptism’s benefits do not end once the water is poured, Christ’s words uttered, and prayer is made.

fore, that we ought to live to His glory.

Rejection of Errors

Finally, the teaching of the Anabaptists is rejected. They were a group of radical reformers who we have already seen denied the true humanity of our Lord, and insisted that those baptized as infants had to be re-baptized:

We believe, therefore, that every man who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal ought to be baptized but once with this only baptism, without ever repeating the same... Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have received.

Here we as Reformed believers follow the ancient catholic Church against the Donatist error, which said that re-baptism is necessary for those who rejected their faith during persecution upon returning to the church, as well as those who were baptized by one who later turned out to be apostate.

Augustine of Hippo, the great opponent of the Donatists, wrote in his *Letter 23.4* about the implications of re-baptizing, when he said, “Ye, therefore, who wish to baptize twice, must seek as subjects of such double baptism men who have double hearts.” The reason for this sarcastic statement, like Paul’s in

Galatians 5:12, is that baptism is the sign of being born again. So when the *Belgic Confession* says the reason for rejecting the Donatist and Anabaptist doctrine of re-baptism is that “we cannot be born twice,” it is following the ancient argument of Augustine.

Second, we also reject the Anabaptists because they “condemn the baptism of the infants of believers.” Our response is basically this: our children belong to the covenant and therefore “ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant.” This was done to the children of Israelites as they were circumcised “upon the same promises which are made unto our children.”

As the *Confession* says, “And indeed Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of believers than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of which Christ has done for them.” An example of this from the Old Testament is found in Leviticus 12, where “the Lord commanded in the law that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ’s suffering and death shortly after they were born, by offering for them a lamb, that was a sacrament of Jesus Christ.”

This article concludes with the words of Paul, saying, “Moreover, what circumcision was to the Jews,

Study/Application Questions for Article 34

1. Why did circumcision involve blood, while baptism does not?
2. What is the *sign* in baptism?
3. What is *signified* in baptism?
4. What is the analogy between ordinary water and baptismal water, and what does this teach us about baptism's benefits?
5. What are some of the Old Testament "types" (a type is an Old Testament preview of something in the New) of baptism?
6. Does the mode (i.e., immersion, sprinkling, pouring) of baptism make a baptism true?

baptism is to our children. And for this reason Paul calls baptism the *circumcision of Christ*."

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The Two Parts of the Heidelberg Catechism

Law and Gospel

"The entire Scriptures consist of two parts, of the law and the Gospel." This unambiguous distinction between the law and the gospel in Scripture was relentlessly taught by Martin Luther from about 1517 until his death in 1548. Phillip Melancthon (1497-1560), Luther's colleague, also taught the difference between the law and the gospel. He said, "All men are carefully to learn the difference between law and gospel." The law/gospel distinction is indeed a Lutheran teaching.

Reformers who followed in the wake of Calvin also clearly taught this distinction between the law and the gospel. Yet some in our Reformed circles today say that a

law/gospel distinction is a Lutheran teaching that we should avoid. As this article will argue, we must insist that *the law/gospel distinction is such a Reformed teaching that it even shows up in the Heidelberg Catechism*. Both Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus clearly upheld the law/gospel distinction.

Zacharias Ursinus

Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) was born in Breslau, Germany. He studied in Wittenberg from 1550 to 1557. During this time Ursinus developed great respect and admiration for his professor, Philip Melancthon. After attending the Worms conference in 1557 with

Shane Lems

Melancthon, Ursinus toured many major cities of the Reformation. On this trip, he befriended notable Reformed teachers, such as Bullinger, Vermigli, and other such men. Along with these men, Ursinus made contact with Calvin, who gave him a copy of the latest edition of the Institutes.

In 1558, Ursinus began to lecture in Breslau, Germany at the university. Not long after assuming his role as professor, he was charged with having "unsound faith in regard to the sacraments." In the context of the Reformation, it is not surprising that the three-way debate over the Lord's Supper created a "general hurricane of excitement," which led to a "great sacramental war." However, this "war" did not sever the warmhearted relationship Ursinus and Melancthon enjoyed.

This charge of wrongly teaching the Lord's Supper forced Ursinus to print his first published work, a

defense of his own view of the presence of Christ in the Supper. In this tract, Ursinus set forth a highly Calvinistic view of the Lord's Supper, one in which the presence of Christ in the elements was spiritual rather than bodily (Lutheran) or not present at all (Zwinglian). His tract did not silence his enemies, so Ursinus stepped down from his lecturing podium soon after Melancthon's death in 1560. He then went to Zurich, where in 1560 Ursinus studied under a fellow Calvinist Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, for nearly a year.

In 1561, Elector Frederick called Ursinus to Heidelberg to help settle the debate over the Lord's Supper. Frederick assigned the newly appointed doctor of divinity to write a catechism along with fellow professor Caspar Olevianus. Sometime in 1562, the men began working on the catechism. By the end of 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism was finished. When Ursinus died in 1583, it was already the most popular Reformed catechism in Europe.

We have done a brief survey of Ursinus' life because it is important for us to see his theological background. Some may argue that since Ursinus studied at a Lutheran university for nearly seven years, it is no surprise that he strongly emphasized a law/gospel distinction, which we will soon observe. Others might say that his high regard for Melancthon is the source of Ursinus' law/gospel distinction. No doubt Ursinus learned much from Melancthon, but we cannot simply label him a "closet" Lutheran. As mentioned above, his first published tract was one defending the *Calvinist* sacramental presence. Fur-

thermore, we should not underestimate the influence of Vermigli and Calvin on Ursinus.

According to one historian, the Heidelberg Catechism was a "loud declaration of war" against the Lutheran church. Many different branches of the Lutheran church disputed the Heidelberg Catechism. Some Lutheran theologians called the catechism heretical.

Ursinus, however, was not an enemy of Luther or Melancthon. He understood the distinction between law and gospel to be plainly taught in Scripture, and on this issue he did not part ways with Luther or Melancthon. The law/gospel distinction was so fundamental to Ursinus' teaching that he began his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism with a plain declaration:

The doctrine of the church consists of two parts: the Law, and the Gospel; in which we have comprehended the sum and substance of the sacred Scriptures ... The law and gospel are the chief and general divisions of the holy Scriptures, and comprise the entire doctrine comprehended therein.

Ursinus was not uncomfortable making such bold Luther-like

statements in the pages before his commentary on the catechism.

What did Ursinus mean by *law*? "The law is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, constraining us to fly to him...the law prescribes and enjoins what is to be done, and forbids what ought to be avoided." The law is no stranger to us, because we know it by nature, said Ursinus. We find a kernel of the covenant of works in Ursinus: "The law promises life upon the condition of perfect obedience." This statement that obedience leads to life is another area where Ursinus was clearly *not* a Lutheran.

The gospel has everything to do with Christ. "The gospel announces the free remission of sin, through and for the sake of Christ." Ursinus said that the gospel is a stranger to us, so to speak; it is "divinely revealed." The law is generally familiar, the gospel is entirely foreign. The gospel promises life – opposite the law – on the condition of faith in Christ. "The gospel is the doctrine concerning Christ the mediator, and the free remission of sins through faith."

Ursinus did not simply describe the law/gospel distinction and then leave it as a minor theological point. Christian doctrine itself is different from that of all other religions, because in it the *law* of

Many different branches of the Lutheran church disputed the Heidelberg Catechism. Some Lutheran theologians called the catechism heretical.

God is “retained entire and uncorrupted,” while other religions distort and corrupt it. Moreover, the Christian church alone teaches the gospel. Ursinus even used the law/gospel distinction as one of the evidences of the truth of the Christian religion. Since the church alone upholds the Decalogue, only its doctrine is true. At the same time, only the church proclaims the way of escape from hell and the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Because the church alone proclaims the gospel, it is “true and divine.” At one point, Ursinus even stated that one of the duties of a minister in the church is “a faithful and correct exposition of the true and uncorrupted doctrine of the law and gospel, so that the church may be able to understand it.”

From these statements by Ursinus, it is uncontested that he clearly taught the distinction between the law and the gospel. As a second generation Reformer, he knew the difference between prescription and promise, between command and comfort. This understanding of law and gospel was so fundamental to Ursinus’ theology it even pervaded the Heidelberg Catechism. The structure of the catechism is law, then gospel. One can even say that if Ursinus had not understood the law/gospel distinction, the catechism would not be structured in the way that we know it – guilt, grace, and gratitude.

Caspar Olevianus

Caspar Olevianus was born in the German city of Trier in 1536. At the age of fourteen, he moved to Paris to augment his childhood

education. From there, Olevianus studied law. At some point during his studies in France, Olevianus accepted Reformation theology, and after a frightening incident, devoted himself to the study of the Word and the Reformed faith. After 1557, Olevianus practiced law and studied with Calvin for some time. Olevianus also visited many of the major cities of the reformation in Switzerland, where he befriended Vermingli, Beza, Farel, and Bullinger. Olevianus

*For Olevianus,
comfort does not
come unless
discomfort precedes
it.*

was acquainted with many of the leading Reformers of his day. While he may have rubbed shoulders with Lutheran teachers, they were not nearly as influential upon Olevianus as Calvinist reformers were.

In 1559, Olevianus was imprisoned in Trier for preaching protestant doctrine. After Elector Frederick had heard of Olevianus’ imprisonment, he paid a large ransom in order to free the young reformer. Frederick invited him to teach at the university in Heidelberg, and soon Olevianus was promoted to professor of dogmatics. When Ursinus arrived in Heidelberg in late 1561, Olevianus stepped down from the

lectern and moved behind a pulpit to preach. Along with preaching, Olevianus upheld the Calvinist position in debates over the Lord’s Supper and wrote several treatises and books. As we have seen above, Ursinus and Olevianus began working on the catechism in 1562 and finished it in 1563. Olevianus continued to preach, write, and teach until his death in 1587.

Although there has been some debate as to Olevianus’ role as an author of the Heidelberg Catechism, the evidence points to Olevianus as having at least some part in writing the catechism. First, Frederick called both Ursinus and Olevianus to Heidelberg for the cause of upholding Reformed theology in the Palatinate. Second, Olevianus’ *Firm Foundation*, written shortly after the Heidelberg Catechism, has many clear parallels with the catechism. Finally, the theme of comfort is so prevalent in Olevianus’ works it is not simply a coincidence that the Heidelberg Catechism *begins with* and *is full of* comfort.

For Olevianus, this comfort does not come unless discomfort precedes it. That is, one cannot understand the gospel until the law crushes and kills. The law leads us “by the hand, as it were,” to the gospel. We cannot be led to the good news without hearing the bad news first. “After we are convicted of our unrighteousness and smitten with the awareness of eternal death, the law teaches us not to seek salvation in ourselves but to accept by faith the salvation offered us outside ourselves in the

gospel.” The gospel is the promise that Jesus Christ alone saves His people from their sins.

What is the difference between the law and the gospel? The law is “implanted in human nature” and “repeated and renewed” in God’s commandments. Olevianus knew well the difference between the two. In the law, God holds a manuscript before us. This manuscript is a list of what we are and what we are not to do. We must “obey Him perfectly both inwardly and outwardly.” Olevianus stressed that the law demands *perfect* and *perpetual* obedience. If a person does not keep “every provision of the law” his “whole life long,” eternal damnation awaits him. In sum, “the law exposes but does not remit sin. It comes with accusations rather than promises. It condemns us; it does not save us.”

What then saves us? The gospel. “Because it contains promises of salvation, it is called the gospel of salvation, a word of salvation, and a power of God unto salvation.” The gospel is not known by nature even by the wisest men; it is revealed from heaven. In the gospel, God does not demand but gives. The gospel “gives us the righteousness that the law requires.” Olevianus said:

The gospel, or the good news that delights the heart of the poor condemned sinner, is a revelation of the fatherly and immutable will of God, in which He promised us, who are unworthy, that all our sins have been washed away and pardoned not just for the rest of our lives but, indeed, forever.

No one can deny that Caspar Olevianus distinguished between the law and the gospel. While Olevianus did not note that *A Firm Foundation* is divided into two sections, he did begin this doctrinal work with a discussion on the difference between the law and the gospel.

The Law and the Gospel in the Heidelberg Catechism

We may expect the catechism to open up with a thunderous decla-

We cannot understand the summits of God’s grace unless we know the depths of our depravity.

ration of law and the terrors of sin’s punishment. The catechism, however, opens up with the theme of comfort. Many of us are familiar with the first question and answer, *What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own....* While Ursinus and Olevianus understood what the law meant, they did not write the Heidelberg Catechism to frighten and terrify consciences, but so that Christians might attain “sure and solid comfort, both in life and death.” The Heidelberg Catechism was written to Christians with the aim to show them the comforting benefits of the gospel.

However, we cannot know the benefits of the gospel without also knowing the opposite. What must a Christian know to live and die joyfully in the comfort of the gospel? Three things, as the second answer tells us. “The first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.” We are here interested in the first – the greatness of our sin and misery.

We need to know our sin and misery not because it gives comfort, but because it shows us that we need deliverance. We cannot understand the summits of God’s grace unless we know the depths of our depravity. Ursinus wrote that we must first preach the law, so that it might slay us and show us our wretchedness. Both Olevianus and Ursinus spoke of the law being like a diagnosis of illness. Once we know our illness, which is necessary if we wish to be made well, we are driven to the *verus medicus*, the gospel.

“Whence knowest thou thy misery? Out of the law of God.” Question and answer three is clear. The first use of the law is evident. The law of God tells us that we are hell-bound creatures by nature. According to the catechism, the law of God can be summarized as Christ summarized it in Matthew 22. Here the Heidelberg Catechism implies that the law is in the New and Old Testaments. The law and the prophets hang on the two commandments of summary; Jesus

spoke these words in the New Testament.

The law requires perfect obedience, as question five implies. “Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?” As we have seen above, both Ursinus and Olevianus understood that God commands perfect obedience in the law. Every prescription of the law must be perfectly kept by man for his entire life. If he breaks the law, man is cursed and faces God’s judgment in this life and the next (Q/A 10). Because law-breaking, sin, is committed against God’s “most high majesty,” it must be penalized with the most severe punishment: “everlasting punishment, both of body and soul” (Q/A 11).

Question/answers 3-11 is the law section of the catechism. Question/answer 12 gives the reader a hint of good news. God’s justice must be satisfied, and in order to be received into His favor, either we or someone else must make this satisfaction. But we cannot do it, because we are sinful. We actually increase our damning debt daily (Q/A 13). The catechism goes on to discuss what kind of deliverer we need who will perfectly satisfy God’s judicial demands. Who is this deliverer and mediator? Our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we know about this deliverer? From the *holy gospel* (Q/A 19).

The gospel teaches us how the law’s condemning roar against us is silenced, because it shows us the promise of grace. The righteousness – perfect obedience – that Christ performed is imputed

to us through faith. The forgiveness of sins is possible because Jesus fully paid for the sins of His people. Therefore, when the law shouts in our face, “Do this and live,” we point to Christ, and say, “He has done it; I will live.”

The Heidelberg Catechism is beyond doubt a law/gospel document. In plain terms, it says that the law prescribes, while the gospel promises. The law condemns and kills, and gives not even a hint of remedy or help for sin. The law cannot give us anything, it can only demand. On the other hand, the gospel promises and gives comfort, forgiveness, peace, righteousness, and life through Jesus Christ, our only Savior.

Conclusion

We have observed that Ursinus knew and taught the difference between law and gospel. His distinction was unmistakable: “The law says..., ‘Do this, and live.’ The gospel says, ‘Only believe.’” Olevianus fully agreed. Question and answer 10 in Olevianus’ *Firm Foundation* is lucid: “What is the difference between the law and the gospel?” Today, may God help us understand the difference between the two, which will guard us from many serious errors. The law does not give life – only the gospel does. Olevianus and Ursinus teach correctly on this truth.

This law/gospel distinction is also apparent in the Heidelberg Catechism; it is structured with the distinction. In the years following the Reformation, not only did Lutherans make a sharp distinction between the law and the gos-

pel, many Calvinists did the same. Without a doubt, *the law/gospel distinction is such a Reformed teaching that it even shows up in the Heidelberg Catechism*. In our day, in the midst of the muddling of law and gospel, it is essential for us to uphold this important division. Ursinus was exactly right when he said that one of the duties of a pastor was to teach correctly and faithfully the difference between the law and the gospel. The Heidelberg Catechism is an excellent help for pastors and teachers as they instruct Christians in the difference between law and gospel. Indeed, it is their duty.

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Looking Above

A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 6:12-17

“Who Is Able to Stand?”

The opening of the sixth seal brings before us the great Day of Wrath; in view is Judgment Day.

The horrifying scene is described in verses 12-14: “I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.”

The first thing we behold with the opening of the sixth seal is a great earthquake—the Greek says literally a “great shaking”—it is the great shaking of the heavens and the earth.

The earth, of course, has been shaken before. Remember the scene at the giving of the Law, Exodus 19:16-18, “Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and *the whole moun-*

tain quaked greatly.” The judge Deborah recalls the scene as she sings her song in Judges 5:4-5, “Lord, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the field of Edom, *the earth trembled* and the heavens poured, the clouds also poured water; the mountains gushed before the Lord, this Sinai, before the Lord God of Israel.” David also recalls the scene as he sings the words of Psalm 68:7-8, “O God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness, *the earth shook*; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.”

The earth beholds its Creator, and shakes in His presence. It shakes not only because God is present, but because God speaks. Two of the minor prophets draw a connection between the revelation of God’s Word and the shaking of the earth. Consider Amos 1:1, “The words of Amos, who was among the sheep breeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, *two years before the earthquake.*” Compare that with Zechariah 14:5, “Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, *you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake* in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all

the saints with You.” Amos and Zechariah both connect the revelation of God’s Word to an earthquake. God’s Word is power; it is living and active; it brings with it a shaking of the earth.

The earth trembles at God’s presence. The earth shakes at His revelation, the revelation of His Word. The earth trembles and shakes because God comes forth in judgment. Consider Psalm 18:7-15, “Then the earth shook and trembled; *the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken*, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.” The earth shakes and trembles at God’s coming in judgment.

It is fitting, then, that the prophets depict the coming day of the Lord in terms of a great earthquake. Isaiah 13:13, “Therefore *I will shake the heavens*, and *the earth will move*

out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.” Again in Isaiah 29:6, “You will be punished by the Lord of hosts with thunder *and earthquake* and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire.”

Consider also Ezekiel 38:18-23, “And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,” says the Lord God, ‘that My fury will show in My face. For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: ‘Surely in that day *there shall be a great earthquake* in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on *the face of the earth shall shake* at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains, says the Lord God. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.” The coming of the Day of the Lord is pictured in terms of a great earthquake.

We find such imagery also in the Minor Prophets. Joel 2:10, “The *earth quakes* before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish

their brightness.” Again in Joel 3:16, “The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; *the heavens and earth will shake*; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.” Finally, consider Haggai 2:6, “For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once more (it is a little while) *I will shake heaven and earth*, the sea and dry land.” The great and coming Day of the Lord is pictured in terms of an earthquake.

Revelation picks up on this theme picturing the great and coming Day of the Lord in terms of a great and terrible earthquake. God shakes the earth in His great indignation and wrath. Judgment Day shall bring a shaking of the heavens and the earth—a shaking of the created order—a rending of the created order—a destruction of the created order—an undoing of the created order.

So great will be this final shaking of the heavens and the earth that it will affect all of creation. The sun will become black like sackcloth of hair; the moon will become like blood; the stars of heaven will fall to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind; the sky will recede as a scroll.

Why the sun? What is the sun but that which gives light and governs the day? What is the sun but that which, in giving light and governing the day, also governs the seasons:

seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer. On the Day of Judgment, the sun is turned black like sackcloth of hair. The point is clear: no more light to govern the day, no more light to govern the seasons, no more seedtime and harvest, no more cold and heat, no more winter and summer, no more day and night. The earth no longer remains. The created order is undone.

Why the moon? What is the moon but the reflection of the light of the sun? The moon reminds us of God’s faithfulness, even in the midst of darkness. You can look up in the blackness of night and though the sun is hidden from your view, you know that it continues to shine by evidence of the moon. Now the moon is turned to blood. The created order is undone.

Why the stars? Consider how many worship the stars through astrology, daily consulting the horoscope for guidance. Is your hope in the stars of heaven? Do you read the horoscope with great interest, thinking that it has great bearing upon the events of your life? Look what becomes of those precious stars! They fall into disarray, and are cast down upon the earth. The created order is undone.

Why the sky? The firmament above is that which separates the heavens and the earth. Now the firmament recedes like a scroll. The kingdoms of this world are

***The great and coming Day of the Lord is pictured
in terms of an earthquake.***

The shaking of the created order brings about another shaking as well: the shaking of mankind.

become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and there is no place for the ungodly. He is coming to Judge!

In His coming to judge, every mountain and island is moved out of place. From Mt. St. Helens to the Hawaiian islands. From Mt. Everest to the Everglades. The created order is shaken and undone.

The shaking of the created order brings about another shaking as well: the shaking of mankind. Consider verse 15, “And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains.” All mankind sees the shaking of the created order, and they, like the earth, tremble and shake as well. The entire godless world—kings, great men, rich men, commanders, mighty men, slaves, free men—is shaken with fear and terror. They may have ignored God all their lives long, refusing to tremble at His Word, but now they can ignore Him no more, now they do tremble! The Day of Judgment is here. The great day of His wrath has come.

As Adam and Eve hid from God on that original judgment day of Genesis 3, so unrepentant mankind hides from God on the great Day of Judgment in Revelation 6.

They run to and fro, hiding themselves in the mountains and caves, crying out to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” So great and terrible are the events of that Day, that mankind will run about looking for death, crying out for death, death being a better alternative than facing the wrath of the Lamb! But that which they seek they will not find. Death will escape them. The one thing they desire, they will not receive. How horrible that Day! They cry out for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them. These are shrieks of agony and terror, unlike any heard on the face of the earth before. How horrible that Day!

In view, then, with the opening of the sixth seal is the great day of wrath; in view is Judgment Day. The horror of Judgment Day is that there is no more mercy. The horror of the Day of wrath is that there is no more grace. Once that day has arrived, the door of grace is closed forever, for all eternity.

But the good news is this: that day is not yet here! God’s Word continues to go forth while it is yet the day of salvation! In that connection, don’t miss the point of the sixth seal. The seven seals are being opened from the time of

Christ’s ascension to the time of His return in glory to judge the living and the dead. That means that every earthquake, every conflagration of creation, every shaking of the earth serves as a harbinger, a harbinger of the great shaking of the heaven and earth that is yet to come. God’s Word instructs us to view each earthquake as a reminder that the great earthquake is yet to come! Each earthquake, then, serves as a summons; a summons to faith and repentance, a summons to warn you and transform you, a summons that is intended to drive you to Christ.

Remember the scene at the cross. Jesus breathes His last, and the earth quaked and the rocks were split. Remember the confession of the centurion: “Surely, this was the Son of God!” The earth shook, and the centurion got the point!

Remember the scene at the jail in Philippi. Paul and Silas were in prison, singing hymns and praying at midnight, when suddenly there was a great earthquake. Remember the confession of the Philippian jailer: “What must I do to be saved?” The earth shook, and the Philippian jailer got the point!

As the final shaking of the heavens and earth will transform the created order— removing it to make way for the new—so each preliminary shaking of the earth is a summons to you, a summons to repentance and faith, a summons to warn you, a summons to transform you, a summons to drive you to Christ, for in Him alone are you able to stand on that last great day!

The earth shakes in California, in India, in Pakistan, telling you that the Day is coming in which the heavens and the earth will be shaken with a great earthquake. The great Day of His wrath is coming. Will you be able to stand?

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“The Old Testament Evidence Regarding the Participation of Children in Covenant Observances”

Part Two

In my previous article, I summarized the common argument that advocates of paedocommunion derive from the teaching of the Old Testament. This argument appeals primarily to two kinds of evidence, the second of which is the most important. First, an appeal is made to the inclusion of the children of believers within the covenant community and their participation in a number of the observances of the older covenant. And second, an appeal is made to the participation of children in the celebration of the Feast of the Passover, which is regarded as the most important Old Testament type of the New Testament sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Even though my summary may have omitted some features of the paedocommunionist argument, these are the most important and relevant considerations from the evidence of the Old Testament. According to advocates of the practice of paedocommunion, these Old Testament precedents constitute a sufficient basis for the presumption that children should be granted the privilege of participating in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper under the new covenant administration.

In effect, the paedocommunionist argument from the Old Testament grants the premise of one, common objection of Baptists to the Reformed view of paedobaptism. That objection claims that there is

an inconsistency in administering the sacrament of baptism to the children of believing parents, which assumes that they are included with the covenant community and recipients of the gospel promise in Christ, and at the same time refusing such children admission to the Lord’s Table. In the opinion of many advocates of the admission of children to the Lord’s Table, this objection legitimately identifies a real inconsistency in the historic practice of the Reformed churches.

Now that we have identified the main features of the argument for paedocommunion from the Old Testament, we are in a position to evaluate this evidence and draw a preliminary conclusion regarding the implications of Old Testament practice. In this and a subsequent article, I will follow roughly the same order as in my preceding article. I will first evaluate the evidence of the participation of children in various Old Testament practices. After evaluating this evidence, I will then address the evidence drawn from the Old Testament Passover. Though we will conclude that the Old Testament does not provide a case for the admission of children to the Lord’s Supper, our conclusions at this juncture will have to be tentative. Since the most important evidence must be drawn from the New Testament, which norms the practice of the believing community under the new

covenant, no definitive conclusion regarding the biblical propriety of the practice of paedocommunion may be reached without a consideration of the relevant New Testament data. We will therefore turn to that evidence in subsequent articles.

A Critical Evaluation of the Paedocommunion Argument from the Old Testament

Two Relevant Principles to Note

As we evaluate the Old Testament evidence that might have relevance to the subject of paedocommunion, we need to bear in mind two important biblical principles that tend to be slighted by advocates of paedocommunion. The first principle is that the ultimate norm for the practice of the church must be the New Testament description of the administration of the new covenant. The second principle is that participation in the observances of the covenant, whether in terms of Old Testament or New Testament teaching, must be governed by the Lord's insistence that His people worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

The first principle is a basic rule of biblical interpretation that acknowledges the progress of the history of redemption and revelation. Whatever continuities may exist between the old covenant and the new covenant, we may not determine the practice of the new covenant community of faith by a simple, direct appeal to the practice of the old covenant. Though Reformed believers confess that the old and new covenants are "one in substance," they also confess that they are different in their "mode of administration." There is one covenant of grace, which was first formally established with Abraham (Gen. 15,

17), but this covenant was variously administered throughout the course of the covenant Lord's dealings with His people in the history of redemption. For example, the covenant relationship between the Lord and His people changes in important respects in the transition from the Abrahamic covenant to the Mosaic covenant. Similarly, with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of time, a "new" and "better" covenant than that of Moses has been instituted (cf. Heb. 7:22; 12:24). We may expect that this new and better covenant will differ significantly in some features of its administration from what was true under the old covenant.

Any consideration of the practice of the old covenant community, particularly its significance for the question of a new covenant practice like that of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, must reckon with this principle. Since the specific form of the old covenant administration has been replaced with that of the new covenant administration, we may not argue for a practice solely on the basis of Old Testament precedents. The general application of this principle is illustrated by the abrogation of the entirety of the "ceremonial legislation" of the old covenant, which finds its fulfillment in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the

ceremonial legislation of the old covenant is fulfilled in Christ, the substance and reality to which this legislation pointed forward still remains. However, the ceremonies and types of the old administration end with the introduction of the new. Since the Lord's Supper marks the "new covenant in [Jesus'] blood" (Luke 22:20), it must be governed by the New Testament's teaching regarding the Lord's Supper. Though this is not the place to review the differences between the Old Testament Passover and the New Testament Lord's Supper, it is important to observe that the latter is an observance that belongs to the "new covenant" and points to the fulfillment of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament legislation. There is no single Old Testament precedent for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, not even the Feast of the Passover, which might superficially appear to be the most obvious candidate for this status.

In addition to this basic principle of interpretation, we should also note the Old Testament emphasis, which is also enunciated in the New Testament, that the Lord insists that His people worship Him in a responsible and informed manner (Ps. 50:13-16; Isa. 1:10-17; 66:3; Jer. 7:21-26; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8). Though this principle does not directly speak to

We may expect that this new and better covenant will differ significantly in some features of its administration from what was true under the old covenant.

the question whether children participated fully in the observances of the Old Testament, it does warn against an assumption that sometimes creeps into the argument of paedocommunionists. This assumption is that simple membership in the covenant community automatically grants to believers and their children access to all of its rites and observances. In the argument of many paedocommunionists, covenant membership virtually guarantees full participation by every member of the covenant community in all features of the covenant. Any restrictions upon participation in covenant observances, particularly restrictions that might demand a responsible and intelligent appreciation of what the observance means, are regarded with suspicion, as though they were tantamount to a denial of the covenant member's status. As we shall see in the course of treatment of the biblical evidence pertaining to participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Old and New Testaments norm the practice of the covenant community in a way that often restricts participation in some aspects of the covenant's observances. Frequently, these restrictions have to do with stipulated requirements that must be met prior to participation on the part of believers and their children.

Though we are only noting these two principles here, it will become apparent as we take up the paedocommunion argument from the Old Testament, and subsequently from the New Testament, that they have significant implications for evaluating the strength of

the case for the admission of children to the Lord's Supper.

The Limitations of the Argument from the Participation of Children in Old Covenant Observances

If we keep these two principles in mind as we evaluate the Old Testament evidence, there are several features of its teaching that are slighted in the argument of paedocommunionists. These features suggest that there are limits to the argument for paedocommunion from the alleged precedents of the Old Testament.

We have noted, for example, how paedocommunionists often appeal to the participation of children in the eating of the manna that the Lord provided His people in the wilderness. Since the apostle Paul draws an analogy between this provision of manna and the participation of the new covenant community in Christ by means of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:1-5, 14ff.), this is adduced as an example of an Old Testament precedent for paedocommunion. The argument is not as strong as it might first appear, however. In a sense, it might be regarded as an example of "proving too much." In the account of the provision of manna in Exodus, we are not told that there were any restrictions upon the community's participation in the eating of manna and drinking of the water from the rock (Ex. 16-17). Presumably, even

strangers to the covenant community as well as animals were nourished by the food and drink that the Lord miraculously supplied for their daily sustenance. If the assumption were correct that participation in this eating and drinking is a clear Old Testament precedent for the participation of children in the Lord's Supper, one could also argue for the participation of unbelievers and strangers to the covenant. The circumstances of Israel's eating manna in the wilderness may have significance as a "type" of the covenant community's participation in Christ, but there are significant differences between this Old Testament observance and the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The limits of this precedent for children partaking of the Lord's Supper is similar to the limits of other Old Testament observances that have a New Testament counterpart. For example, there are important differences that exist between the Old Testament rite of circumcision, which in the nature of the case only applied to the male members of the covenant community, and the New Testament sacrament of baptism, which is administered to men and women. And there are significant differences between the *annual* celebration of the Passover at a central location in Jerusalem, and the *frequent* administration of the Lord's Supper in the sanctuary/assembly of the Lord's new covenant

There are limits to the argument for paedocommunion from the alleged precedents of the Old Testament.

people. It is simply impossible to determine the proper administration of the new covenant by a direct appeal to these kinds of alleged Old Testament precedents.

Another Old Testament precedent to which paedocommunionists appeal is the participation of children in the Feasts of Weeks and of Tabernacles. Since children were instructed to take part in these Feasts, and were also permitted to partake of peace- and firstfruit-offerings (cf. Numb. 6:2,13-21; Deut. 12:6ff.; 14:23-26; 15:19ff; 16:10ff.; Prov. 7:14), we have ample Old Testament examples of their participation in covenant meals. These examples support the presumption that children should also partake of the Lord's Supper in the new covenant. Since these examples testify to the inclusion of children within the covenant community and its privileges, they are not without relevance. However, they do not include some of the most important sacrifices of the old covenant that more directly "typify" the sacrifice of Christ, which the Lord's Supper commemorates and proclaims. Some of these Old Testament sacrifices did not permit participation on the part of the whole covenant community in the meals that accompanied them. For example, it is interesting to observe that the sacrifices that were regularly to be offered in Israel, and that were symbolic of the "work of atonement," were sacrifices that could only be offered by the Levitical priests. These atoning sacrifices, which included stipulations that no bone of the sacrificial victim was to be broken and that its flesh must not be left overnight, included meals that were confined to the priests

Paedocommunionists argue that the restrictions associated with the sacrifices belong to the shadows of the old covenant.

who were on duty in the sanctuary (Lev. 2:3,10; 5:13; 6:16-18,26,29; 7:6-10; 10:12ff.; 14:13; Numb. 18:9ff.) or to the priests and their wives and children at home (Lev. 10:14ff.; 22:11-13; Numb. 18:11-19). Furthermore, the sacrifice offered by the high priest on the annual day of atonement did not include an accompanying meal, since the meat of the sacrificial animal was discarded and burned (cf. Heb. 7:26ff.; 8:1ff.; 9:6-7, 11-14; 10:19ff.; Lev. 16:7).

Since the Lord's Supper remembers and proclaims especially the atoning aspects of Christ's work, which were typified by means of these sacrifices and their accompanying meals, these old covenant rites are among the most important Old Testament prefigurements of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. While paedocommunionists do not deny this, they argue that the restrictions associated with these sacrifices belong to the shadows of the old covenant. Since we no longer have a distinct priesthood in the new covenant (Christ is our "only High priest"), these restrictions do not hold any longer. The problem with the paedocommunion argument at this point, however, is that these Old Testament observances further confirm how difficult it is to conclude from Old Testament precedents that all members of the covenant community should partake of the Lord's Supper. The paedocommunion argument appeals to those

observances of the Old Testament that support the full participation of all covenant members, while downplaying those that stipulate restrictions. This is particularly significant, since the restricted observances often concern precisely those Old Testament rites that have the most direct bearing upon the sacrifice of Christ that the Lord's Supper commemorates.

In our subsequent consideration of the New Testament evidence for or against paedocommunion, we will have occasion to argue that the new covenant sacrament of the Lord's Supper is much more than an "updated" version of the old covenant sacrament of the Passover. In the context of that consideration, we will return to one of the most important Old Testament precedents for the Lord's Supper, the sealing of the old covenant that is described in Exodus 24. At this point in our evaluation of the paedocommunion argument from the Old Testament, however, we need to consider the importance of the event recorded in Exodus 24 for our claim that there are limits to the argument that appeals to Old Testament precedents. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he said, "This is my blood of the covenant," which is a quotation from Exodus 24 (cf. Heb. 8-10). In the book of Hebrews, the author maintains that the blood of Jesus is the distinguishing mark of the new covenant and that it surpasses the

blood of the old covenant, which was sprinkled over the people of Israel by Moses (Heb. 9:20). This means that the New Testament views the event recorded in Exodus 24 as one, if not *the most important*, of the Old Testament precedents for the Lord's Supper.

In the account of this event in Exodus 24, which follows the giving of the law of God at Sinai and the people's pledge to live obediently before the Lord, it appears to have been a kind of sign and seal of the covenant relationship between the Lord and His people. Though it might be an overstatement to call this event an Old Testament "sacrament," it functions in a quasi-sacramental way as a visible token and confirmation of the covenant communion between the Lord and the children of Israel. In Exodus 24, we read that Moses, the covenant Mediator, first sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings before the Lord. These offerings represented the fellowship and communion that existed between the Lord and His covenant people. After gathering the blood of these sacrificial bulls, Moses then spread the blood over both the altar, which represented the Lord's presence, and the people of Israel (including the children). Perhaps the most important feature of this event, is the fellowship meal that was celebrated on the mountain. In the account of this event, we read: "Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men

of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank" (Ex. 24:9-11).

When the Lord Jesus Christ used the words of Exodus 24 in the act of instituting the Lord's Supper, therefore, he was appealing to this Old Testament fellowship meal that Moses and the leaders of Israel celebrated on the mountain. After the children of Israel were covered

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by the blood of the covenant, this meal signified and sealed their communion with the covenant Lord. Since the blood atonement that preceded this meal was only a type of the blood atonement that the writer of Hebrews teaches was ultimately provided by Christ, this ceremony and its accompanying meal were only celebrated once, and never again. Since Christ's atoning work fulfills what this atonement ceremony could only typify, the Lord's Supper, which is the new covenant fulfillment of this event, is celebrated frequently by the new covenant believer who enjoys a full communion with the Lord on the basis of the accomplished work of Christ.

Though this Old Testament observance represents the most significant Old Testament background to the institution and meaning of the Lord's Supper, it also illustrates the difficulty of directly appealing to the Old Testament for determining the practice of the church. It is impossible to argue from the meal that was celebrated at this time in Israel's history that all believers and their children should participate in the Lord's Supper, which is its new covenant fulfillment. It is likewise impossible to prove from the circumstances of this meal that only the leaders of the new covenant community should participate in the Lord's Supper. What can be derived from this event, however, is that there are Old Testament precedents for the Lord's Supper—this one in particular—that do not support the paedocommunionist argument that the Passover is the principal Old Testament background for the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, this important Old Testament precedent in Exodus 24 does not lend support for any direct inferences regarding who should partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the new covenant administration.

Conclusion

My purpose in citing these examples of the limits of the paedocommunionist appeal to Old Testament precedents for the participation of children in covenant observances, is rather modest. I have not cited this evidence from the Old Testament to establish a firm conclusion regarding whether children should be admitted to the Lord's Table. Rather, I have appealed to these principles of interpretation and examples of Old Testament practice to show that it is not

possible to determine the practice of the new covenant simply by appealing to evidence from the Old Testament.

Before we can draw any further conclusions at this point, we need still to consider the most important piece of evidence from the Old Testament, so far as the argument for paedocommunion is concerned. And that is the alleged precedent of the participation of children in the celebration of the Passover. Accordingly, we will turn to the subject of the Old Testament Passover and its significance for the question of paedocommunion in our next article.

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If You Want to Enter Life, Keep the Commandments

We have often heard that Jesus Christ had to *die on the cross* so that our sins might be forgiven. This is absolutely true and wonderful!

But it is only one side of the story. Jesus Christ also had to *obey on the cross* so that we might inherit eternal life.

The distinction between these two goals (forgiveness and life) is the same as that of the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. The passive aspect of Christ's obedience is that He paid the penalty for sin. The active is that He merited eternal life for us.

In this article, we examine the active obedience that Christ gave so that we might inherit eternal life. This is absolutely crucial to our understanding of salvation, but it is oftentimes neglected and not clearly understood in the evangelical world today.

The reason we believe that Christ has earned eternal life for us by His obedience is because the Scripture says (1) that perfect obedience is necessary for life, (2) that Christ not only suffered for us but also obeyed for us, and (3) that the result of Christ's work is forgiveness of sins *and* eternal life.

Perfect Obedience Merits Eternal Life

The Bible has one simple way of saying that perfect obedience is necessary for eternal life. "Do this and live." The "do this" is perfect

obedience, and the "live" is eternal life.

Jesus said it this way to the rich, young ruler, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). John Calvin's comment on this passage is simple and to the point, "[The rich young ruler] dreams of merits, on account of which he may receive eternal life as a reward due; and therefore Christ appropriately sends him to *the keeping of the law, which unquestionably is the way of life*" (emphasis mine).

This is similar to the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. There, a teacher asks Jesus what must he *do* to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what is written in the law, and he responds that we must love God and our neighbor. Listen carefully to Jesus' answer, "You have answered rightly, do this and you will live" (Verse 28).

Obviously, Jesus establishes a necessary connection between perfect obedience and eternal life. But what does that mean for us?

The *purpose is not* that we might try to gain righteousness by the law. Some object to the idea that Jesus would say that perfect obedience merits eternal life because that would be tempting us to gain righteousness by the law. But they forget what the Bible says one very important purpose of the law is.

The *purpose is* that we might be

shown that we *cannot* merit eternal life. To put it another way, “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). The law condemns us all that “every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God” (3:19). This is precisely what Jesus was doing in the passages that was mentioned earlier.

And so the question for us is, “Have we *done this* so that we might *live*?” The answer is that *we have not done this*, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The conclusion is: we shall not live.

Christ not only Suffered but Obeyed for Us

Happily, we are not left with the sad fact that we have not done this and, therefore, shall not live. The Gospel gives us the happy news that Christ not only suffered for us but also obeyed for us so that we might live. The Bible says that Jesus “did this” so that we might live.

Jesus said that dying on the cross was not only laying down His life for the sheep but also obedience to the Father. In John 10:18, He said, “I have power to lay [my life] down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” Thus, His death on the cross was an act of obedience to the Father.

This is why the Apostle Paul describes Christ’s humiliation as becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8). Christ was obedient throughout His whole life but especially on the cross.

Thus, in one of the most important

With the coming of the Seed, Christ, the promise that God made to Abraham, is realized.

passages in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit contrasts the disobedience of Adam with the obedience of Christ. He says there, “For as by one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). We see in this passage not only that Christ rendered perfect obedience but also the purpose of that obedience: “so that many will be made righteous.” That is, that His righteousness might be put on their account!

Some object to the use of Romans 5 in speaking of the active obedience of Christ because it speaks of one act of obedience, which refers to the cross. But this objection is easily removed. Just as Christ’s sufferings occurred throughout His whole life but reached their culmination on the cross, so Christ’s obedience continued throughout His whole life but reached its pinnacle on the cross as the supreme act of love to the Father.

Thus, we have a solution to the problem of the “Do this.” Christ has “done this” for us. When we think of all the ways that we have disobeyed God, we can take comfort in this fact: Jesus has obeyed in our place.

Eternal Life is a Result of Christ’s Work

Jesus has “done this” for us, and so now we can live. Is it not stated abundantly in Scripture that Christ

came down from heaven not only that we might have forgiveness of sins but also that we might have eternal life?

Consider the most popular verse in the Bible. It is said that God sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish (because of His passive obedience) but have everlasting life (because of His active obedience).

Another Scripture verse that is very familiar to us all is Romans 6:23. Here it is said, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Notice that we have merited death. Christ paid those wages. But we also have a gift—eternal life. How do we get it? It is “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Thus, we “live” because Jesus Christ has “done this.”

It is important to recognize that God does not change His standards. God has said, “Do this and live.” Perfect obedience is the condition of eternal life. Without the “doing of the law,” there will be no eternal life.

But we get eternal life. How, then, is this possible? Certainly not because we have done what was necessary! Rather, it is because Jesus has done all that it was necessary to do in order for us to gain eternal life! The “done this” or obedience to the law is not ours but Christ’s. Christ gives us His “done this” or His perfect righteousness so that we might have eternal life.

Conclusion – Very Good News

Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins. That is very good news, for we deserved eternal punishment because of our sin. Christ has paid that penalty for us.

But paying the penalty for our sins is not enough to get us into heaven. If we only had forgiveness of sins, then we would merely have a clean, blank slate. A blank slate will not get us into heaven. The Bible says that eternal life is for those who have obeyed the law. The slate must have “good works,” “performance of the law,” “righteousness,” or “done this” written on it.

And this is also the very good news of the Gospel. Christ has not only given us a clean slate. He has written on it, “Christ’s obedience.” That is surely enough to get us into heaven!

What glorious good news! Christ has done it all! He has paid the penalty for my sin *and* done all that is necessary for me to obtain eternal life. And now I know that I have everlasting life and will not come into judgment but have passed from death to life. No power in this world can possibly overwhelm or overrule the efficacy of Christ’s obedience and sacrifice!

Rev. J. Wesley White is Pastor of the New Covenant PCA in Spearfish, South Dakota

Meeting of the CEIR of the OPC with the CERCU of the URCNA

On March 22-23, 2006 the committees for ecumenicity of both the OPC and the URCNA met in Willow Grove, PA to further their ecumenical dialogue.

Present from the URCNA: John A. Bouwers, Chuck Dykstra, Gary Findley, Casey Freswick, Don Hoaglander, Todd Joling, Ralph A. Pontier, William Van der Woerd, Harry Zekveld.

Present from the OPC: Mark T. Bube, L. Anthony Curto, George W. Knight III, Th.D., Robert B. Needham, Jack J. Peterson, Jack W. Sawyer, Thomas E. Tyson, Peter J. Wallace, Ph.D., and G. I. Williamson.

The meeting was chaired by the Rev. Thomas Tyson.

The OPC has invited the URCNA to enter a relationship of “ecclesiastical fellowship” (equivalent to the URCNA’s “phase two” of ecclesiastical relations). The committees have been meeting annually to discuss these matters since 2002. The two committees are involved in producing a series of “Statements of Agreement,” in order to provide a clear picture to the General Synod of the URCNA in 2007.

The two committees have agreed on the wording of statements on 1) The Holy Scriptures, 2) The Confessions, 3) Subscription to the Confessions, 4) Church History (especially regarding the formation of the OPC and the URCNA), 5) Church Designations and Distinc-

tions, and 6) Church Offices and Authority. The purpose of this meeting was to finalize the first six statements, and to begin working on further statements on worship, preaching, sacraments, ministerial training and discipline.

Each committee presented a written statement on worship, preaching, sacraments, ministerial training and discipline, followed by an amicable and profitable discussion, which demonstrated that there is much *foundational* agreement in all of these areas. Each communion is concerned to govern its worship practices by Scripture, to preach the whole counsel of God, to administer the sacraments properly, and to exercise Christian discipline faithfully. While neither the OPC nor the URCNA have denomination-run seminaries, both are committed to a thorough theological education for the ministry. While the age for receiving members by baptism to the Lord’s Table by a profession of faith may generally be lower in the OPC than in the URCNA, paedocommunion is not permitted in either the OPC or the URCNA.

While the resulting statements will focus on the agreement between us, we recognized that there are details of our church order and practice where there are differences between us, such as:

1) The URC does not generally lay hands on ruling elders at their ordination, while the OPC does.

2) The URC generally uses the word “church” to refer only to the local church and the holy, catholic Church, while the OPC also speaks of the “regional church” under the oversight of the presbytery and the “whole church” under the General Assembly as further manifestations of the church.

3) The URC requires ministers to preach catechetical sermons, while the OPC does not. Some OPC ministers would be uncomfortable with such a requirement since they are committed to preaching through books of the Bible. While the method of catechetical preaching produced considerable discussion there was general agreement that the whole counsel of God must be preached. The URC allows for the observance of special days and encourages special attention to Christmas and Easter in its church order, while the OPC does not have such a provision.

4) The URC requires the use of particular forms for sacraments, ordination, marriage, etc., while the OPC allows for greater liturgical freedom

5) The URC Church Order prescribes two worship services per Lord’s Day, while this is not the practice in some OPC congregations.

The meeting was characterized by great cordiality and frankness as well as warm fraternal fellowship.

This Is My Outlook

Parents Take Note

Do you know where your children are? Of course you do. You consider yourself a responsible parent. You make sure your children know their catechism. You provide them with a Reformed Christian education. You do all that you can to provide a Christian environment for your child. Even now, she is upstairs in her bedroom writing to her friends. But what is she writing?

While investigating another matter, I came across the Xanga account of several young people who I know are members of solid Reformed churches. Nice kids. They are being brought up in nice, solid Reformed homes; they lead good Christian lives; they teach Daily Vacation Bible School; they often provide special music in various churches; and so much more. But what they are writing on Xanga will greatly shock and sadden you.

Xanga is one of many websites on the Internet where individuals share their feelings and thoughts with the whole wide world. It is kind of like the diary of yesterday — except where teenagers of the past wanted to keep their thoughts private, today’s bloggers post them for all the world to see. Basically, what they are hiding from their parents is available to all the world.

Xanga, and other websites like it, is a wonderful way for people to keep in touch. For example, when

a group of young people went to Trinidad to lead DVBS, their families, friends, and churches could log into their account to find out what activities the young missionaries were involved in each day. In such situations, the Xanga account is a wonderful tool source for relaying information without cost to those who want to read it.

However, as the popularity of the site grows, more and more young people have set up their own personal blog sites. On these sites the young teenagers pour out their hearts. They write about the parties that they throw when their parents are out of town; they write about their sexual experimentation and experiences; and they use language that would grieve the heart of God and should never enter the thoughts of a Christian, let alone be written down for all the world to see.

Parents need to be alerted to these postings for several reasons. First of all, your young teenage daughter is opening herself up to more than just her friends. Since what they write is open to the world, they become easy prey for pedophiles. Several sites that I checked out had the following response written back to them: “Hi. You don’t know be, but I’m a friend of your friend (a fellow blogger). We’ll have to get together sometime.” By checking out previous posts, the pedophile can even write about events where the two supposedly met.

Equally important is the Christian witness that is lost in all of this. Xanga could be a wonderful avenue for young people to share their Christian struggles and also their growth in the faith. And, indeed, several young people do use the site to that end, illustrating a wonderful walk with the Lord and Christian growth. The majority that I viewed, however, give no hint of the fact that they have any Christian influence in their lives at all. While several list God in their area of interest, He often follows boys and partying and He is sadly missing from their writings.

Parents, talk to your children! Check out the “history” of sites that they have browsed and contribute to. It is not all that difficult to discover where your child has been. If you are computer illiterate, have someone help you. You may find something you do not want to know about, but it is something you need to know about. Use your findings as an opportunity to speak with your child about computer etiquette, the danger of blogging, and her responsibility as a young Christian with a Reformed worldview. We must to make every effort to

teach our children the necessity of having every area of their lives under the sovereignty of God and the vital importance of claiming every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Rev. Wybren H. Oord

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Looking Out and About

- Rev. Paul Ipema, who has served as a church planter in Nampa, Idaho since 2001, has accepted a call from the Community United Reformed Church in Schererville, Indiana.
- The Faith United Reformed Church in Beecher, Illinois dedicated their new building on April 7, 2006.
- The Faith United Reformed Church in Balmoral, Ontario announced at Classis Southern Ontario on March 28, 2006 that they were going to officially disband.

- Churches are invited to request a student from Mid-America Reformed Seminary for ministerial internships for the summer. Contact Rev. Mark Vander Hart at the Seminary for more details.

Churches are invited to send news items to The Outlook by contacting the editor at wymbkath@juno.com

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