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# The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



• The Command to Cross • The Second Plague • Election: Friend or Foe to Evangelism? • Augustine's Tale of Two Cities • Bible Studies on Jacob  
• Baptism, Election, & the Covenant of Grace (II) • NT Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (IV) • Church Offices in Historic Reformed Doctrine

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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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# The Command to Cross

*Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 'Pass through the host, and command the people, saying Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.'*"  
(Joshua 1:10,11)

What a feeling must have come over the Israelites when they first heard the command that they would be crossing over Jordan in just three days. The possession of the land had been the hope of their lives. It was mingled in with their childhood memories. It had been the constant expectation of their growing years. The thought of this land had lightened their weariness and cheered their toils as they wandered thru the wilderness.

The very words of the promise were a part of their lives. They had heard of it as "the good land," "the land flowing with milk and honey," and "the land that the Lord had promised to our fathers." They had drunk it all in—every word spoken by their fathers and mothers who stood at these very banks forty years earlier.

Those whose feet would walk upon the sacred soil of this new land were the children of those who had made the Exodus. They had spent the strength of their childhood in the desert. Throughout their teen years they knew only of wandering in the wilderness. And now the end had come. The promised rest lay ahead, just three days hence.

## Joy in the Camp

How strange indeed it would have been if they had shrunk from the

task and complained because their inheritance was now at hand. Yet, no less strange and unnatural is the gloom and sadness; the fear and horror with which some Christians contemplate their own passage into the heavenly Canaan. While the Book of Joshua is a historic redemptive book in which God is ever moving toward the fulfillment of His covenant promise to bring the people into the land, there are some great themes in the book that simply cannot be ignored. The symbolism found in the Book of Joshua points to God's continued covenant promise to His people. He has brought His New Testament people out of our bondage to sin. He is leading us through the wilderness to the eternal land of promise, the New Jerusalem.

Those born within the covenant and brought up in the church have from our earliest infancy heard about and have been taught about the glorious land that awaits us. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 2:9 "...eye has not seen and ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the hearts of men, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." Heaven—no more tears; no more dying; no more sorrow.

The joys of this sinless world, prepared for us through Christ have been mingled in with our very first

thoughts. Our very first prayer, taught to us at our mother's knee, included that precious phrase "Thy kingdom come." The joy of the new Jerusalem, indescribable and immeasurable, has filled our childhood fantasies. It has fired the imagination of our early years, occupied our wandering thoughts as we grew older, and filled us with reverent conjectures in our riper age. Any true thinking of this glory that awaits us ends with the same words that John spoke at the end of Revelation: "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

The Canaan of the ancient Israelites was but a change of scenery. They would face further conflict and eventual exile. Our inheritance is described by Peter as "imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away." And yet, the Israelites delighted in the thought of it. They did so for the very same reason that makes heaven so sweet to us: the prospect of its rest.

It was not only the contrast between the fountains and fruit of the promised land over against the arid desolation of the great wilderness through which they had wandered for forty years. God had provided in times of hunger and thirst. God had provided during times of tumult and battle. It was, however, the never-ending motion, the moving on, often for no apparent reason other than the disbelief they had expressed the last time they were on those very same banks of the Jordan River. They were looking forward to being able to settle down. "To enter into their rest, as Hebrews puts it.

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## *The Christian has no need for fear as we travel thru this pilgrim land.*

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The basic idea of rest is that of ceasing from our normal work. It is not that all work stops, but there is a freedom from the worries of the daily tasks set before us. Freedom from what we call “the rat race.” That is the promise that lies ahead for the Israelites. They will still have to work, but they will no more have to wander.

Before the Israelites is that promise: a land flowing with milk and honey, but more, a land they could call home. They would no longer be on the pilgrimage toward that land, but home. Canaan would be home, God had promised them that. And God promised to us this same rest.

The rest that God intends for us is not the Sabbath that God established within the creation order. That was but a sign pointing us to the eternal Sabbath God has prepared for us. Nor is the rest God means for us the repossession of the Land of Canaan where Jerusalem will once more be established as the capital of the world and Christ will reign for 1,000 years. Those were but a type, a foreshadowing, of that eternal rest promised us.

Let us be certain that the rest of God is realized not in the Joshua of the Old Testament, but in the New Testament Joshua, Jesus Christ. Jesus was the hope of the Israelite Church even in the time of the first Joshua, whether they realized it or not. He is the one who brings to us rest from our guilt, self-righteousness, and from our burdens and labors.

In His obedience unto death, He labored and was heavy laden that in Him we might find rest for our weary souls.

### **Fear in the Camp**

And yet, we look again at these Israelites waiting to cross over the Jordan. While the predominant thought in the mind of each Israelite must have been great joy, there must have been blended in with it a great trial of fear. The chosen land was indeed close at hand. It seemed as if they could almost touch the shore. But just beyond the river, gleaming in the sunshine, were the towers of Jericho. And what about the Jordan River? The command from Joshua emphasized that they were to cross the Jordan in three days. The Jordan was at flood stage. It would be hard enough to move a military operation across the Jordan at this time under the watchful eye of the enemy, but here a whole nation of men, women, and children were to cross with all their livestock, tents, and baggage.

Yet, so long as the command was given, the promise remained. When Israel first came upon these banks years earlier, they were not permitted to enter because of their unbelief. But God will not forsake those who trust in Him. Likewise, the Christian has no need for fear as we travel thru this pilgrim land. Our eyes are to be ever focused upon the things that are eternal and not that which is temporal. Jesus tells

us in Luke 12:32 “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you this land.”

Would not faith argue that the God of the covenant, who had provided for them in the wilderness, would also provide for them even here? Would not faith argue that the God who gave this command to cross the Jordan was the same God who had parted the Red Sea so that Israel could cross over on dry ground? He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Certainly Israel must trust Him now, even as they had throughout their wanderings where He had proven Himself faithful.

Gloriously we know how God fulfilled His word. Through the depths of Jordan, touched by the sacred feet of them that bore the ark of the covenant, God made a way for His ransomed people to pass over, crossing the Jordan River on dry ground. How great the consternation must have been in Jericho as they watched from their towers the crossing of this great multitude and as they caught the distant echo of their singing.

What then of that other Jordan, the one that each of us must cross? Death. It is death that brings us out of the wilderness into our promised land — that land not built by human hands, but by God Himself. Shall we be more fearful than these Israelites when we have the very same God to lead us safely through?

### **Faith in the Camp**

The first requirement for salvation is faith. Hearing the Gospel is certainly essential, but it is not enough. The Book of Hebrews tells us about the ancient Israelites who stood on the same banks of

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the Jordan River forty years earlier. They had heard God's good news of rest but it did them no good since they rebelled against God and were sent away. They did not trust God.

It does no good to hear if we do not believe. The author of Hebrews writes "For indeed we have had the good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Hebrews 4:2). Hebrews reminds us that there were two great multitudes that stood at the banks of the Jordan River. One group was turned away and did not taste their rest because they did not believe. The other group entered in because they believed in the power of God.

It is tragic that hell is going to be populated with all kinds of people who will cry out: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" to whom Jesus will reply, "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Matthew 7:22, 23). Certainly those who make that plea had a knowledge of God. They knew all about Jesus Christ and were counted as those within the covenant, but their knowledge and their work were not united with faith.

The early Jews in Jesus day prided themselves with the fact that they had God's Law. They were especially proud to be the descendants of Abraham. Jesus warned them that the true children of Abraham are those who believe as Abraham did and act upon that faith that God has given to them.

If you run a red light and a policeman pulls you over, it will do you no good to show him your copy of the state driving laws as your defense. You do not establish your innocence by telling him that you have read the booklet many times and know most of it by heart. In fact, this would make you all the more responsible and all the more guilty for breaking the law you said you knew. Knowing the law is only to our advantage if we abide in it. We must not only be hearers of the Word, we must be doers of that Word.

### **Preparing to Leave Camp**

In three days Israel would cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. That is what the Israelites had to do. Certainly they would have to make preparations. After all, they had been wandering through the wilderness for forty years. Their equipment must have been worn and their weapons rusted with exposure. But nothing could be further from the truth. Recall the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 29:5 "I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot." For forty years the Lord had provided. The only preparation Israel must make is to pack up camp and get ready to cross.

Again, the Book of Hebrews reminds us that the Joshua of the Old Testament did not provide the final, blessed rest that the people longed for. God's true rest does not come to us through Moses, Joshua, or David. It comes to us through Jesus Christ. What preparations have you made for crossing over into that rest?

Of special preparations you need none. If you are in Christ, that is enough; you are safe. If you are a believer in the precious blood shed for you by God's own Son at Calvary, then you have enough. Paul writes that we must be: "found in Him, not having your own righteousness, but that which is of Christ by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

The only thing that the Israelites had to do was cross over through the power of the covenant God. So it is with us. It is all the covenant God. It is all in Christ. No preparation or courage of our own is needed; it is all given to us in Christ. He has taken the sting out of death and given to us the victory. When you are in Christ, you are at all times and in every place prepared to die and to pass over into your inheritance.

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# The Second Plague: Jehovah Destroys the Egyptian Fertility Goddess

Once more Moses went to Pharaoh to demand that Pharaoh release Jehovah's people so that they may serve Him in the wilderness. This demand came with the threat of a second plague. "And Jehovah said to Moses, Come to Pharaoh and you shall say to him, 'Thus says Jehovah, Send out my people that they may serve me. But if you refuse to send them out, behold I will plague all your territory with frogs.'" There is no ambiguity in the demand or the threat. The conflict is clearly between Jehovah and Pharaoh. To whom do the Hebrew people belong and whom will they serve, Pharaoh or Jehovah?

## The Multiplication of the Frogs

We should never think that the plagues were without thought or design. God is a God of design. He chose each of the plagues for specific reasons. This plague, like the previous one, appears to be part of a contest to establish who was the true God. The Egyptians regarded the frog as a symbol of divine power and as a symbol of fertility. One of the major goddesses of Egypt was Hekhet, who is depicted as a human female with a frog's head. She was the spouse of the creator-god Khumn. The Egyptians believed that Khumn fashioned human bodies on his potter's wheel, and Hekhet was responsible for breathing the breath of life into the lifeless bodies that Khumn had formed.

The Egyptians also believed that Hekhet controlled the multiplication of frogs in ancient Egypt through the frog-eating crocodiles. In the multiplication of frogs, Jehovah overwhelms Hekhet and causes her to be impotent in her task. She is powerless against Jehovah's decree. Hekhet is powerless to repel or resist Jehovah's overpowering regeneration of frogs. God is sovereign over fertility, God is sovereign over Egypt and God is sovereign over the false gods of Egypt.

The significance of the second plague is further expressed in verse 3 by the use of the word "teem." "The Nile will teem with frogs." This is the same word used in Genesis chapter 1: "And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.'" The immensity and the intensity of the second plague is stressed by the use of the same language that God used to describe the original act of creation. In the Hebrew the verb means to swarm over the earth.

Following the Genesis flood, God used the same verb when He commanded the animals to multiply and to cover the earth. "Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground— so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."

This is the same verb used in Exodus 1:7 to describe the multiplication of the Hebrews in Egypt. In spite of Pharaoh's severe oppression, the Hebrews continued to multiply according to the original creation mandate. They were multiplying and covering the land to the point that Pharaoh felt threatened by their presence.

In the first and the second plagues, we see how God is turning creation against Pharaoh. In the original pattern of creation humanity had dominion over the animals. "God blessed man and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" Now with the second plague the frogs would fill the earth and subdue it; they would fill all of Egypt.

"They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials." The invasion of frogs would affect all three levels of Egyptian society - the king, his people and his servants.

The point that the author of Exodus is making verifies that all Egypt would be subject to the consequences of the plague. By making reference to the king's palace, his bedroom, his bed, and all the houses of his officials, even their ovens, their kneading troughs, he makes the point that God has reversed the order of creation. The frogs will exercise dominion over the people, from the king to the least, including

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the servants. All the land will be filled and overrun with frogs.

Three different spheres will be the source of the frogs. The rivers, the waterways, and the reservoirs will overflow with frogs. All the water sources of Egypt were struck by the plague.

What makes this miracle even more astounding is the fact that it falls on the heels of the first plague whereby the waters of Egypt had turned to blood. The turning of the waters into blood had most likely caused all the fish and much of the marine life to die. Although the waters were unable to support life, the same waters had become a place of supernatural regeneration of frogs. The multiplication of frogs had to do with the fact that God had supernaturally decreed this plague. Most often God uses natural means to govern creation, but this act should be viewed like the original act of creation whereby God spoke the material world into existence by the sheer power of His word. Likewise, the reversal of creation that took place through the second plague appears to be the result of a decree apart from any secondary means. I make this point because many scholars try to explain the plagues as natural occurrences that took place in nature. Personally, I find their explanations to be less than satisfying; they take too much liberty with the biblical text.

### **Pharaoh Calls for Moses and Acknowledges Jehovah**

Aaron did as God commanded, and God brought forth frogs out of the waters of Egypt. The same waters that had suffered from the first plague produced an overwhelming

number of frogs. The frogs multiplied so greatly that they covered all the land of Egypt. But the magicians did the same with their secret arts. They imitated the miracle.

The magicians of Egypt, however, were unable to reverse the plague that God had imposed upon Egypt. Pharaoh received no relief from his magicians. The gods that he served were powerless to save him from the judgment of Jehovah. As a result “Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, ‘Pray to Jehovah that He might remove the frogs from me and from my people. And I will send out the people that they might sacrifice to Jehovah.’”

It was not that long ago that Pharaoh claimed that he did not know Jehovah. How things have changed. Now he is asking for Moses and requesting that Moses pray to Jehovah in his behalf. This request comes with the agreement that Pharaoh will allow the Hebrews to go so that they might worship Jehovah.

It is worth noting that Pharaoh is not interested in praying to Jehovah; instead he wants Moses to pray to Jehovah in his behalf. Pharaoh is requesting that Moses serve as an intercessor on his behalf. It is very possible that Pharaoh never intended on letting the people go. This may explain why he was hesitant to appeal to Jehovah in his own behalf.

Moses makes a curious response to Pharaoh’s request. “I give you the

honor of deciding when I should pray for you and for your servants.” What Moses seems to be saying is, ‘I trust in my God to the point that I will give you the advantage. In other words, Moses is giving Pharaoh the choice as to the time when the frogs will be removed from the land. Pharaoh makes an unreasonable request. He wants all the frogs which cover the land of Egypt to be removed by tomorrow. The king’s demand would require a miraculous response. But Moses answers by saying it will happen in one day so that Pharaoh will know that Jehovah is sovereign over Egypt and all of creation.

After Moses had left the presence of Pharaoh he cried out to the Lord. It was important that Jehovah answer the prayer of Moses, because Moses had spoken in God’s name. God’s reputation would be at stake if He failed to answer the request of His prophet Moses.

### **The Consequences Remained**

First, the Egyptians had to expend a great deal of effort to deal with the remains of the all the dead frogs. The Hebrew text emphasizes the amount of work involved in dealing with the dead frogs. “And they heaped them up, heaps, heaps.” The repetition of the noun “heaps” makes this point. Imagine a land the size of Egypt littered with dead frogs.

A second consequence was that the entire land of Egypt reeked of dead

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*The reversal of creation that took place through the second plague appears to be the result of a decree apart from any secondary means.*

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frogs. The result of the first plague was that the Nile River smelled, but now with the result of the second plague the land stunk. God had caused all of Egypt to stink; creation was being undone.

But Pharaoh saw that there was relief, and he hardened his heart. And he did not listen to them as Jehovah had said. Once the plague had passed, we see the true character of Pharaoh revealed once more.

By way of application, the second plague is repeated and intensified in the book of Revelation, where we read, “And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of the God, the Almighty” (Revelation 16:13-14). In a dramatic reversal of the exodus account, the frogs here are produced by the evil ones to do battle against God and His people. These frogs were not mere animals, they are symbols of evil, unclean spirits.

In this passage, the kings of the world are described as being under the influence of evil frog-like spirits. We see the hostility of the world is directed toward Jesus Christ and His church. When men are given over to evil, creation is reversed. Men become less like the image of the God that they were originally created in. This is a description of the time leading up to the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. Just as Pharaoh was judged, in the coming of our Lord the world will be judged. As the original cre-

ation is undone, a new creation will emerge. The judgment of Egypt through the ten plagues and the emerging of Israel as a new creation foreshadow the coming judgment of the seed of the serpent and the appearing of the new heavens and the new earth.

In light of the coming judgment of this present evil world, and the salvation that we will experience in the day of the Lord, we are commanded to live in eager expectation of the Lord’s coming, and the appearance of the new creation. If you belong to Christ, then you are a member of the new creation. As a member of Christ, you are also a member of the eternal city. You have been called out of darkness and into the light.

There are two competing visions for the church. One vision teaches that we are a people called out of darkness, we live as stranger and aliens in this world. The other vision is centered on this world. It teaches us that we must change this world, and make it a better place. Historically, this vision is most fully developed in what theologians call the social gospel. The social gospel teaches us that the greatest virtue is our service to humanity by transforming the world.

I ask you, which vision is most compatible with the Bible? Did God transform Egypt, making Egypt a place for His people, or did God call His people out of Egypt and judge Egypt? Likewise, at the end of time the world is described as a place where evil spirits will influence the kings of the earth.

Do not fear, because Jesus has promised that He will save every-

one that the Father has given to Him. “And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39-40). Not even one will be lost.

In conclusion, God is sovereign over this world and its leaders just as He was sovereign over Egypt and Pharaoh.

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## Election: Friend or Foe to Evangelism?

“If the decree of election is unchangeable and therefore renders the salvation of the elect completely certain, what need have they of the gospel?” This is the way R.B. Kuiper phrased the question that has often been asked concerning the relationship between election and evangelism. To be more blunt, we might ask, “Doesn’t a belief in election make evangelism unnecessary?”

There has always been a common opinion that the doctrine of election is actually a discouragement or disincentive for God’s people to witness. For example, it has been suggested that predestinarian theology was one factor that limited historic Protestant missions.

In response, we may frankly admit that sometimes those who have denied sovereign electing grace have been more active in missions than those who have affirmed it. On a more personal level, we can probably all admit that we have sometimes used God’s sovereignty as an excuse for personal inactivity. But we must maintain a distinction between how Reformed people have sometimes put their (mis)understanding of election into practice and how we *ought* to implement a correct view of election with regard to missions. How *should* a biblical view of election impact personal evangelism?

Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to look at how the

greatest missionary of the Christian church responded to the doctrine of election. If any Christian missionary ever believed strongly in God’s gracious election, it was Paul. The second half of *Acts* amply proves that Paul did not suffer from evangelistic lethargy! Instead, Paul’s understanding of election enlivened him to activity.

One of the clearest examples of this is found in Acts 18:9-11. There is good reason to believe that when Paul arrived in Corinth he stood in need of encouragement to speak about Christ. In the ninth verse of that chapter Christ visits Paul to meet that need. He charges him: “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent.” Christ then adds two reasons why Paul should speak.

In the second of these grounds Christ urges Paul to keep up his witnessing by reminding him of the doctrine of election. He says: “for I have many people in this city.” There are many people in the city of Corinth who are owned by Christ, though presently living in grievous unbelief. Christ reminds Paul of God’s gracious election not to deter him from preaching the gospel or to make him indifferent, but to encourage him to action! According to Christ, election is an incentive to evangelism.

Such a claim certainly requires an explanation, especially since it represents a minority opinion

among modern evangelicals. How is election an incentive to evangelism?

*First*, election should promote evangelism because it guarantees results. Our only hope of seeing anyone converted to Christ is rooted in His eternal unconditional election. Consider the alternative. “If the depravity of man is such that no sinner, of himself, will repent and believe the gospel, then, unless God has determined to bring some to repentance, all will inevitably perish.” Without election missions would be a hopeless activity.

Isn’t that what Paul might have thought as he ministered in Corinth? “God, you want me to minister in this city! What for?” If any city in the New Testament world appeared to be God-forsaken, it was Corinth. Yet Christ said, “I have many people in this city!” Imagine the perspective that this gave Paul as he ministered in Corinth for the next eighteen months.

Commenting on this passage J. I. Packer summarizes that, “...the sovereignty of God in grace gave Paul hope of success as he preached to deaf ears, and held up Christ before blind eyes, and sought to move stony hearts.”

Notice how this same doctrine is cited in Acts 13:48: “And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Only because of election was the Apostle’s preaching in Antioch (and Corinth) one hundred percent effective!

*Second*, election keeps our eyes humbly focused upon God in our

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## *Election keeps our eyes humbly focused upon God in our evangelism.*

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evangelism. Paul's success in Corinth led him to rely more and more on the sovereign purpose of God to save men. When he wrote back to the Corinthians he told them that while he had planted and Apollos watered, it was God who gave the increase (I Corinthians 3:6,8). This is encouraging because there will not always be a visible increase. Thankfully, a firm belief in election also comforts us in our evangelistic "failures."

*Third*, election gives a sense of purpose to our mission. When Christ commissioned Paul to be an evangelist he did so by closely connecting Paul's mission with his own calling and election. "[Paul]," said Christ, "is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Significantly, this "predestined commission" was not only given to Paul and to the other apostles. The Apostle Peter links the election of all of God's people with evangelism. He calls God's people a chosen (elect) generation. Flowing out of this election is a purpose, namely "to proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9).

When opponents charge that the doctrine of election makes evangelism unnecessary they betray an ignorance of the purpose of election. The election of the saints is their divine commission to evan-

gelize. This doctrine affords the believer courage knowing that his name is written in the book of life. It also removes any ulterior motives from the evangelistic efforts of the Calvinist. He has no reason frenetically to engage in evangelism as if he himself is responsible for the "decisions" of others.

*Finally*, election is an incentive to evangelism because it intrinsically requires the use of means. God could have decided to convert sinners without means, but He has not. Instead, He has determined that "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). The Canons of Dort, a thoroughly predestinarian document, highlights the importance of the means of gospel communication already in its third paragraph (I.3). If you believe in election then you also believe in the need for Christians to communicate the gospel.

Still, the proper use of means without the blessing of God will be ineffectual. Not all of those who heard Christ Himself preach were converted. There must be more than the proper use of means. There must be a divine work of God that begins in His decree of election.

So we end where we began. It is indeed, only the unchangeable decree of election that renders the salvation of the elect completely certain. This certainty, however, far from being a discouragement

is actually "the only ground of encouragement to preach the gospel to sinners." Election does not make evangelism unnecessary, rather election demands evangelism.

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# Augustine's Tale of Two Cities

The year was 410. Visigoths were plundering and sacking Rome, the great city that was once the seat of the world's largest and strongest empire. Many Romans saw this destruction as a direct punishment from the gods for the Romans' departure from pagan religion. Many Christians despaired, wondering why God would send this pestilence into their empire. Into this scene of chaos and questions came St. Augustine of Hippo and his book, *The City of God*.

Augustine had been raised by a Christian mother. However, he neglected his mother's teaching and fell into a sinful lifestyle. Although he became a wealthy and respected teacher, he was wretched. But the providence of God led him to attend church services in Milan, where he learned from the Bishop Ambrose. As he learned more about the Scriptures, he found that the God of his mother was a personal God who loved him. Because of what he learned in Milan, Augustine knew he had to give up his selfishness in order to live a Christian life.

One day Augustine experienced a dramatic conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit. He read from Romans 14 and finally came to understand that the grace of Christ was all that he needed. Augustine's life was radically altered from that moment onward. He left his sinful life and began a new life dedicated to the service of God.

## Two Different Cities

In *The City of God*, Augustine reminds Christians that their citizen-

ship is not of any earthly kingdoms, but of a heavenly one. Christians are only pilgrims in this world, he said, traveling onward to their heavenly home. With sweeping words of comfort for the Church, as well as a reprimand to those who put their trust in earthly kingdoms, this book swept the Christian world and has become one of the classics of Christian literature. Perhaps the best known and cherished part of this book is section entitled "The Two Cities."

At the beginning of this selection, Augustine makes the statement that there are "two cities" within the human race, an earthly city and a heavenly one. Augustine's allegory of two warring cities serves as his thesis and theme throughout this selection. These two cities are diametrically opposed to each other – one is fueled by overwhelming ego, lustful passions, and extreme desire for power, and the other by overcoming faith, selfless love, and humble servitude.

The two warring cities are a picture of the doctrine of the antithesis. The antithesis is that separation between the Church and the non-believing world. In Augustine's *The Two Cities*, the city of heaven signifies the elect children of God, while the city of the earth signifies the reprobate children of Satan.

Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, are a perfect microcosm of the antithesis. Augustine uses Hebrews 11 to show that Abel was a pilgrim in this world. On the other hand, Augustine asserts that Cain

was a child of the world. Although these two boys were both raised in a covenant home, they ended up on two very different roads. Augustine points out the historical fact that Abel did not found or live in a city like his brother Cain. He then compares that to the spiritual fact that Abel, as a member of the heavenly city, had no attachment to the world and its sinful pleasures. Augustine says, "For the City of the saints is up above, although it produces citizens here below, and in their persons the City is on pilgrimage until the time of its kingdom comes." Although we are still living in this world, we must not be conformed to it (Romans 12:2).

True Christianity by its very nature produces good citizens who follow the laws of the land to the best of their ability. However, we can never truly be citizens of the world in a spiritual sense. The Church must, like Abel, "desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16).

## Already, But Not Yet

However, we as the Church do not yet live in this perfect city. In this world we live, work, and even worship right along with the reprobate. Augustine points out that these evil times of humiliation and persecution are preparing Christians for our future exaltation. However, even in these times of trials and troubles, we are blessed not with earthly peace, but with the hope of our heavenly home.

It is ironic how the unbelievers strive for wealth and fame, search-

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ing for temporal pleasures, yet do not have peace in their souls. Augustine says that the members of the heavenly city who by faith look forward to the promised blessings of heaven receive spiritual blessings, and are already enjoying the joy of heaven.

In a rapture of pious delight, Augustine goes on to describe the victory of the Church when it reaches heaven. “How great will be that felicity, where there will be no evil, where no good will be withheld, where there will be leisure for the praises of God, who will be all in all!” He calls heaven “the perpetual Sabbath,” that is, a place of unceasing praise to God.

Augustine goes on to say that in heaven our free will, which mankind lost at the fall, will be restored. However, this freedom of will be “freer in that it is freed from a delight in sin and immovably fixed in a delight in not sinning.” Can you imagine! We will be free from all of our sins which “so easily ensnare us” (Hebrews 12:2), free from all of our daily temptations and strife! What a blessing we have to look forward to in that perpetual Sabbath in heaven!

### **The Antithesis**

Augustine’s doctrine of the antithesis certainly makes a beautiful allegory of two cities, but is it true? Is there really a perpetual state of warfare between two factions of the human race? The Bible clearly declares the antithesis to be true. Ever since the fall of man, this sharp division in the human race has existed. In the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis 3:15, God declared this antithesis. There He told

the Serpent that there would be enmity between his seed and the seed of the woman. The seed of the Serpent in this passage are the unbelieving reprobate. The seed of the woman is the Church, which is constantly struggling with that unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh. Ultimately, the Seed of the woman is Christ, who came utterly to defeat the serpent and his seed. Through this Seed, Christ, the Church has her ultimate victory.

How does this view of the antithesis affect our worldview? Should we as Christians now completely separate ourselves from the city of the world? Augustine would agree that the answer is no. Rather, this doctrine of the antithesis should make us more fervent in our desire not to conform to the ways of the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, to be more Christ-like in our thought, words, and deeds. As Christians, we are called to be in this world, to shine as lights to our fellow man; we must live our lives as a testimony to those around us. However, while we labor in this task, we should also remain unstained from the world. Witnessing is not an excuse for being overcome by the pleasures of the world. Remember what Augustine said: our reward is in heaven, and is beyond compare.

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## Looking Out and About

- The Consistory of the Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church in Ontario has announced that Mr. Jeremy Veldman has successfully sustained his classical examination for candidacy as Minister of the Word and Sacraments and is available for call. He is a graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.
- The Consistory of the Dutton United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan has announced that Mr. Steve Postma passed his classical examination for candidacy as Minister of the Word and Sacraments and is available for call. He is a graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.
- The Consistory of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa has announced that Mr. Nicolas Alons sustained his classical examination and is available for call. He is a graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.
- The Escondido United Reformed Church in California has announced that Mr. Ryan Kron has successfully sustained his classical examination and is eligible for call. Mr. Kron is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary.

# Bible Studies on Jacob

## Lesson 13: Jacob's Sons Dishonor the Covenant Sign

Read Genesis 34

### Introduction

When Genesis 33 ended, everything seemed to be going Jacob's way. Jacob and his household have arrived at Shechem, a significant city in central Canaan. They are camped within sight of the city itself. There is now peace, perhaps even good feelings, between Jacob and his twin brother Esau. Jacob has bought land and set up an altar to worship the true God, the God who has kept His word to Jacob and brought him back to the Promised Land. All appears well. But Genesis 33 also ended with the mention of the names of Hamor and his son Shechem, the local Canaanites who become very important in Genesis 34. The text is setting us up by means of these names for further developments in this chapter.

### Where is God again?

The reader will note that God is mentioned in Genesis 33:20 ("El Elohe Israel" means "El, the God of Israel"). God again speaks to Jacob in Genesis 35:1. But the name of God is not mentioned at all in Genesis 34. To be sure, God is never absent from His people, yet it is as if God steps off the page for a moment in order to distance Himself, as it were, from the actions of Jacob's family in Genesis 34. When you read the Bible, always take note where God is, what He does, and what He says. God is

textually "absent" in Genesis 34. So why is this chapter in the Bible? What is God revealing to His church here?

### Dinah defiled by a Canaanite (34:1-4)

This is the only story about Dinah in the Bible, but throughout the entire chapter, we never hear her speak! Her words are not recorded for us. There are perhaps five or six conversation scenes in Genesis 34, but Dinah does not join in the conversation. At least the text does not record her words, if she does speak. She is a daughter who is "seen but not heard," and even then, she is barely seen.

Dinah was the only named daughter of Jacob and Leah, born after Leah had given birth to six sons for Jacob (see Gen. 30:21). It is likely that the events of Genesis 30-33 would have taken at least eight years, and thus Dinah's age is thought to be about 15 or 16 years old. With so many brothers in the family of Jacob, is it possible that Dinah was simply seeking other women friends in the area? If so, was this so wrong?

Whatever Dinah's motivations were, her exposure to the women of Shechem also allows her to catch the eye of the young man Shechem, the son of Hamor, the local ruler. Verse 2 identifies him as a "Hivite," one of the people who were settled in Canaan at this time. Thus Dinah is seeking association, even friend-

ship, with the people of the land who do not worship the true God, people who were pagans. Dinah's desire for a wider circle of friends will not end well, as the text tells us in verse 2. Listen to this unhappy escalation: "saw her... took her... violated her."

What happens here reminds us of a later incident in the household of King David (2 Sam. 13), where his son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar. After that assault, Amnon despised Tamar. Not so in Genesis 34. In fact, Shechem loves Dinah and speaks tenderly to her (verse 3). He wants to marry the girl he has violated.

At this point a question arises about what actually happened with Dinah, and the commentators are not agreed. Was it rape, a crime of violence? The English verb "violated" (verse 2) suggests violence, but the word in the original does not necessarily mean that. It can mean humiliate or even suppress, an action that can occur without violence. We do not read that Dinah resisted Shechem, as David's daughter Tamar did with Amnon in 2 Samuel 13. Shechem appears to love Dinah, and he wants to marry her, something a rapist does not desire with his victim. Perhaps what he did to Dinah falls along the lines of what Biblical law would later condemn as fornication or seduction, intimacy outside of marriage. Genesis 2 is clear as to the norms of marriage: one man and one woman are joined in a lifelong bond of union, a union that is sealed with vows that are taken *before* there is physical intimacy, which is part of the "one flesh" aspect of marriage.

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We should be careful to point out that we do not “blame the victim” (Dinah), that is, if she was unwilling to be intimate with Shechem. We read in verse 26 that she is taken from Shechem’s house, and we are hard pressed to say that she was being held there against her will. Nor do we read that she is unwilling to marry Shechem. Still, the text is clear that it is Shechem who “violated” her, and that is something that should never happen in Israel, among God’s covenant people. This sin will now set in motion the events of retaliation.

### **The families respond to the crisis (34:5-7)**

Shechem goes to his father to tell him to “get this girl” to be his wife. Shechem now falls back on traditional customs as he wants his father to arrange the marriage. Quite obviously the modern practice of “dating” was not an option for Shechem! And father Hamor goes to Jacob in order to enter into the negotiations that would lead to marriage (or so Shechem hopes). Jacob’s response, on the other hand, is silence: he cannot respond alone as long as his sons are away with the family’s livestock. When they learn of what happened to Dinah, they are furious.

### **The Canaanite appeal (34:8-12)**

The desire of Hamor and his son Shechem is revealed in verses 8-10 (and later in verses 21-23). The first speech is an attractive offer for Jacob and his entire family to live with these Canaanites, to intermarry with them, and to trade with them. In other words, just “blend in with us,” say these Canaanite lead-

ers. “We don’t need to be separate from each other.” Hamor and Shechem appear ready to give these aliens (Jacob’s family) citizenship in this land. But this offer is really “forbidden fruit:” it appears good, even attractive, but in the end it will bring death. Temptations are never presented to look ugly or unattractive. Otherwise they would not tempt us! Also, we never hear any confession of sin or any apologies from the Canaanites. Just ignore the sin that was committed: it is time to “move on.” But the sin will keep festering.

### **The Israelite counteroffer (34:13-17)**

While Hamor and Shechem offer glowing terms of inclusion, Jacob’s sons plan deceit as Jacob seems to go into the background. But this deception reminds us of Jacob’s own deceit earlier with his father Isaac. “False face hides what false heart does know.” Intermarrying with people who are not circumcised is disgraceful, they tell these Canaanites. Dinah will be given in marriage if, and only if, all the males of Shechem submit to circumcision. This is the deal-breaker: if the Shechemite men do this, then they all can become *one people* (verse 16).

Genesis 17 reveals that the LORD had imposed circumcision upon believing Abraham and his entire household as a sign of the covenant between God and His people. In

the physical organ of generation every male member of the covenant would bear throughout his life a reminder that he had been set apart by God’s gracious decision, representative that only God can cut away the sin in our lives and that we are called by God to a new obedience. Therefore, circumcision was an outward act, one that was representative of an inner reality. But that inward reality can only be worked by the operation of the Holy Spirit. In God’s covenant family every male was to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life: having lived through one week (7 days) of the old creation, he began a new week on the eighth day as a marked man in his flesh. Imposed upon such a covenant community was the calling to a new way of life. Circumcision was thus an Old Testament sacrament of the covenant of grace, with the meaning given by God’s Word.

How tragic and how sad it is to read this story in Genesis 34, where Jacob’s sons talk to the Shechemites about the physical sign, but we read nothing about God’s covenant. We hear nothing about the gracious acts of the true and living God. The members of God’s covenant—Dinah’s brothers—are silent when it comes to submitting to the LORD. Instead, the sign of God’s gracious favor becomes, in their angry and enraged hearts, a tactic in a strategy, a plot devised to massacre their neigh-

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***Temptations are never presented to look ugly  
or unattractive. Otherwise  
they would not tempt us!***

bors. One man violated Dinah; Jacob's sons plot to wipe out every one of the males of Shechem. The covenant sign becomes the device of deception.

### **Persuading the Shechemites (34:18-24)**

Amazingly, Shechem enthusiastically agrees! He wants to marry Dinah (verse 19: he is "delighted" with her). But father Hamor and honored son Shechem must now persuade the males of the town to submit to the knives of circumcision. This better be a very persuasive speech! And it is. But the angle of persuasion in this speech (verses 21-24) is slightly different from that used with Jacob and his sons. The Shechemites are told that they should agree to this proposal in order to get the Israelites to live and trade among them. The clincher comes in verse 23: "Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours?" This is a shameless appeal to greed. "No pain, no gain" convinces the men that, in the end, the people of Shechem will come out ahead financially. The Israelites will blend in and then melt away.

### **Massacre and plundering (34:25-29)**

The strategy is carried out by Dinah's full brothers, Simeon and Levi. By the third day after the circumcision, the fighting men of the city would have been temporarily weakened by fever, pain, and discomfort. Now two brothers strike (with support from their servants?). All the males of the city of Shechem are killed. Simeon and Levi are then joined by the rest of the brothers in carrying off the plunder of the city: all the animals, all the

## **Lesson 13: Points to ponder and discuss**

1. In Genesis 33 the redemptive story for Jacob and his family seems so positive after the good meeting with Esau. But then a crisis strikes the family in Genesis 34. While no one wants a crisis, much less real tragedy, what can Christians do to prepare themselves for a crisis or a tragedy? What are possible benefits to a crisis or tragedy that Christians can see only later on?
2. Where Jacob settles in this land is filled with spiritual risks, even physical risks. What things must Christian families consider when moving and settling elsewhere? Certainly one looks at the presence of Christian churches, Christian education, as well as physical safety. What other things must be considered? Should Christians forsake a lucrative job opportunity if such a move would harm a family spiritually?
3. Read Deuteronomy 7:1-6. How can this be applied to Christians today?
4. Perhaps Dinah was seeking friendship. Friendship is important, but our circle of friends can influence our lives, for good or ill. What kinds of friends did you have growing up, especially in high school and into adulthood? Are some of them still your friends? How do you—how can you—influence the kind of friends your own children have?
5. Jacob's sons abuse the covenant sign of circumcision. Circumcision has passed away with the coming of Christ. Yet in the church today, what are possible ways that the things of the Christian faith and of the Christian church might be abused for one's own advantage?
6. Christians are the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." We are "in the world," but we are "not of the world." How can we do this? What can you and your family do to stay spiritually strong in Christ, and at the same time be a strong witness to the people around you?
7. What can possibly explain the frightful escalation of sin in Genesis 34: a daughter/sister violated initially, ending with the massacre of an entire city? Remember: these are the covenant sons of the patriarch Jacob, the "leader" of the Old Testament church at this time. Read about the people and events of Genesis 4 as you consider this question.

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wealth, and the woman and children, presumably to be kept or sold as slaves. Deception and then horrific violence are perpetrated by Jacob's sons, by church members, sons who had the sign of the covenant in their own flesh. Where did these young(er) men learn such violence? How could they carry out such an atrocity? Does such evil lurk just below the surface in any of us or in all of us? God sanctifies, it's true, but so often it is "one step forward, then two steps back."

### **Now what? (34:30-31)**

The chapter ends on a very sad note. Jacob finally speaks, but his speech lacks resolution and focus. "I'm afraid that you've ruined our reputation around here. Your violence puts us all in physical danger." The sons respond with a moral argument: "We acted to maintain justice with regard to our sister." The sad truth is this: whenever God's people act in disobedience, they place themselves outside of covenant protection. Furthermore, when we take the law into our own hands, our actions can be reckless, destructive, and such brings dishonor on God's Name. To make things "right," did every male in Shechem need to die?

# Bible Studies on Jacob

## Lesson 14: At Bethel God Reaffirms His Covenant (again!)

Read Genesis 35

### **Introduction**

The sordid story of Genesis 34 reveals several things. The depravity of human nature is put on display, even coming to expression in the lives of God's covenant people. There is also the constant lure of temptation that comes to God's people to blend into the surrounding culture and thus lose their distinctive nature and calling as those who are identified as salt and light. But the chapter also shows us how God could be at work for the good of His people: the shocking massacre of the men of Shechem now puts a fear into Jacob that causes him to want to move on and move away from his settlement by Shechem.

### **Time to move (35:1)**

It is God who calls Jacob back to Bethel. Jacob may want to move on, but it is God who puts the matter clearly before him. God sends Jacob back to a very significant spot: Bethel, where God had appeared to him. Covenant history occurred there, and Jacob must remember that, now with his whole family.

In this chapter we come full circle. God commands Jacob to return to Bethel with his family, and in this way, God moves His covenant family away from the area that had become dangerous due to the events of Genesis 34. At Bethel God had appeared to Jacob in a

dream when he was fleeing from his brother in Genesis 28. He will appear to him again (verses 9-13).

### **Jacob prepares his household (35:2-5)**

Jacob must first prepare his family to meet with God. If Jacob appeared somewhat passive in Genesis 34, here he takes the leadership with his household. This includes the removal of all the "foreign gods" from their midst. Earlier we had read of Rachel taking her father's teraphim and then hiding them in her saddlebag (Gen. 31:19). But apparently she was not alone in having superstitious beliefs and pagan charms with her: other family members and household servants have them as well! Jacob calls them "foreign" gods. What does this mean? These are not the gods that have revealed anything to their forefathers. False gods have nothing to say. It is the living God who called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees, and it is the living God who reaffirmed His covenant promises again and again to Jacob's grandfather and father. All other gods are "foreign," that is, they come from somewhere else. They are, in fact, no gods at all!

Jacob requires his household to change the clothing they were wearing and to surrender even their earrings. These get buried under a particular oak tree. Read Deuteronomy 7:5 and 7:25. Idols of foreign gods were to be smashed



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and, if possible, burned in fire. Physical remains must be removed lest our hearts—which can be “factories” that manufacture idols—be led astray.

We will see a similar kind of preparation when Israel comes to meet the LORD at Mt. Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:10,14). They must purify themselves and bathe to be ceremonial clean, for God is holy, a consuming fire, and He cannot even look upon sin. This is still true today. Thus we absolutely need a pure and spotless Mediator to present us before this holy God. We need the sinless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

The terror of God subdues the surrounding people as Jacob’s family makes its way to Bethel. This is an important point: it is not the case that the Canaanites are afraid, first of all, of Jacob’s fierce sons. The fear in their hearts comes from the Lord God. Later on, God will do a similar thing with Israel’s enemies as they go to the Promised Land (cf. Exodus 23:27). Rahab will tell the two spies that fear had fallen upon the people of Jericho: their hearts “melted” (Joshua 2:9,11,24).

### **Jacob builds an altar at Bethel (35:6-7)**

Genesis records several times and places where altars were built (see Gen. 12:7; 13:4,18). God’s people recognized that they needed to come before the living and holy God to worship Him. Likely they would come with an appropriate gift, bringing a sacrifice in the form of a perfect animal as their substitute, one that would die in their place. This would all become formalized in the Mosaic covenant. Yet the realities of the gospel work

of Jesus Christ and His message for sinners were already in place in the Old Testament period, even if these truths were not yet worked out as they would be in the more sophisticated practices described in the Mosaic covenant (e.g., Leviticus 1-7). Bethel is “God’s house,” since the true God had made Himself known at this place. Jacob’s altar is a physical signpost of the presence of God in His people and in His world.

### **God repeats redemptive promises – again! (35:9-13)**

Truly we have come full circle! God appears, i.e., some kind of visible presence occurs that Jacob could see. He had seen God in a dream, and at Peniel he had wrestled with God. Furthermore, God’s words here recall His covenantal promises made in Genesis 17, 22, and 28:13ff. He pronounces a blessing with the focus upon *children* and *land*. These have been a major thread that has run through the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. Children (seed) and land have been the two “pillar promises” of the covenant of grace in the narratives of the patriarchs. Those children today include God’s people in the whole world, and that land of Canaan was only an anticipation for all the earth that God now claims for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Children and land, as well as blessing and protection, are the key promises that God not only makes, but He also fulfills through Jesus

Christ and by the work of Jesus Christ.

God also confirms the name change that He made when Jacob had wrestled with the mysterious, divine Stranger at Peniel. Jacob has become *Israel* (meaning “God struggles,” or, “he struggles with God”). Over all these years, God has built up the man Jacob and His covenant people. God shows Himself to be gracious and incredibly patient with a man whose life has been somewhat spotty and unattractive to any observer. God has wrestled with this man (even physically!), and He is not finished with Jacob or with his family. He is longsuffering with the people of His church because we, God’s children, so often fall so far short of God’s glory. This is going to be a history-long wrestling match. Yet by grace, God’s people will win since Jesus Christ has already won the victory for them on Calvary’s Cross and on Easter morning.

### **Jacob responds to God’s words (35:14-15)**

Jacob, in turn, answers God’s appearance here in much the same manner as he had responded in Genesis 28, over 20 years earlier. He sets up a stone pillar and anoints it with a drink offering and oil. This consecration is one way to mark out a kind of “signpost” for God’s Kingdom in this world. Canaan does not belong to the wicked Canaanites, though they live

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***It is not the case that the Canaanites are afraid, first of all, of Jacob’s fierce sons. The fear in their hearts comes from the Lord God.***

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*This world is turned against the true God, even though He remains in sovereign control.*

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there for the moment; it really belongs to God and the people that He allows to live with Him. It is, after all, the Promised Land, territory that God owns and He graciously chooses to give to His people.

The same is true today: this world is turned against the true God, even though He remains in sovereign control. In fact, Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and earth, according to Matthew 28:18ff. Christians also set up signposts that point the way to a new reality! Therefore, Christians want schools to be genuinely Christian and businesses to operate according to Biblical principles. We work for genuine justice in public affairs, and we seek peace and reconciliation in our society. The world must see the “signposts” of the coming Kingdom of God.

In the end at least two names are locked in place: Jacob is “Israel,” the father of the people with that name. Plus, Luz has been re-identified as Bethel, “the house of God,” one of many places where the living God came to His people to repeat the promise of the holy gospel for people who needed to hear it again.

### **Moving on**

Genesis 35 records some further travels of this covenant household. They move on from Bethel to Ephrath (verse 16). Then Israel (note the use of this name!) moves again toward Migdal Eder (verse

21). He will also come to Hebron (the older name being Kiriath-arba) around the time when his father Isaac passes away.

### **Obituary notices**

This chapter records the death of several people:

1. Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse dies, and she is buried under the oak below Bethel. It is not exactly clear why we are told this. Has Rebekah died already? Did this (presumably elderly) nurse come to live with Jacob? We cannot be completely certain.

2. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin (“son of the right hand,” or, “the south”). There is some irony in her death. She at one time said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I die!” When Joseph was born, she had hoped for another son. So now, when her second son is born, she dies in childbirth. But Rachel dies near Ephrath, i.e., Bethlehem (Ruth 1:2; Micah 5:2), the village where our Lord Jesus Christ would be born, the One who would conquer death once and for all. Benjamin is the only son born in the Promised Land; the others all born in Paddan-Aram (Mesopotamia).

3. Isaac dies. We might say, “finally dies,” since when he sensed his death approaching back in Genesis 27, that was at least two decades earlier. Reports of his imminent demise were greatly exaggerated! He had remained living in the

southern region of the Promised Land. His age at death (180 years) was actually five years longer than his own father Abraham’s age at death. There is a beautiful statement in verse 29, not to be missed, when we read that both twin sons, Esau and Jacob, join together to bury their aged father. Peace between the brothers seems to be holding.

These are all deaths in the Promised Land. Isaac is gathered to his family. Believers have the confidence that while we live, our life is defined by Christ, for Christ. Dying is never loss for the believer; it is gain (Phil. 1:21). God is the “God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.” See Matthew 22:29-32 (paralleled in Mark 12:26,27 and Luke 20:37,38). Though now they are physically dead, to our living God, they are alive.

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## Lesson 14: Points to ponder and discuss

1. At the end of Genesis 34, Jacob was concerned about his reputation becoming a stench to his neighbors, and he feared for his safety and that of his family. What does our society today think of the Christian church and of Christian people? What testimony do our words and lives give to the world around us? Should we even care what opinion the world has of Christianity?
2. The “foreign gods,” superstitious charms, etc., had to be removed, even buried, before Jacob’s household could meet the LORD. Today published horoscopes are still with us, psychic readers do business in our cities, and witchcraft is still practiced in North America. Does this affect Christians you know? What explains this, especially in areas that supposedly have had a Christian heritage?
3. At Bethel, God repeated His gospel promises of children and land to Jacob. Why did Jacob need to hear this again? How many times did he hear it during his life? Why do Christian churches need to preach the gospel, and why do Christians need to hear it again? Can church members ever become tired of hearing that “old, old story?” If they do, why is that the case?
4. Rachel dies as she gives birth to her second son. She gives him the name Ben-Oni, “son of trouble,” but Jacob overrules this by calling him Benjamin, “son of the right hand (or, the south).” Why, do you think, did Jacob give him such a name? Could it be, as some commentators suggest, that Jacob did not want the son of his beloved wife Rachel to go through life with a sad and negative name? How does Jacob treat Benjamin later when his ten sons want to take him to Egypt (when Joseph is in charge in Egypt)?
5. Genesis 35:22 records that Reuben slept with Bilhah, who had been Rachel’s maidservant. More importantly, she had become one of Jacob’s concubines, the mother of Dan and Naphtali. How do the brothers react to this sexual sin? How does Israel respond to this? Compare their response to Dinah’s violation in Genesis 34. To sleep with a man’s concubines suggests that he wants to take over the reins of power and leadership. Read 2 Samuel 3:7; 16:20-22; and 1 Kings 2:22. Does Reuben want to usurp the leadership from his aged father? What does this act cost Reuben in the end (see Gen. 49:3,4)?
6. It was Isaac’s sense of his impending death that led to Jacob’s deception and then Esau’s hatred in Genesis 27. Isaac’s actual death brings the brothers together in one last labor of love in which they together bury their father. What hope could Esau and Jacob have concerning life after death? What could other Old Testament saints have with respect to this? See Job 19:25-27; Psalm 17:15; 49:15.

# Baptism, Election, and the Covenant of Grace

## (Part Two)

### Scriptural Teaching

In Genesis 17:10–14 the Lord restated His covenant promise to Abraham. To that gracious covenant He attached a sign and seal of initiation, circumcision. Those adult males who first entered the covenant assembly had to profess faith and receive the sign and seal of covenant initiation. Contrary to what the Baptist view might lead one to expect, the Lord also commanded the father of all believers (Romans 4:11) that they must also initiate their children, indeed every male in their household, as members of the covenant of grace. To enter outwardly the covenant of grace this way was to undergo a ritual death. This much is clear from Paul's teaching in Colossian 2:11–12 where he identified circumcision and baptism with Christ's actual death on the cross. In His death for us, Christ was, as it were, circumcised, "cut off" (Genesis 17:14; Isaiah 53:8). To fail to observe this covenant initiation was to break the covenant and risk sanction from the Lord of the covenant (cf. Exodus 4:24–26). From its institution to its fulfillment in Christ, this was the pattern of the administration of the covenant of grace for two thousand years.

It seems clear from the history of redemption, however, that not every circumcised person was either regenerated (made a new person or brought to spiritual life). Consider the story of Jacob and Esau (Gen-

esis 25–27). It appears from the narrative that one was blessed and the other was not. One believed and the other did not, yet both had received the same sign of covenant initiation. Outwardly, both were members of the covenant of grace and recipients of its promise: "I will be your God and your children's God." Nevertheless, one received the promise by faith, and the other did not (Hebrews 11:20–21).

We are obligated by the clear teaching of God's Word to explain the difference between the two as the Apostle Paul did in Romans 9:11–14

...though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call— she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'

Could Paul be more explicit? God elected Jacob, not because He foresaw anything in him or anything that he would do, but out of His good pleasure (Ephesians 1:5). The only explanation Paul offers for the fact that Jacob believed and Esau did not is God's unconditioned (by us), eternal "purpose in election." Both Jacob and Esau were in the covenant of grace but they were in the covenant of grace in different

ways because one was elect and the other was reprobate.

How should we speak of the two different ways of being in the covenant of grace? In Romans, Paul distinguishes between being a Jew "outwardly" and "inwardly" (Romans 2:28). Everyone who has been initiated into the visible covenant community and externally identified with Christ's death (either looking forward in circumcision or looking backward in baptism) is an outward member of the covenant of grace. Not every outward member of the covenant of grace is, however, as Paul says, "a Jew inwardly." This is because inward membership in the covenant of grace is, as Paul says, "a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (Romans 2:29).

According to Paul, there are two ways to relate to the same covenant of grace: inwardly and outwardly. Everyone who is born of covenant parents is a member of the covenant of grace outwardly and has a right to and interest in the signs and seals of the covenant of grace. We baptize covenant children because they are such. Everyone who, by faith, takes up the promises made to him in baptism is also a member of the covenant of grace inwardly. Not everyone, however, born to covenant parents will necessarily take up for himself the promises made to him in baptism.

To affirm the truth of this distinction, however, is not to devalue the signs and seals of the covenant of grace. Paul is adamant that the fault lies not with the covenant sacraments but, rather, this is the outworking of God's purposes to His

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own glory (Romans 3:5). Neither did Paul invent the idea of the two ways of being in the covenant of grace. The distinction between internal and external membership goes back to Moses' call to God's people to "circumcise the foreskin" of their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16) and to the distinction in Jeremiah 4:4 and 9:25–26 between those who are circumcised only "in the foreskin" and those who are circumcised "in the heart." The preaching of the prophets is virtually structured by this distinction. Surely there is an advantage to being a Jew (Romans 3:1) but merely being an outward member of the covenant community is not enough.

It is within this matrix that we must read Paul's language in Romans 6:1–5. The Federal Visionists' appeal to this passage as the strongest proof for their view that baptism unites every baptized person "head for head" to Christ. Read in context, however, this passage is best understood as John Calvin and most of the rest of the Reformed tradition has done.

The issue in Romans 6 is motive for and necessity of holiness. Having been justified *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, may we sin freely? Paul does not equivocate: "Anyone who has died to sin cannot live in it. Paul's interest in this passage, then, is not to argue that every baptized person is automati-

cally united to Christ. Rather, he appeals to baptism to illustrate the nature of the union that believers have with Christ and the nature of the benefits we enjoy as a result of that union.

With this understanding, Calvin wrote:

...our faith receives from baptism the advantage of its sure testimony to us that we are not only engrafted into the death and life of Christ, but so united to Christ Himself that we become sharers in all his blessings. (*Institutes* 4.15.5).

Notice that, for Calvin, baptism is not said to effect union with Christ, but to serve as a testimony of our union. Baptism says that the believer *is* united to Christ, not that it effected that union. "It shows our mortification in Christ and our new life in Him." Calvin goes on to say that "through baptism Christ has made us sharers in His death, that we may be engrafted in it.

For Calvin, faith and baptism have quite distinct functions. Faith receives righteousness and union with Christ, whereas baptism signifies and seals that union. This seems clear from his lecture on Romans 6:4 where he recognized that Paul was speaking of those who believe, and with that assumption "joins the substance and

the effect with the external sign." Nevertheless, what the Lord offers in the visible symbol "is ratified" (*ratum est*) by faith. Whenever the dominical institution and faith are united, the sacrament is not "bare and empty."<sup>1</sup>

For Paul, it is a certainty that believers are united to Christ by grace alone, through faith alone. Those so united have died with him, and ought to live out that union morally, but baptism has no more power to effect this union or confer Christ's benefits than did circumcision.

### **Historical and Systematic Theology**

The Reformed theologians with Calvin regularly and consistently recognized the internal/external distinction and applied it to their interpretation of Scripture. Calvin understood that, in this life, though we do not know who are elect, we must recognize that there two classes of people in the congregation. For this very reason, he used the doctrine of election to explain why the visible church has two kinds of people within it. "Therefore the secret election and inner vocation of God is to be considered." In the visible church there are always "many hypocrites mixed in, who have nothing of Christ except the title and appearance." Calvin quite intentionally and clearly distinguished between the "sign" of the sacrament and its "truth." He did so because one receives from baptism only as much as one receives in faith. He thought this way because he considered *faith*, not baptism, the instrument of justification and union with Christ.

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***There is an advantage to being a Jew but merely being an outward member of the covenant community is not enough.***

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Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587), one of the principal authors of our Heidelberg Catechism and our covenant theology taught that there are those in the church with whom God has made a covenant of grace, in the narrower sense, and those in the visible church with whom he has not. That is why he titled his major work on covenant theology: *On the Substance of the Covenant of Grace Between God and the Elect* (Geneva, 1585).<sup>2</sup>

The internal/external distinction is built into the title of the work. The elect receive the *substance* (i.e., justification and sanctification) of the covenant of grace by grace alone, through faith alone. Implied in the use of the word *substance* is the distinction between substance (that which makes a thing what it is) and *accidents* (those things that can change without changing a thing). Thus, for Olevianus, the covenant of grace, construed narrowly (or internally), is made only with the elect. Considered broadly (or externally), however, the covenant of grace can be said to include “hypocrites” and “reprobates.” They share in the administration of the covenant of grace, they participate in “external worship,” but they do not enter into true fellowship with Christ.

Only the elect believe and only they receive Christ’s benefits, i.e., the substance of the covenant.<sup>3</sup> Christ is present and offered to the congregation, but Christ and his benefits are received through faith alone. One finds this very same distinction also in the theology of Olevianus’

## ***Considered broadly (or externally), the covenant of grace can be said to include “hypocrites” and “reprobates.”***

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colleague and the principal author of our catechism, Zacharias Ursinus.<sup>4</sup>

This distinction was made not only at the beginning of Reformed theology, but throughout the classical period of Reformed theology. For example, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Herman Witsius (1636–1708) wrote:

...the participation of the covenant of grace is two fold. The one includes merely symbolical and common benefits, which have no certain connection with salvation, and to which infants are admitted by their relation to parents that are within the covenant; and adults, by the profession of faith and repentance, even though insincere.... The other participation of the covenant of grace, is the partaking of its internal, spiritual, and the saving goods, as the forgiveness of sins, the writing of the law in the heart, etc. Accordingly the apostle makes a distinction between the Jew outwardly and the Jew inwardly,—between circumcision in the flesh and the letter, and circumcision in the heart and Spirit; which, by analogy may be transferred to Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Consistently, then, in the classical period of our theology, we ac-

counted for the co-existence in the visible church of believers and hypocrites by speaking of those who are in the church externally only, by baptism, and those who are also in the church internally through faith which apprehends Christ and his benefits. Both sets of people are in the covenant of grace but they sustain different relations to it.

In the modern period of Reformed theology, in the Netherlands, Herman Bavinck intentionally carried on the classic Reformed pattern of distinguishing the two ways of being in the covenant of grace. He regarded it as “self evident” there will be in the covenant of grace, until the consummation, both those who believe and those who make a profession of faith but who are “inwardly unbelieving,” who “do not share in the covenant’s benefits.” He also rejected the attempt by some to exclude the unbelieving from any relation to the covenant of grace whatever. They are “not of the covenant, they are *in* the covenant and will someday be judged accordingly.”<sup>6</sup>

In many ways, Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) was Herman Bavinck’s successor, and indeed devoted an entire section of his *Reformed Dogmatics* (Systematic Theology) to a discussion of the “Dual Aspect of the Covenant,” under the heading of “covenant and election.” He ex-

pressed some misgivings about the traditional language, but nevertheless he held and taught the same basic distinction as Bavinck and the earlier Reformed theologians.

He followed his predecessor Geerhardus Vos in speaking of those who have a purely legal or objective relation to the covenant of grace and those who enjoy a “communion of life.”<sup>7</sup> He argued that the unregenerate are “in the covenant” in four ways, in that covenant membership entails responsibility to repent and believe, in that they may lay claim to the promises of the covenant by faith (not all unregenerate remain in that state!), in that they are recipients of the ministry of the covenant, and in that they experience blessings common to all members of the covenant of grace. Those who show themselves to be unbelieving and impenitent, however, are genuine covenant breakers.<sup>8</sup>

Even though there have been some modern Reformed writers who have expressed doubts about the utility of speaking of the visible and invisible church (e.g., John Murray) and others who have rejected the internal/external distinction altogether (e.g., Klaas Schilder, Norman Shepherd, and the Federal Visionists) nevertheless, Bavinck and Berkhof witness to its ongoing vitality in modern Reformed theology.<sup>9</sup>

### Endnotes

1 T.H.L. Parker, ed., *Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos, Ionnis Calvini Opera Omnia, Series II: Ionnis Calvini Opera Exegetica* (Geneva: Droz, 1999) 119.24-25.

2 Casper Olevianus, *De Substantia Foederis Gratuiti Inter Deum Et Electos* (Geneva: 1585), 3.418.

3. *De Substantia* 2.53

4 Lyle D. Bierma, ed., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) p.185-186.

5 Modified from the translation in Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on the Apostles' Creed*, ed. Donald Fraser, 2 vols. (Edinburgh and Glasgow: A. Fullarton & Co. and Khull, Blackie and Co., 1823 2.354-355. Herman Witsius, *Hermani Witsii Exercitationes Sacrae in Symbolum Quod Apostolorum Dicitur et in Orationem Dominicam*, 3rd Ed. (Amsterdam: 1997) 453-454. See also, Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing; reprint, 1990) 1.353.

6 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics. Volume 3: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, trans. John Vriend, ed., John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 231-232.

7 Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 286-287.

8 Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 288-289.

9 J. Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, trans. G. van Rongen (Launceston, Australia: Free Reformed Churches of Australia, 1985), 40-75, defends the

Schilderite view and provides some English translation of background documents that are useful in understanding the struggle in the Netherlands in the 1940s over these questions.

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# The New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (Part Four)

The most important piece of New Testament evidence that bears upon the question of paedocommunion is undeniably 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. In this passage, the apostle Paul speaks at length about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, its institution by Christ, and the manner in which those who sacramentally partake of Christ are to come to the Table of the Lord. It is no exaggeration to say that this is the most extensive and comprehensive New Testament passage on the subject of the Lord's Supper. It is also the most compelling piece of testimony that addresses the issue of the proper recipients of the sacrament. As we noted in our introduction to a survey of the New Testament evidence on the subject of the Lord's Supper, most of the pertinent passages refer either to the institution of the Lord's Supper or its practice in the new covenant community. None of them, with the possible exception of John 6, a passage we considered in a previous article, has clear implications for determining who may be admitted to the Lord's Table.

In comparison to the other New Testament evidence, therefore, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 belongs in a category of its own. We have previously noted that, since the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the new covenant that has no exact analogy in the old covenant,

the teaching of the Scriptures of the new covenant must determine how it is administered and received. Because the Scriptures of the new covenant in Christ have priority in our determination of the practice of the new covenant community, this passage is of unparalleled importance for answering the question regarding the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper.

Before we consider the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 in detail, it will be helpful to begin with a brief summary of the historic Reformed and more recent paedocommunionist interpretations of this passage. Though there is the danger that this will prejudice our treatment of the passage, acquaintance with these widely divergent interpretations of the passage will provide a context for and background to our exposition in a subsequent article. We will begin with a summary of the historic Reformed reading of the passage, and then offer a summary of a more recent paedocommunionist reading.

### **The Historic Reformed Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

In the traditional understanding of this passage in the Reformed churches, the apostle Paul's instructions regarding what it means to participate in the sacrament in an "unworthy" manner are viewed as

normative for all members of the new covenant community. Though the occasion for Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is specific, the apostle seizes upon this occasion to set forth general guidelines or principles for the way any member of the church should partake sacramentally of the body and blood of the Lord. In the Corinthian church, some of the wealthier members were enjoying a private meal in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but they excluded others from this meal who remained hungry (v. 21). In response to this problem, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the institution of the Lord's Supper and what it requires of all who would partake in a worthy manner of the Lord's body and blood. In his positive instructions regarding the manner in which the sacrament is to be received, he uses language that is general or universal in its implications. For example, in verse 27 he speaks of "*whoever* eats the bread or drinks the cup ...." In verse 28, he enjoins all believers with the language, "*let a person* examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." And again in verse 29, he says, "For *anyone* who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." This language clearly shows that Paul's instructions regarding participation in the sacrament are intended to apply in a general way to all believers whenever they commune with Christ and each other by means of the sacrament.

In his general description of the proper manner in which the Supper is to be celebrated, the apostle Paul begins with an appeal to the Lord's



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instructions that were issued at the time of the institution of the Lord's Supper. All who partake of the elements of bread and wine must do so "in remembrance" of Christ (vv. 24-25). When the sacrament is received in remembrance of Christ, believers are said thereby "to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). According to the historic interpretation of these instructions, participation in the sacrament requires the kind of faith that is capable of remembering and proclaiming Christ's death. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper may not be received in a "witless" or uninformed manner by its recipients. It obliges those who participate to do so in the way of a *believing appropriation* of the gospel promise and teaching regarding Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross for his people. The traditional practice of the Reformed churches, which insists that the recipients of the sacrament confirm publicly the presence of the kind of faith that can meaningfully remember and proclaim Christ's death, is simply an application of what is required by these words of institution.

The most important features of the traditional interpretation of this passage, however, are based upon the instructions of verses 27-29. In these verses, the apostle Paul begins by insisting that whoever participates in the Lord's Supper is obliged to do so only after having engaged in a form of "self-examination." Before believers receive the sacrament, they should examine themselves in the sense of "testing" whether their faith and conduct is in accord

with their profession (v. 26). Though this requirement of self-examination has been implemented in various ways throughout the history of the Reformed churches, it is generally understood to require that believers test themselves in terms of the normal requirements of a Christian profession.

After this reminder of the need for self-examination, the apostle Paul adds that all who partake of the sacrament must do so only as they properly "discern" the body of Christ (v. 29). Such discernment of the body of Christ includes an understanding of His atoning sacrifice, and the implications of this sacrifice for the conduct of believers in relation to Christ and others. In the historic Reformed interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11, these requirements for a proper reception of the sacrament provide a sufficient warrant for the insistence that all who come to the Lord's Supper do so as "professing members" of the church who are in good standing. The seriousness of these requirements is only further confirmed by Paul's teaching that God's judgment was resting upon many believers in Corinth who were guilty of ignoring them (vv. 29-32).

Accordingly, when the Reformed confessions address the

subject of what is required to participate in the Lord's Supper, they interpret Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians to mean that believers must come to the Table in the way of faith. For example, the Belgic Confession echoes the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 in Article 25, which treats the holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ: "we receive this sacrament in the assembly of the people of God, with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to the table without having previously rightly examined himself, lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup he eat and drink judgment to himself."

Similar appeals to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 are found in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 30, and the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question and Answer 177. This understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, which is expressed in the confessional symbols of the Reformed churches, underlies the practice of requiring a public confirmation of faith prior to the admission of children to the Table of the Lord.

#### **A Recent "Paedocommunion" Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

In spite of the long-standing consensus of the Reformed churches

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*The seriousness of these requirements is only further confirmed by Paul's teaching that God's judgment was resting upon many believers in Corinth who were guilty of ignoring them.*

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## ***The apostle does not rebuke the Corinthians for admitting “unworthy” participants to the Table of the Lord.***

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regarding the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, recent advocates of paedocommunion have vigorously challenged it. According to a recent paedocommunionist interpretation of this passage, the refusal to admit the children of the covenant to the Lord’s Table fails to appreciate the real burden of the apostle Paul’s argument in this passage. On a paedocommunionist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, there are several significant errors in the traditional reading. The cumulative effect of these errors actually turns the tables on the older view.

Whereas this passage has been read traditionally to exclude non-professing members of the covenant community from admission to the Table, a careful reading of the passage will show that it commends the admission of all the members of the church, young and old alike. Indeed, the traditional restriction upon the participation of young children in the sacrament wrongly divides different segments of the covenant community (in this case, professing and non-professing members) in a manner that is reminiscent of the unwarranted divisions in the Corinthian church.

Paul’s strong rebuke of the Corinthian practice, which profaned the Table of the Lord as an expression of the unity of the body of Christ, may apply accordingly to the traditional practice of the

churches, which excludes some members of the community from full participation in Christ.

In the paedocommunionist reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the particular occasion that prompted Paul’s teaching about the Lord’s Supper in this passage. The problem Paul addresses in this passage is not one of “orthodoxy” or right doctrine but of “orthopraxis” or proper conduct. The apostle does not rebuke the Corinthians for admitting “unworthy” participants to the Table of the Lord. Rather, he rebukes them for a practice that represented an ungodly pride and factionalism among segments of the congregation in Corinth. Some members of the congregation were enjoying their own private meals in conjunction with the sacrament, and in so doing humiliated poorer members of the congregation who were excluded from participation with them.

The offense that was present in the Corinthian congregation was one of factionalism or divisiveness within the one body of Christ. In the context of their celebration of the sacrament of communion, which represents the participation of all believers in Christ and their spiritual unity with each other, the Corinthians had turned the sacrament into an occasion for *ungodly divisions among seg-*

*ments of the congregation.* The sinful practice of the Corinthian church was an affront to the gospel of the union and communion of the whole covenant community, with all of its members, in the one body of Christ, which the sacrament of communion so powerfully attests. If we keep this occasion in mind, it will have a significant impact upon our reading of the passage.

In addition to an emphasis upon the particular occasion for Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, a paedocommunionist reading of the passage also maintains that the language of “remembrance” and “proclamation” in verses 24-26 need not exclude younger children of the covenant community. These terms do not describe a participation in the sacrament that requires an intellectual or knowledgeable apprehension of the gospel of Christ’s sacrifice of atonement on behalf of His people, as advocates of the traditional view claim.

The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is itself an “act of remembrance” and a “visible proclamation” of the gospel of Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross. Just as young children of believing parents participated in Old Testament rites of remembrance, though their understanding of the meaning of these rites was negligible or quite limited, so the young children of believing parents today may participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Table as a rite of remembrance. According to advocates of paedocommunion, therefore, this language does not prevent even the youngest mem-

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bers of the covenant communion from participation in the sacrament.

Perhaps the most important leg in this paedocommunionist reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34:17-34, however, is its interpretation of the language of verses 27-29. Though these verses have been interpreted historically to exclude young children from participation in the sacrament, their teaching actually opposes a practice that would exclude them (or any other segment) of the covenant community from reception at the Lord's Table. The Corinthians were "improperly" eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, because they were guilty of a failure to "examine" themselves in terms of their membership in the body of Christ, the church. By their divisive practice, which excluded some from participating in their "private feasts," they failed to identify correctly who belonged to the community of Christ's people.

When Paul speaks of the need to "discern the body" in verse 29, he has in mind the obligation to discern or properly recognize all who are members of the community of the church. The "body" to which Paul refers is not the body of Christ that was offered in sacrifice for the sins of His people, but the one church to whom all believers and their children belong. Paul's concern is ecclesiological rather than soteriological; he is interested in a proper identification of who belongs to the body of the church, not a kind of informed understanding of the nature of Christ's sacrifice as the basis for

the forgiveness of sins. Because the Corinthians' practice sinfully fractured the unity of the church, it violated the body of Christ and exhibited a failure to eat and drink in a worthy manner.

On this paedocommunionist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the implications for the practice of paedocommunion are clear and startling. Nothing in the passage prevents young children from being admitted to the Table. Simply by their participation in the sacrament, children are able to remember and proclaim the death of Christ. They are also capable of being admitted to the Table as those who have properly examined themselves and discerned the body of the church (in the sense of knowing that they belong to the household of faith)

#### Summary

As we consider 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 in a subsequent article or articles, we shall have to keep these two divergent interpretations before us. Does this passage provide compelling support for the traditional practice of the churches, which insists upon a public profession of faith prior to the admission of believers to the Table of the Lord? Or does the more recent paedocommunionist reading of this passage provide a more likely interpretation of it? The historic and more recent paedocommunionist interpretations of this passage cannot both be true. It is actually rather remarkable how opposed they are. The one appeals to this passage to oppose the idea that young children, who have not professed the Christian faith, should be admitted

to the Table of the Lord. The other appeals to this passage in order to prove that young children must be admitted to the sacrament. The importance of this passage and the divergence of interpretation regarding it, demand that we give it our most careful attention.

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# Church Offices in Historic Reformed Doctrine

We find within the broad community of Reformed churches a variety of views on the subject of the offices in the church of Jesus Christ. Some advocate a two-office view, maintaining that the church of our Lord has been given two permanent offices—the office of elder and the office of deacon. Others set forth a three-office position, affirming that there are three offices in the church—the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon. Some describe elders as though they were pastors, allowing them to preach, baptize, and administer the Lord’s Supper. Others see no distinction between New Testament references to the pastor on the one hand and the teacher on the other.

## Temporary in Contrast to Perpetual

What is the historic Reformed doctrine on this subject? John Calvin taught, in the first place, that there is a distinction between the temporary and the perpetual offices. In Ephesians 4:11, he contended, the first three offices in Paul’s list—apostles, prophets, and evangelists—were for “a limited time only.” (He did concede, however, that “where religion has fallen into decay” it may happen that “evangelists” will be “raised up in an extraordinary manner, to restore the pure doctrine which had been lost.”) The last two offices mentioned in the Ephesians text—pastors and teachers—“are intended to be perpetual” (*Commentaries on the Epistle to the Ephesians*).

While it is popular today to refer to Ephesians 4:11 as setting forth the perpetual office of *pastor-teacher* (thereby coalescing the two offices of pastor and teacher into the one office of pastor-teacher), Calvin insisted (as John Owen later would, as well as the American Puritans) that Paul was here referring to two distinct offices. “Pastors,” wrote Calvin, “are those who have charge of a particular flock.” In addition, “there is a distinct class of *teachers*, who preside both in the education of pastors and in the instruction of the whole church” (Ibid.). “We shall call it,” he said, “the order of the schools.” The office entails “the teaching of theology, the scope of which includes both Old and New Testaments” (*Ecclesiastical Ordinances*).

The Ephesians passage sets forth two of the permanent offices that Christ has given to the church. Paul, however, does not set forth all of the perpetual offices in this text. The common element in the five distinct offices listed in Ephesians 4:11 is the fact that each of the offices entails the gift of teaching. The other two permanent offices do not necessarily require the gift of teaching since the function of these offices is related to different fundamental tasks (ruling in the case of elders and serving in the case of deacons). In 1 Timothy 5:17, the apostle sets forth a third office in his reference to the elders who rule well. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul discusses a fourth office as he lays out the necessary qualifications that

must be found in the man who is set apart to the office of deacon.

## The Number of Permanent Offices

On the basis of the New Testament data, Calvin and the classical Reformed tradition held that there are four permanent offices in the church—not three, and most certainly not two. It was Calvin who wrote the constitution for the Church in Geneva called the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541). They state, “There are four official orders which our Lord instituted for the government of His Church: firstly, pastors; secondly, teachers; thirdly, elders... and, fourthly, deacons.” There is no disagreement at this point between the continental perspective and that of the English Reformed. The New England Puritans, for example, set forth the four-office view in the *Cambridge Platform* (1649).

In our time of confusion regarding the ecclesiastical offices, what have the Reformed—on the basis of biblical exegetical work—historically maintained regarding the fundamental task of each office? Here we shall restrict our consideration to the offices of pastor, teacher, and elder—since there is less confusion in Reformed circles regarding the office of deacon.

## Pastors and Teachers

Let us begin with the offices of pastor and teacher. How were these two offices to be distinguished? “There is, I believe, this difference between them,” Calvin affirmed, “teachers are not put in charge of discipline, or administering the sacraments, or warnings

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and exhortations, but only of Scriptural interpretation—to keep doctrine whole and pure among believers” (*Institutes* IV.3.4). In Calvin’s thinking, men whom Christ gave as gifts to the church would be found in the schools, in institutions like the Academy in Geneva. The pastoral office, conversely, was “the highest and most comprehensive office which God could give to anyone within the Church” (Ronald Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, 16). Indeed, “the pastoral office includes all these functions within itself”—teaching, discipline, administration of the sacraments, warnings and exhortations, and Scriptural interpretation (*Institutes* IV.3.4). In Geneva, one would find a number of pastors, including John Calvin who occupied the pulpit at St. Pierre. (The unique thing about Calvin was that he held two offices at the same time, the office of pastor and the office of teacher. Even while he preached every week in the Cathedral Church, he also lectured on the Old Testament at the Geneva Academy.)

The seventeenth-century American Puritans likewise distinguished between the office of pastor and teacher. “The office of pastor and teacher appears to be distinct,” states the *Cambridge Platform* (Chapter VI). The New England theologians, however, understood the distinction in slightly different terms than did Calvin. It is true that the following declaration sounds

very Calvinian: “The pastor’s special work is, to attend to *exhortation*, and therein to administer a word of *wisdom*: (Eph. iv.11; Rom. xii.7, 8; 1 Cor. xii.8,) the teacher is to attend to *doctrine*, and therein to administer a word of *knowledge*: (1 Tim. iv.1, 2; Tit. i.9,)” (Ibid.). The Puritans, however, were more inclined to regard the teachers in terms of men who administered the sacraments and engaged in church discipline just as the pastors did: “Either of them” may “administer the seals of that covenant, unto the dispensation whereof they are alike called; as also to execute the censures, being but a kind of application of the word.” Furthermore, each officer was called to engage in preaching: “The preaching of which, together with the application thereof, they are alike charged withal” (Ibid.).

While Calvin tended to view the teachers given by Christ in connection with schools (they were essentially the theological professors of our time), the New England men were more willing to tie the office of teacher with the church: “Forasmuch as both pastors and teachers are given by Christ for the perfecting of the saints and edifying of his body; (Eph. iv.11, 12, and i.22, 23,) which saints and body of Christ is his church: and therefore we account pastors and teachers to be both of them church-officers, and not the pastor for the church and the teacher only for the schools” (Ibid.). This doctrinal perspective

is exemplified in the lives of Richard, Increase, and Cotton Mather—the father, the son, and the grandson of the Mather dynasty. Richard had held the office of *pastor* in the church in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Later on, Increase was called to the office of *teacher* at Second Church in Boston. Still later on, Cotton became the *pastor* at Second Church even while his father continued to occupy the office of *teacher* in the same congregation.

Here is the point which must be underscored against the backdrop of the contemporary commonplace perspective that Christ calls men to the office of pastor-teacher. The Reformed tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—on the continent and in the Puritan tradition—insisted upon a distinction between the offices of pastor and teacher. Likewise, the history of Reformed doctrine shows that the pastor and the elder hold two distinct offices, with the deacons constituting a fourth permanent office in the church of Christ.

#### **Pastors Versus Elders**

For Calvin the pastors of the church were ministers of the word and the sacraments. Candidates for the pastoral office had to be called by God. They needed to endure an intense examination by the Company of Pastors. The men who were approved by this body were judged to be sound in doctrine, able to teach, and blameless in conduct. The educational requirements for a pastor in Geneva were so high that all the congregations in the Republic had foreigners for pastors.

Elders in classical Reformed thought were neither ministers of

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*The unique thing about Calvin was that he held two offices at the same time.*

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## *We live at a time of great indifference regarding church polity.*

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the word nor the sacraments. The fundamental task of the eldership, wrote Calvin, “is to watch over the life of each person, to admonish in a friendly manner those whom they see to be at fault and leading a disorderly life” (*Ecclesiastical Ordinances*). It is indisputable that the New Testament ties together the idea of oversight and the office of elder. Luke affirms that Paul called to himself the “elders of the church” in Ephesus (Acts 20:17). It was to these men that Paul gave the charge, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). The biblical conception is that the elders have been placed on a watchtower by God for the purpose of watching over the sheep for whom Christ died.

While pastors must be able to teach, elders must be “good-living and honourable men, without reproach and beyond all suspicion, above all who fear God and possess the gift of spiritual prudence” (*Ecclesiastical Ordinances*). What Calvin wanted in the reformation effort in Geneva were men with “spiritual prudence” linked with a proven ability to govern. In the unique context of the Church in Geneva, a candidate for the eldership had to be one of the civil magistrates who governed the Geneva Republic. In the thinking of the apostle Paul, a proven ability to govern may be discerned by observing the home life of the elder candidate. The epistle of 1 Timothy affirms that the overseer

must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence—for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

It should be noted that historic Presbyterian thought likewise maintained a distinction between the office of minister and the office of elder. The *Westminster Confession* identifies ministers and elders as the two types of church officers who meet in “synods or councils” (XXXI.1). “The ministers of Christ,” states the *Confession*, “with other fit persons, upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies” (XXXI.2). The *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*, which was also produced by the Westminster Assembly, makes it very clear that this mentioning of “other fit persons, upon delegation from their Churches” is a reference to the office of elder: “As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with priests and Levites in the government of the church, so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in the church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church.” The *Form of Government* then states, “Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.”

## **The Importance of These Issues**

We live at a time of great indifference regarding church polity. For most churches in the American evangelical community, the only thing that really matters is that decisions are made democratically by the local congregation. The officers, whoever they may be, merely exist to implement the will of the laity.

The Reformed tradition takes a much different approach. In the first place, it rejects democracy as a church polity in favor of an ecclesiastical republicanism. Although there is a democratic element in terms of the fact that officers are raised to their position by the suffrage of the people, the officers do not exist merely to implement the desires of the people. Their fundamental allegiance is to Jesus Christ the head of the church. Their deepest commitment is to the Word of God seeking to implement its teachings and principles in the life of the covenant community.

May we reject the spirit of our age on the subject of ecclesiology. May we stand with our Reformed fathers who did not believe that proper thinking regarding the offices was a peripheral or irrelevant matter. With respect to the four-office structure that he established at the time of the Reformation, Calvin wrote, “If, then, we wish to have the Church well ordered and maintained in its entirety, we must observe this form of government” (*Ecclesiastical Ordinances*).

**Dr. Mark Larson** is the home missions pastor at Providence OPC in Aiken, South Carolina.

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# Classis Western Canada of the URCNA

Classis Western Canada of the URCNA met on January 11 & 12, 2007 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Many of the delegates arrived earlier in the week to attend the Winnipeg Conference on Reformed Theology; for many it was therefore several days of fellowship, learning, and praise.

The agenda for Classis was relatively light with no candidacy or ordination examinations requested and only two overtures to deal with. Classis included in the agenda an appeal from members of the Grande Prairie congregation. The churches also brought forward ten cases where they were seeking concurring advice from Classis as well as some requests for general advice.

The first overture requested Classis to overture Synod 2007 to form a new Pacific North West Classis consisting of several churches located in northwest, USA. With some sadness Classis approved this overture realizing that it could result in the congregations of Bellingham, Lynden and Salem leaving Classis Western Canada after Synod 2007 addresses the overture.

The second overture asked Classis to appoint the clerk of Classis to create a schedule providing regular pulpit supply for the vacant churches of our Classis. Classis defeated the overture since a previous Classis had already asked the clerk to create such a schedule. Classis then went on to approve that schedule.

The appeal from members of the Grande Prairie congregation asked Classis to rule that the Edmonton council, which currently has oversight of the Grande Prairie congregation, should release that congregation back to its members so that they would be able to install their own council and reorganize as a church. After considering its merits, the appeal was defeated on the grounds that Classis' approval of the appeal would be a violation of Church Order Art. 22 since the request did not originate with the supervising consistory.

The several requests for concurring advice were an indication that the churches of Western Canada are attempting to diligently administer the keys of the kingdom and maintain the marks of the Church. Classis considered each case individually and carefully and gave concurring advice where it believed it was warranted.

The delegates and visitors were blessed by times of praise, prayer and fellowship, and we thank the council and members of Winnipeg Providence Reformed Church for their hospitality.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. William Van der Woerd  
Clerk for Classis  
Western Canada

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