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The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



• Rahab and the Spies • What is Reformed Worship (II) • The Fifth and Sixth Plagues • Covenant of Works in Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy
• Looking Above: The Fifth Trumpet • NT Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (VII) • Book Review: The Path of True Godliness

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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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Rahab and the Spies

“As soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any courage in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and on the earth beneath.” (Joshua 2:11)

Throughout the Book of Joshua we read of God commanding the Israelites to destroy the nations that occupy the land of Canaan. Some people think God is unfair to demand the destruction of nations who had never heard of Him. But God gave the people of Canaan four hundred and twenty years to repent. If that were not enough, God extended that period for another forty years while His people wandered in the wilderness.

In addition, God did not destroy a people who did not know about Him. They had heard how He delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. One of the very first things Rahab tells the spies is: “We have heard.” Not only had the whole city of Jericho heard about the God of Israel, they knew that what they heard was true. Even so, one turned to God.

While some claim the Book of Joshua to be a book of harsh and utter judgment, the very first story we encounter is not one of God’s wrath; it is one of mercy. It is the story of Rahab.

Surrounding Rahab was an awesome environment. Jericho was a mighty fortress with great walls that had stood for hundreds of years. Rahab may have heard about this powerful God of Israel but, visibly, she was still surrounded by a powerful city. She

could see nothing with her eyes that would indicate any change was going to take place. And yet, she declares, “I know that the Lord has given you this land; the Lord, your God is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath.” She renounces her past for the sake of her new faith in the God of Israel.

Rahab’s Great Disadvantages

Rahab’s life is a story of great mercy because humanly speaking Rahab had nothing going for her. First of all she was a Gentile. All the advantages of true religion were in Judaism. Paul asks in Romans 3 “What advantage is there in being a Jew?” He answers his own question saying that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. (Romans 3:2). Paul lists the advantages of the Jews in Romans 9:4, writing that to them was “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” Rahab had none of those things. She was a Gentile and was, therefore, a foreigner “to the covenant of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Rahab was not only a Gentile, but she was also an Amorite. The Amorites were not the only tribe that occupied the land of Canaan during the time of Joshua. Still, among all of the tribes listed, God

singled out the Amorites for particular condemnation for their sin. God told Abraham in Genesis, and Moses in Deuteronomy, that the land of Canaan would not be destroyed until the sin of the Amorites was complete and at its fullest. The Amorites were a corrupt, vile people sacrificing their own children in their depraved wicked religious practices.

In addition, Rahab was a prostitute. There have been attempts to excuse Rahab from the full implication of that word. Some suggest that she had come to believe in Israel’s God before the spies ever arrived to her home. They say that she reformed from her earlier life’s occupation. Ancient historian Josephus claimed that Rahab was only a keeper of a house of entertainment for travelers. Arthur W. Pink tried to prove that Rahab was an honest woman engaged in an honest occupation.

While it is true that Rahab knew many things about the God of Israel, it is also true that she is nevertheless identified throughout the Bible as a prostitute. Here we see the great and marvelous grace of God reaching out to save a person lost in her sin. That being the case, Rahab was really no worse than any of us who were once lost in sin, yet found of God. It is not the righteous but sinners whom Christ redeems.

Rahab’s One Advantage

In spite of all the great liabilities that Rahab had, this pagan woman did have one thing going for her. She had heard about the God of Israel. As a result of that hearing she believed in the true God. Paul writes,

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). This is where the great confession of Rahab comes in. Rahab confesses the majesty of God. Rahab, the pagan, Amorite harlot had an Israelite confession on her lips. She declared the sovereignty and supremacy of Israel’s God. She declared Jehovah as the only ruler over all of heaven and earth.

There was, no doubt, much about the faith and history of Israel that Rahab did not know. She probably had not heard about Abraham or about the covenant. It is doubtful that she knew anything about the Law, Israel’s sacrificial system, or the way God demanded He be worshipped. She knew nothing of the promises.

Even so, she had heard enough. She had heard of God’s mighty acts in delivering the Israelites from Egypt. She had heard about the great victory given to the Israelites over the two Amorite nations east of the Jordan River. She had heard what God had done and as a result she believed on Him.

That is the one thing that Rahab had going for her. And the wonderful thing is that she heard about God not only with her ears but also with her heart. Here was this immoral pagan woman, who in the midst of her prostitution had heard about the true God of Israel and believed that the God she heard about was the true God.

That may be offensive to some. We think, “We can’t have that. The church is only for respectable, clean, middle-class folks.”

That is like saying the hospital is only for doctors, nurses, and X-ray machines instead of sick people. Who should be in the church but sinners saved by grace? The church is not a club; it is a refuge for sinners who have been touched by the grace of God. It is for those who have had their sins washed by the blood of Jesus Christ. As long as that can happen we can never despair about anybody nor need we despair about ourselves. We, too, are sinners dead in our trespasses and sins, but we too, like Rahab, have been saved by grace.

Rahab is held up as a model of faith twice in the New Testament. She appears first in the list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:31 where it is said of her: “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, after she welcomed the spies in peace.” The book of James tells us, “In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers, and sent them out by another way?” (2:25).

Rahab’s Confession

So often we focus on the fact that Rahab lied to the Jericho guards about the spies. We even go so far as to use her lie as an example to excuse our lies. Let us be clear that Rahab was not saved because of her lie. Rahab was saved by the grace of God. She was saved not by her own righ-

teousness because, like us, she had none. God saved her not because she was good, but that she might become good through His power in her life.

Neither Hebrews 11:31 nor James 2:25 tell us that God commended Rahab’s falsehood or any of her other sins. These passages instead point out her faith, which was manifested by the works that followed—not the lie—but her testimony concerning God and her action in putting down the scarlet cord.

Unfortunately, we get so caught up in Rahab’s lie that we never get around to hearing Rahab’s truth. We are like the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. We want to point out what Rahab did, but we forget all about what God did in Rahab’s heart. Rahab expressed her belief that Jehovah was and is the one true God and that He would give the Israelites the land of Canaan. Rahab asked that when—not if—the Israelites came to take possession of the land that her life and the life of her family would be spared.

This confession was totally unexpected. Rahab was a pagan. There was no accounting for her faith as it came to expression here before the spies. The spies, after all, were in a city that was totally hostile territory for them. They had no reason to believe that they

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would find anyone in Jericho who would befriend them, let alone acknowledge their God as God.

This shows us again the sovereign control of God over all things. In fact, I would go so far as to say that this was the very reason why the spies were sent into Jericho in the first place. Joshua did not need to know any information about Jericho. He knew that God would give the city to them. The battle plan of marching around Jericho did not require any great knowledge of the city. But there was a child of God in that city. All the while she had been living her sinful lifestyle God was preparing her heart. He had those spies sent into the city in order that arrangements could be made so that she, along with her family, would be saved.

Genuine Faith

Genuine faith never rests content with being convinced only of the reality of God. It must take refuge in God. Rahab must not only know the clear truth about God, she must escape the coming wrath of God. Faith is not just a matter of correct belief; it is one of desperate need. Rahab not only trembled before the terror of the Lord, she also sensed that there might be mercy coming from God.

The spies agreed to spare her life and her family *if* she would tie a scarlet thread, or scarlet cord, in her window. Rahab agreed im-

mediately. There is a tradition that goes back to the early church fathers that claims that the scarlet cord represents the blood of Jesus Christ. That may be reading into Scripture more than Scripture says. Still, even if Rahab's scarlet cord does not specifically represent the blood of Christ, there is a remarkable parallel between this cord that marked her house and the blood of the lambs that was spread on the doorposts of the Israelite homes in Egypt when the angel of death passed over their homes and spared their families. When the walls of Jericho came crashing down, the section of the wall where the scarlet cord hung was spared destruction. It was passed over, kept safe from the judgment of God upon the rest of the city.

However you view the scarlet cord, one thing remains true: The way of salvation has always been the same. If we are to understand Joshua 2, we must see ourselves as Rahab. We were not at all part of the family of God. Instead, we were part of a corrupt degenerate society in which each one of us had our own reprehensible sins. But God set His hand on us. He made His great saving act in history known to us and then brought us into contact with His messengers and His representatives. He called forth faith in us.

Now we live in a foreign land, giving up our citizenship in a world we can see for the promise of a

heavenly kingdom where Jehovah is acknowledged as King. We live between the moment of our commitment of faith and the moment of the final judgment when the walls of this world will collapse. That will be the time of our full deliverance.

In the meantime, we are like Rahab, called by God to stand amongst God's people in opposition to the surrounding godless culture. May our testimony be made in the same confidence as that of Rahab: "For your God, He is God."

Rev. Wybren H. Oord is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is also the editor of *The Outlook*.

What is Reformed Worship? (II) It is Historical

“Part of the richness of our identity as Christians is that we are saved into a historic people.” As a young, rootless, evangelical Christian, the Reformed Church attracted me with its wonder, its mystery, and its historicity in theology and worship. I came to learn that as Christians, we are saved *by* Christ and *into* Christ’s Church. We are not left as orphans, but join a new family that stretches across all times and places and stretches from heaven to earth. When we assemble, then, for worship, we join in something that is holy as well as wholly other. Worship transcends people and time and is above recent worship fads. Being saved into a historic people means that we join the “great cloud of witnesses” which have gone before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Because we believe this, our worship has historical continuity with ages of Christians past. Our worship is not only *reformed* according to Scripture, as we saw in our last article, but also *informed* according to the history of the Church.

As humans, we need history. The ancient Latin poet Cicero said, “To remain ignorant of things that happened before you were born is to remain a child.” The English thinker and writer C.S. Lewis said that our modern Western philosophy has caused us to be “chronologically arrogant.” Thus, we do not and cannot worship in a vacuum. We do not start a church and decide on our own how we want to worship, or,

even worse, how the community around us wants us to worship. It is important for us to know what the Church did in the past and why it did so. Reformed worship, then, is historical because it links us to the past, communicates to the present, and will lead us in praise before the throne of God in the eternal future.

Catholicity

As Reformed churches, we follow the wisdom and heritage of the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century. Our Protestant forefathers did not “throw the baby out with the bath water” when they began reforming the liturgies in their regions. They did not get rid of the existing liturgy and radically start over. Instead, they took what existed and followed the battle cry of the Renaissance: “back to the sources.”

The sources to which they went in reforming the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church were Scripture as well as to the liturgies of the ancient church. They saw a faithful history and tradition in the ancient liturgies of the church. These liturgies served as testimonies of the truth they were finding in Scripture.

The results were service books such as that of John Calvin, entitled, *The Form of Prayers According to the Custom of the Early Church*. In Martin Bucer’s defense of the reformation of worship in Strasbourg, the *Grund und Ursach* (“foundation and reason”), he described these reforms

as “restorations of that which is right, old and eternal.”

The church in the first four centuries of its existence was seen as a time in which Christians worshipped in a biblical way, since Rome’s false gospel and idolatrous worship did not infect it yet. What you experience as you worship in a faithful Reformed church is a fully biblical service in the same vein as the historic liturgies of the ancient church in the second through fourth centuries, which were revived during the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Examples of Ancient Christian Worship

The best way to see Reformed liturgical catholicity is to do what the Reformers did and examine the earliest writings of the Church in the area of liturgy and then compare these ancient descriptions to the practices of the Reformed churches.

The Didache (ca. 50-120)

One of the earliest descriptions of worship comes from the *Didache*. This was a manual of how the church was to be ordered in its various activities—baptism, preaching, Lord’s Supper, fasting, prayer, etc. In speaking of the Christian assembly, the *Didache* says,

And on the Lord’s own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. And let no man, having his dispute with his fellow, join your as-

sembly until they have been reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled; for this sacrifice it is that was spoken of by the Lord; {In every place and at every time offer Me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great king, saith the Lord and My name is wonderful among the nations.}" (14:1-5).

What this teaches us is that the purpose of assembling for worship is celebrating the Lord's Supper. In this statement, the *Didache* follows the apostle Paul, who in 1 Corinthians says the church was to gather to break bread. We also learn that the church was to confess its sins before the Eucharist because it is a sacrifice of praise, as the *Didache* quotes from Malachi.

Pliny to Trajan (ca. 112)

A second early description of worship is from Pliny the Younger, Governor of Asia Minor, who wrote to the Emperor Trajan about persecution of Christians, among other things. When Christians were brought before those in charge, Pliny records that

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their cus-

tom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food – but ordinary and innocent food.

In Pliny's letter we learn that Christians gathered twice on the Lord's Day—before dawn in order to sing to Christ and to bind themselves together in a common life of morality (a possible reference to the Ten Commandments) and "again" in order to partake of food (a possible reference to the Lord's Supper).

Justin Martyr

The most elaborate description of the worship that existed in the early church comes from the testimony of Justin Martyr. Justin was a convert to Christianity in the mid-second century. In the year A.D. 155, he wrote his *First Apology*, meant to show the Caesar of Rome of that time, Titus, the true nature of Christianity.

In chapters 65-67, Justin describes what happened when believers gathered for worship. In chapter 65, he first gives a general description of what happened when a newly baptized Christian came into the worship assembly, saying,

But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we

may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation.

Justin then gives a description of the service of the Eucharist (later he goes back and describes the service of the Word):

Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language to *genoito* [so be it]. And when the presi-

The most elaborate description of the worship that existed in the early church comes from the testimony of Justin Martyr.

dent has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

So far, chapter 65 of Justin's *First Apology* described the order of service like this:

Prayer
Kiss
Presentation of Bread/Wine
Prayer and corporate "Amen"
Distribution of Bread/Wine

In chapter 67, Justin fills in the rest of the service of worship with the service of the Word, which precedes the Eucharist:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things...

And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers so-

journing among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

Therefore, the Lord's Day service that Justin describes to the Emperor is as follows:

Service of the Word
Assembling
Old Testament Readings
New Testament Readings
Sermon

Service of the Eucharist
Prayer
Kiss
Presentation of Bread/Wine
Prayer and corporate "Amen"
Distribution of Bread/Wine
Offering

We notice in Justin's description of worship how simple the worship was. As well, its focus is the Word of God and sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In following this basic pattern, the Reformers stripped the worship that existed in their day, the Medieval Mass, of its idolatry and extra-Scriptural content. In doing so, they did not reinvent the wheel.

Clement of Rome (ca. 80-140)

A full description of the prayer that Justin mentions between the sermon and sacrament, what we often call the "Pastoral Prayer," but what is also called the prayer of intercession, came from Clement of Rome's *First Epistle to the Corinthians*. In it, Clement opened his prayer, saying,

And we will ask, with instancy of prayer and supplication, that the Creator of the universe may guard intact unto the end the number that hath been numbered of His elect throughout the whole world, through His beloved Son Jesus Christ, through whom He called us from darkness to light, from ignorance to the full knowledge of the glory of His Name (59:2).

The prayer then interceded for the Church's sanctification of the saints (59:3), for the afflicted (59:3, 4), for the salvation of all men (59:4), for the forgiveness of sins (60:1, 2 cf. *Didache*), for deliverance from enemies (60:3), for rulers (60:4, 61:1, 2) ending in a doxology (61:3), then closes with more intercessions for the sanctification of the saints and closes in a great doxology: "through our High priest and Guardian Jesus Christ, through whom unto Him be glory and majesty, might and honor, both now and for ever and ever. Amen" (64:1).

Tertullian (ca. 197)

The North African teacher, Tertullian of Carthage, also wrote a write description of Christian worship in his *Apology*, chapter 39. What is so instructive is how similar Tertullian, writing from Carthage in North Africa, and Justin, writing from Rome, sound in their descriptions of worship. There truly was a catholic consensus on the principles and practice of Christian worship.

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What is so instructive is how similar Tertullian, writing from Carthage in North Africa, and Justin, writing from Rome, sound in their descriptions of worship.

Furthermore, their descriptions of Christian liturgy in the late 2nd century emphasize the four basic elements of worship mentioned in Acts 2:42: the Word, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and offering.

Tertullian begins his description with the element of prayer, mentioning that prayer is made for the authorities, the world, and for the delay of the Second Coming, saying,

We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation.

He then moves to describe the element of the Word of God, both its reading and preaching:

We assemble to read our sacred writings...with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits. In the same place also exhortations are

made, rebukes and sacred censures are administered.

The offering of God's people, especially for benevolence, is then explained, in contrast to the use of money in world:

There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession...

Finally, Tertullian gives a description of the Lord's Supper, saying,

As it is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God; they talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors. After manual ablution, and the bringing in of lights, each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing,—a proof of the measure of our drinking. As the feast commenced with prayer, so with prayer it is closed.

In summary, we follow this basic pattern of the early Church's worship in which the Word is read and preached, the Sacraments are celebrated with thanksgiving, prayers of confession, intercession, and thanks are offered, and the offerings of God's people are gathered for the ministry of mercy. When we gather, then, we join multitudes of saints throughout all times and places in worshipping according to the Word and according to the custom of the early church.

Rev. Daniel Hyde is the Pastor of Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, California.

The Fifth and Sixth Plague: God Opposes Egypt-Pharaoh

Read Exodus 9:1-12

In the fifth and the sixth plagues we see once more how God makes a distinction between His people and between Pharaoh's people. God's hand distinguishes between the livestock of the Hebrews and the livestock of the Egyptians. Likewise, God will distinguish between the Hebrews and the Egyptians regarding the sixth plague.

In this article I will focus on the polemic nature of the fifth and the sixth plagues. The word "polemic" is used to convey the idea that an argument is being employed. If a statement is polemical it contains a defense of one position, but it can also contain an attack against an opposing position. The fifth and the sixth plagues are polemical because they represent a direct attack against Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods.

Ancient Egyptian texts often describe Pharaoh's power in terms of his "strong hand." Ironically, in this passage, the same language that is used to describe Pharaoh's power is applied to Jehovah. The strong hand of Jehovah opposes Pharaoh and Egypt resulting in their humiliation, while the hand of Pharaoh is weak and powerless against Jehovah's strong hand.

The Fifth Plague - Then

When Moses confronts Pharaoh with the threat of the fifth plague, we expect by now that Pharaoh will refuse Jehovah's demand. As a result, the strong hand of Jehovah

will oppose Pharaoh causing a great pestilence to kill the livestock of Egypt. The horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, sheep and the goats will be affected by this plague. This does not mean that every individual animal of the field will be affected, but rather a great number of animals will die, including animals of all the different kinds associated with the field.

This is a devastating attack against Egypt. The fifth plague affected Egypt's source of food, clothing, and the basic transportation system of that time, which was based upon camels, horses, and donkeys. The fifth plague, therefore, crippled Egypt's economy.

This plague is also a polemic against the popular bull cults that were popular at that time in Egypt's history. Egyptians worshipped the bull as the great inseminator imbued with the potency and vitality of life. Apis was the most important of the Egyptian sacred bulls. The popularity of these bull cults will be reflected later in Israel's apostasy. In Moses' absence the Israelites will reject Yahweh and return to the bulls cults of Egypt.

Numerous other cults were associated with animals: Isis, queen of the gods, bears the horns of a cow on her head; Hathor is given a bovine head for her task of protecting the king. The fifth plague was an attack against all these false gods that were associated with the bull and every other animal of the field. The

fifth plague was proof that all these false gods were imposters. Jehovah is the only true God who sovereignly rules over Egypt. The false gods of Egypt were absolutely powerless against the strong hand of Yahweh.

In verse 3, we read that the hand of Jehovah will be very heavy. This is a caustic statement, because Pharaoh's heart is often spoken of as being heavy. In other words, the plague is heavy upon Egypt on account of Pharaoh's heavy heart. Since Pharaoh continues to harden his heavy heart, God's hand will continue to be heavy upon Pharaoh and his people.

During this plague Jehovah will make a distinction between the livestock of Egypt and the livestock of the Hebrews. God makes a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. This distinction is reflected in the way that God deals with the animals. Only the animals belonging to the Egyptians will be affected by the plague.

In verse 5, Jehovah sets the time of the plague, saying, "Tomorrow Jehovah will do this thing in the land." This is further proof that Jehovah is sovereign, because He controls the timing of the plague. Following the plague, Pharaoh sends his servants to investigate Goshen, but he refuses to send out the people of God from Goshen. His actions are paradoxical. He sends out his servant to Goshen, but he won't send God's servants out from Goshen. Pharaoh denies Jehovah's demand because his heart was very heavy; therefore the hand of God is heavy upon Pharaoh and Egypt.

The Fifth Plague - Now

It is interesting to see how people view natural disasters today. Some people see them as a random act of nature; still others become angry with God to the point where they question God's character and accuse God of injustice.

In light of what is recorded in the book of Revelation, this should not surprise us: "They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify God." "Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven." Just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened in the face of God's judgment, likewise in the last days, the hearts of the reprobate will be hardened when they are confronted with the plagues spoken of by the apostle John in the book of Revelation. The plagues that John describes in Revelation correlate with the plagues that God employed in the Exodus. Exodus provides us with a picture of the final judgment and the time leading up to this judgment, and a picture of God's salvation.

Leading up to the time of Christ's return, the enemies of God will continue to deny His right to rule sovereignly over creation. As a result many leaders within the evangelical church feel the need to defend God. Some of them defend Him by denying His sovereignty. In Exodus, God is clearly the source of the plagues, He determines the hour of their visitation. This is still true today.

The Sixth Plague - Then

In the sixth plague, Moses is instructed to appear before Pharaoh with handfuls of soot from a fur-

nace. Without saying a word, Moses is commanded to toss the soot into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. When Moses acts according to God's instructions the soot is transformed into fine dust, and the fine dust covers all of Egypt.

As the dust covered all of Egypt, festering boils broke out on men and animals throughout the land. The Hebrews and their animals,

By turning the soot of the furnace against Egypt Jehovah is utterly humiliating Pharaoh.

however, were not affected by this terrible plague. This is the first plague that directly affects the bodies of the Egyptians. Through this plague God is demonstrating that He controls the health and well-being of the Egyptians in a very personal way. The strong hand of Jehovah is heavy upon Egypt.

Why was Moses instructed to take soot from a furnace, and toss it into the air as the means of bringing this plague about? This is an important detail. Why did God ordain the use of soot as the means to bring this plague about? The answer is true poetic justice.

When Pharaoh forced the Hebrews into slavery, the major task

that he used to oppress them was the making of bricks. Furnaces were used for baking bricks. Therefore an instrument associated with Israel's slavery, the furnace, is turned against Pharaoh and all of Egypt. God takes the furnace, an object associated with the oppression of the Hebrews and He uses it to oppress Pharaoh and his people. By turning the soot of the furnace against Egypt Jehovah is utterly humiliating Pharaoh.

The type of disease created by the dust is unknown. Some commentators contend that it was anthrax, an infectious and often fatal disease. The language used to describe the disease is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe leprosy and its consequences (Lev. 13:18-20). Although, questions remain regarding the specific disease, whatever it was, it was certainly dangerous and potentially life threatening.

The sixth plague became proverbial in ancient Israel. Moses later warns the Hebrews that if they disobey God's commands, "The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and the itch, from which you cannot be healed" (Deut. 28:27).

The severity of this plague is hard to comprehend. We are told that, "The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians." It highlights a contrast between Moses and the Egyptian magicians. Moses and Aaron were able to stand before Pharaoh, but Pharaoh's magicians could no longer stand before Moses and Aaron. The image is one of complete defeat. Not only were the

magicians unable to protect Egypt, but they were unable to protect themselves. They were completely subdued by the strong hand of Jehovah.

Yet in verse 12 we read “But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses.” Verse 12 stresses the active nature of God’s work; God is described as hardening Pharaoh’s heart. The heavy hand of God is heavy upon Pharaoh’s heart causing his heart to become even heavier. God’s direct agency has been seen before regarding Pharaoh’s heart (4:21, 7:3). At other times, Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15, 32). By alternating between statements that affirm the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by both Pharaoh and Jehovah, it is clear that Jehovah ultimately rules’ over Pharaoh’s heart, but likewise, we also see how it is Pharaoh’s nature to rebel against God.

God is not hardening a submissive man. Pharaoh is at enmity with God. This is true of every sinner until he is called and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We must recognize that even today, God continues to rule over the hearts of all men. This includes both the godly and the ungodly. There is no sphere that is outside God’s control. It is a mistake to think that God is more in control when things go our way or when moral people rule the land. God is in control at all times and in every sphere of life. God rules over the hearts of the most wicked rulers on earth.

The Sixth Plague - Now

The sixth plague, like the previous

God is not hardening a submissive man. Pharaoh is at enmity with God.

plagues, is repeated and intensified in Revelation. John says that the sixth plague will appear again at the end of the age, when God pours out the seven bowls of wrath upon the followers of Satan. “And the first angel went and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image” (Rev. 16:2).

As before, the plagues in Egypt foreshadow the plagues in the book of Revelation. In the last days these plagues will be poured upon the ungodly. However the plagues associated with the end of the age are much greater and more extreme. They confirm the fact that a final judgment is coming, but they also confirm the fact that God’s people will see and know the fullness of their salvation.

God’s people will experience an exodus at the end of the age that will be even greater than the exodus that Israel experienced when they were delivered from the yoke of Egypt. This greater exodus begins when a sinner is delivered from darkness, and made alive in Christ.

Everyone that belongs to Christ is living an exodus greater than the exodus from Egypt. You have been delivered from the slavery of sin, and death. Your inheritance has been secured through the finished work of Christ, and likewise your safe passage through the wilder-

ness has been secured by One who has passed before you. You are assured that God will sustain you by His Spirit, but you must recognize that God’s Spirit works through the ministry of the word and the sacraments. Therefore you should make diligent use of these means.

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The Covenant of Works in Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy

The doctrine of the covenant of works has come under fire once more in Dutch Reformed churches. Some Dutch Reformed Christians have called the covenant of works an unscriptural theory that must be rejected outright. The covenant of works, they say, has traces of Arminianism or Roman Catholicism in it. Of course, the battle rages elsewhere as well, but Dutch Reformed church history has volumes to add to this debate.

Despite recent criticism of the covenant of works within Dutch churches, it is very clear that the covenant of works is both a Presbyterian and Reformed—indeed *Dutch Reformed*—doctrine. The main point of this essay is simple: *the Dutch Reformed church has taught the covenant of works since the Reformation*. While we may owe much to our Presbyterian brothers and sisters, we did not adopt the covenant of works from the Westminster Standards. Rather, the English and Dutch Reformed theologians were influenced by each other, and stood side by side on the covenant of works.

Those in Dutch churches who deny the covenant of works today usually only use a select few recent Dutch theologians to help disprove it. Alternatively, they suggest that the covenant of works is foreign to Dutch Reformed theology, as if there were no major Dutch theologians before the turn of the twentieth century who taught it. But what about the 350 years of Dutch

Reformed theology before the late twentieth century? Is Dutch Reformed theology from 1900-1940 the norm for our understanding of the covenant of works today?

For the sake of space, only a few major Dutch Reformed theologians will be mentioned. This article is designed to be a descriptive walk through Dutch Reformed history beginning in the mid sixteenth century. We will look Caspar Olevian (1536-87), Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), Herman Witsius (1636-1708), Wilhelmus a' Brakel (1635-1711), Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), and Louis Berkhof (1873-1957). All these influential Reformed thinkers clearly demonstrate that the covenant of works is a teaching that is not unique to Presbyterianism.

We should note that not *every* major Dutch theologian since the Reformation taught the covenant of works. At the same time, an impenetrable case can be made that the vast majority did teach it. I have tried to be as brief as possible in the following summaries. I leave it to the reader to follow these leads and look at the details of each

theologian's description of the covenant of works.

Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83)

Although Ursinus and Olevianus perhaps are not true Dutchman, so to speak, they have profoundly influenced Dutch Reformed churches through the Heidelberg Catechism. Olevianus and Ursinus are not as explicit concerning the covenant of works as the later Dutch theologians are. The concept, however, is in their writings. We probably should not expect them to have a fully developed doctrine of the covenant of works; that would be similar to expecting the first and second century church fathers to explain the doctrine of the Trinity the same way that the sixth century church fathers did. In other words, it would be wrong to think that this doctrine should be mature at birth, so to speak. With this in mind, it is difficult for one to read Ursinus and Olevianus and not see the idea of a legal covenant with Adam before the fall.

Olevianus' doctrine of the pre-fall covenant God made with Adam is closely tied to the reformer's distinction between the law and the gospel. There was no gospel before the fall. The condition of the cov-

Even after the fall God “promises eternal life on the condition that I keep the law perfectly my whole life long.”

-- Casper Olevianus

The law contains “a promise of reward in case of obedience,” and a threat of “punishment in case of disobedience.”

--Zacharias Ursinus

enant was “do this, and live.” The pre-fall covenant, similar to the Mosaic covenant, required perfect obedience that is rewarded with life. Olevianus said that if Adam had willed, he “could have remained in the righteousness of the law.” In a short catechism Olevianus wrote, he noted that even after the fall God “promises eternal life on the condition that I keep the law perfectly my whole life long.” However, Adam failed and we fail; this is where the gospel shines through. This is the gospel, that Christ kept the law that Adam broke and merited salvation for the elect. He also, of course, paid for the sin into which Adam brought humanity.

Ursinus was similar to Olevianus. They agreed on this issue of the works principle. There was no gospel before the fall; there was, however, law. In his larger catechism, Ursinus wrote, “What does the divine law teach you?” Answer: “What kind of a covenant God entered into with man at the creation and how man behaved in the keeping of that covenant.” In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus wrote that God requires perfect obedience for eternal life. The law contains “a promise of reward in case of obedience,” and a threat of “punishment in case of disobedience.” Along with Olevianus, Ursinus made the law/

gospel distinction which closely tied into the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

In speaking of obedience and reward, Ursinus directed the Christian away from his own works to the works of Jesus Christ. Christians embrace the obedience of Christ by faith, obedience which He has performed on behalf of His people. Jesus’ obedience to the law was perfect. Ursinus did not shrink back from speaking of the merits of Christ. Jesus’ obedience was rewarded with life and all sorts of blessings. Perfect obedience – Ursinus knew this well – is required for eternal life. Jesus kept the law and merited eternal life for His people.

Herman Witsius (1636-1708)

Herman Witsius, born in West Friesland in 1636, was another very influential Dutch Reformed theologian. Witsius was ordained in 1657, when he began his career in the ministry. He served several churches in Holland until he went on to teach at the universities of

Franeker, Utrecht and Leyden. J. I. Packer suggested that Witsius’ writings have “landmark status as summing up a whole era” of Reformed theology. Scholars have repeatedly cited Witsius’ literature on the covenant of works. His popular four-volume work, entitled *Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, clearly explains the covenant that God made with Adam before the fall as a covenant of works.

After discussing the term and concept of covenant in Scripture, Witsius began his detailed discussion with the covenant of works. Adam was the head, or representative, of the entire human race. God promised eternal life and happiness to Adam “if he yielded obedience to all His commands.” On the other hand, punishment was threatened for disobedience. This law that God gave Adam in the garden “is the same in substance with the Decalogue.” Witsius agrees with the tradition before him by noting that perfect obedience is required for salvation.

What kind of covenant would it have been if there were no reward for Adam’s obedience? Witsius asks. Adam did not have the highest or most blessed life before the fall; there was more in store for humanity than a pre-fall garden. What Adam needed was perfect obedience to God’s covenantal

What kind of covenant would it have been if there were no reward for Adam’s obedience?

--Herman Witsius

command. God, who is just, would reward this perfect obedience.

“We must affirm,” wrote Witsius, “that the obedience of Christ was accomplished by Him in our room [in our stead], in order thereby to obtain for us a right to eternal life.” The law admits none to heavenly glory except on the condition of perfect obedience. The gospel is that Christ performed this perfect obedience, and bestows His earned blessings upon His people.

**Wilhelmus a’ Brakel
(1635-1711)**

Wilhelmus a’ Brakel was a very influential, respected, and well known Dutch Reformed theologian. To many scholars, he represents the Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*) near the end of the seventeenth century. After pastoring congregations in Friesland and Rotterdam, a’ Brakel wrote a four-volume systematic and practical theology that was dedicated to the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. a’ Brakel published this four-volume work in 1700 and it was edited and reprinted twenty times in the eighteenth century alone. His work is still respected by many in Dutch Reformed churches. Suffice it to say a’ Brakel was a major figure in the Dutch Reformed church.

“Acquaintance with this covenant [the covenant of works],” a’ Brakel

***The doctrine of the covenant of works is based on
Scripture and is eminently valuable.***

--Herman Bavink

wrote, “is of the greatest importance, for whoever...denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus.” What is the covenant of works? a’ Brakel defined it as an agreement between God and Adam, the federal head of the human race. God promised Adam eternal salvation upon the condition of obedience and threatened eternal death for disobedience.

The law that God gave Adam in this covenant it is identical in content to the Ten Commandments. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam’s test to see if he would fail or prevail. Even among heathen men, a’ Brakel noted, there is the notion of reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience. Furthermore, as well as other texts which discuss the fact that perfect obedience to God’s law is rewarded with life, a’ Brakel quoted Jesus’ discussion with the young man in Matthew 19:16-17. The young man asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Jesus replied, “If you want to enter life, keep the com-

mandments.” a’ Brakel also highlighted other texts which highlight life for obedience (Lev. 18:5, Rom. 7:10, Ps. 19:11, etc).

a’ Brakel wrote more on the covenant of works, to be sure. For him it was a necessary Reformed doctrine that was of vital importance for the whole of one’s theology. Practically speaking, a’ Brakel wrote that this doctrine amplifies our sins and compels us to look away from trying to keep it because we are steeped in sin. Since we are often inclined to dwell upon our works as Christians, the covenant of works makes us look away from our works to the covenant of grace. Jesus is the mediator of the covenant of grace who not only bore the sins of the elect but also obeyed the law on their behalf, thus earning salvation for them. Not our works, but Jesus’ works are what merit eternal life. a’ Brakel was clear that those who deny the covenant of works very quickly “deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to life for the elect.”

Herman Bavink (1854-1921)

Most likely the name of this Dutch Reformed theologian who took Abraham Kuyper’s chair at the Free University of Amsterdam around the turn of the twentieth century is familiar to many of us. Bavink was and remains a giant in Dutch Reformed orthodoxy. As the theologians we have already ob-

***“Whoever...denies the existence of the covenant of
works, will not understand the covenant of
grace”***

-- Wilhelmus a’ Brakel

The covenant of grace, insofar as it was made with Christ, was essentially a covenant of works.

--Herman Bavinck

served, Bavinck was not ambiguous as he spoke of the covenant of works: “The doctrine of the covenant of works is based on Scripture and is eminently valuable.”

Adam’s position in the garden was provisional and temporary: it either had to “pass on to higher glory or to sin and death.” The penalty for transgressing the covenant of works was death; the reward for keeping it was eternal life. Following a’ Brakel, Bavinck closely tied the covenant of works with the covenant at Sinai. The covenant God made with Adam before the fall and with Israel after the fall was one that conveyed eternal life upon the condition of perfect obedience.

Bavinck traces the covenant of works from the early church fathers in seminal form to the Reformation, including the Belgic Confession (articles 14 & 15), the Heidelberg Catechism (Q/A 6-11), and the Helvetic Consensus Formula of 1675. A strong emphasis of Bavinck’s is the reward involved in keeping this covenant. God created Adam and Eve and showed them “their destiny and the only way in which they could reach it:” by obedience.

Bavinck took it for granted that Reformed theology teaches that “the covenant of grace, insofar as it was made with Christ, was essen-

tially a covenant of works.” The covenant of works for Bavinck is one of the main doctrines that separates the Reformed church from Rome and the Lutheran church: Adam needed no superadded gift before the fall nor was his state in Paradise the highest ideal. There was something more for Adam right from the beginning; obedience leads to it, eternal life. After the fall, this covenant way of life is still binding, yet no one can perfectly and perpetually keep it because we are so plagued by sin. Bavinck actually said that Arminius upheld the idea that after the fall, man was no longer obligated to obedience for life. In other words, Bavinck and Reformed orthodoxy say that payment for sin *and* perfect obedience are necessary for salvation after the fall. This Arminius denied by saying *only* payment for sin is necessary.

Bavinck knew the importance of the covenant of works: “The covenant of works and the covenant of grace stand and fall together.” Similarly, “If there were no covenant of works, neither would there be a covenant of grace.” Indeed, the first Adam failed and plunged humanity into the depths of depravity. The gospel is that we have a second Adam who prevailed. He humbled Himself and willingly stooped to be under the law which brings life for obedience and death for disobedience. Not only

did he pay for the sins of His people; He also obeyed the covenant commands of God and thus merited eternal life for His people.

Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)

As with Bavinck, Berkhof is very well known in Dutch Reformed churches. His *Systematic Theology* has been translated into several languages and has been influential in many denominations and seminaries for over fifty years. He is a giant in twentieth century theology. By now, perhaps the descriptions of the covenant of works seem repetitious. Without a doubt, they are. Clearly, the same concepts and terms come up repeatedly as we observe Dutch theology from about 1550 to 1950.

Berkhof follows traditional Dutch Reformed orthodoxy on the covenant of works. While briefly discussing the history of the doctrine, he noted that at one time in the Netherlands a denial of the covenant of works was considered a heresy. In the final edition of his *Systematic Theology* in the 1940’s, Berkhof wrote that many denied the covenant of works, one of the first major Dutch theologians to make such an observation. Thus, he set out to provide a thoroughly biblical definition and defense of it. Although the opening chapters of Genesis do not use the term “covenant,” Berkhof agreed with the traditional Dutch Reformed understanding that all the elements of a covenant are present in the Genesis narrative.

In the covenant of works, Adam was the federal head of all humanity who was temporarily put on pro-

bation. The covenant stipulations of life for obedience and death for disobedience were active in this pre-fall covenant. “This covenant,” wrote Berkhof, “enabled Adam to obtain eternal life for himself and for his descendants in the way of obedience.” Adam was not yet in the highest and most blissful state: he was still able to sin before the fall. What he needed was obedience; he needed to pass the probationary period. Berkhof is not novel or new when he speaks of the covenant of works – he is simply following the Dutchmen who went before him.

As with the above Dutch Reformed theologians, Berkhof taught that the law before the fall was “undoubtedly like the ten commandments.” Humans are obligated to keep this law perfectly in order to live. No mere human after the fall, however, can perfectly keep God’s commands or pay for his own sin. Thus Christ, the last Adam, steps in. “Christ met the condition of the covenant of works;” as a result, He has merited life for His people. Jesus obeyed and paid. The last Adam prevailed where the first failed.

Conclusion

These influential Dutch Reformed theologians spanning nearly 400 years vigorously upheld the doctrine of the covenant of works. The covenant of works is not simply a Presbyterian doctrine. No one can call the covenant of works a “new thing” in Dutch Reformed theology, nor can they accuse any who hold to the covenant of works of being out of line with mainstream Reformed orthodoxy. Actually, one might make a solid argument that a

denial of the covenant of works is the new and minority position in our tradition.

Interestingly, those within the Dutch tradition who have reformulated or denied the covenant of works have had little influence outside of their respective circles. The most notable are Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965), Simon de Graaf (1889-1955), Klaas Schilder (1890-1952), Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988), and G. C. Berkouwer (1903-1996). These five, we must add, are quite recent theologians in Dutch Reformed history. While these men may have been important in their day, none of them have been as influential as the above named theologians.

This article is more descriptive than prescriptive, yet perhaps the reader will bear with me to end with some practical observations and comments. First, it is necessary for those of us who uphold and defend the Three Forms of Unity to admit that the covenant of works is neither a Roman Catholic nor an Arminian construction. We must be honest with all this church history and openly declare that it is thoroughly a Reformed—even *Dutch Reformed*—doctrine.

Secondly, those who deny the covenant of works must not ignore Dutch Reformed theology that precedes the late nineteenth century. To paraphrase what Geerhardus

Vos wrote in 1891, if one has the “historical sense” to be able to separate the mature development of a doctrine from its beginnings, there should be no trouble in recognizing the “covenant of works as an old Reformed doctrine.” The covenant of works flows through the veins of Dutch Reformed churches; this much is clear.

Finally, the present day opponents of the covenant of works have to be careful when attacking it. By calling it an unscriptural theory, Arminian construction, or medieval Roman Catholic doctrine, one indicts the above Dutch theologians. I trust no one who loves the confessions would want to accuse any of the above theologians as being anything but confessional, orthodox, and Reformed.

To conclude on a practical note, as a’ Brakel and Bavinck indicated, the covenant of works directs us away from our own works and drives us to trust in the works of another, the second Adam, Jesus Christ. He has merited salvation for the elect and paid for their sins. Jesus has agreed to the stipulations of the covenant of works: “Do this and live” applied to the last Adam, the true Israel, Jesus Christ. Praise God that Jesus has obeyed and paid, that our salvation depends not upon our merit, but on His. Jesus has done this and lives; therefore, we live with Him. Praise God that where we have failed, He has pre-

***Christ met the condition of the covenant of works;
as a result, He has merited life for His people.***

--Louis Berkhof

vailed and covered our sins with His sacrifice. It is clear why both a' Brakel and Bavinck understood that a denial of the covenant of works can quickly lead to a misunderstanding or denial of the covenant of grace, of the gospel. After all, without Jesus' perfect obedience to the law credited to our account, how could we stand righteous before God?

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The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for an administrator with some teaching responsibilities for the 2007-2008 school year. RHCS is a K-12 Christian school with approximately 60 students. We are in our 15th year as an Association of parents of various Reformed denominations. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, Biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Interested candidates should send a cover letter and resume to: Paul Vander Berg, chairman, Education Committee
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Looking Above

A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 9:1-12

The Fifth Trumpet

With good reason the eagle sounded the warning in 8:13, “And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’” The eagle sounds the warning loud and clear: things are going to get worse!

We have heard the trumpet blasts of the first four trumpets, and have taken them as a composite picture of all the natural disasters that have occurred in the world from the time of Christ’s first coming to the time of His return. In other words, the first four trumpets have in view all of the storms, the tornadoes, the hurricanes, the earthquakes, the floods, the monsoons, the fires, as well as all other forms of natural disasters known to man, that have occurred from the time of Christ’s coming until the time of His return.

Revelation 8 makes it abundantly clear: these “natural” disasters issue forth from the throne of God as so many trumpet blasts. The intent of these “natural” disasters—these trumpet blasts—is to warn an unrepentant and unbelieving world. With each storm, each tornado, each hurricane, each earthquake, God is proclaiming loudly and clearly that the Day is coming when the creation shall be undone, when the heavens and the earth shall be

shaken and melted in the fire. The Day of the Lord shall be great and fearful indeed!

Now, in Revelation 9:1-12, we move on to the fifth trumpet blast, a trumpet blast that has in view not the created order, but man himself. Whereas the first four trumpet blasts touched creation, even shaking creation itself, the fifth trumpet blast touches man, and is intended to shake him. What we are about to see is terrifying and horrific!

The Fallen Angel

The setting is given in verse 1. “The fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit...”

The fifth angel raises the trumpet to his mouth; he sounds forth his trumpet blast, and John sees a star fall from heaven to earth. In view here is not a natural star in the sky falling to the earth. For notice, to this “star” is given a key. The language suggests a person: “To *him* was given the key...” This person to whom the key is given is identified as one who has fallen from heaven to earth. This “fallen star” can be none other than Satan himself. Christ once said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:17). Satan is cast down from heaven to earth, and the key to the bottomless pit is given to him. And

with the key he opens the bottomless pit.

And now we see the horrors that arise out of that bottomless pit. From hell rise the judgments that lie within. Those judgments that are carried out within the demonic realm, even in hell itself, are now unleashed and are visited upon the inhabitants of the earth. And what horrific judgments they are, as we see in verses 2-11.

We read of smoke, verse 2: “And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.” The bottomless pit is opened, and the yawning abyss belches forth its putrid smoke. As that fire of hell is unquenchable, so the smoke from that fire rises forever. The torments of hell stemming from the judgments that lie within, now begin to make themselves felt upon the inhabitants of the earth. They do not see the light of day; the smoke of hell has darkened it. They do not breathe fresh air; the smoke of hell has polluted it.

The Locusts

The smoke is only a cloud to hide for a few moments the terrors that dwell within: “Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power” (v. 3). The hordes of hell are pictured here, and they are pictured in terms of locusts. Here are Satan’s minions. They have power; their power is likened to that of scorpions.

These locusts are no ordinary locusts. While the locusts of earth

Make no mistake; these locusts have come for battle; not physical battle, to be sure, but spiritual battle.

devour vegetation, the locusts from hell have no interest in vegetation, their interest is man! “They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:4).

Here is the harm they bring: “And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man” (v. 5). These locusts will not kill man, they will only torment man. The torment they bring is likened to that of a scorpion, a sting that causes untold pain and suffering, but not death.

Lest you make light of such torment, rejoicing that these locusts cannot kill, then consider the effect of the torment that they bring: “In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them” (v. 6). Can you imagine a picture so terrible? So terrible is the torment visited upon man by these hordes of hell—so painful the sting of these hellish locusts—man runs to and fro seeking death. He wants to die. He wants to end life here on earth. He desires death. But the one thing he wants flees from him. He looks everywhere for death, but he cannot find it. His desire is not fulfilled. He cannot die!

As terrible and disturbing as the vision has been to this point, it gets worse in verses 7-10. Here the hellish locusts are described for us:

“The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle.” Make no mistake; these locusts have come for battle; not physical battle, to be sure, but spiritual battle. They are like horses prepared for battle. They are ready for the charge, ready for the battle.

“On their heads were crowns of something like gold.” So confident are they of victory, they wear crowns before the battle. With these gold-like crowns they intimidate and weaken their victims, for who can stand against an army so confident of victory and triumph? But notice, their crowns are only gold-like. Their golden crowns are a mere imitation at best.

“Their faces were like the faces of men.” What a horrific description! As their victims look upon them, they see, much to their own horror, the faces of men: they see themselves! And these locusts are grotesque beyond description, for while they have the faces of men, they “had hair like women’s hair.” What a sick and disgusting picture of the hordes of hell. And still the description goes on: “Their teeth were like lion’s teeth.” While they have the teeth of the most vicious of beasts, they do not kill! Their teeth are used only to inflict agonizing wounds, terrible wounds, but not mortal wounds.

“And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle” (v. 9). They appear like

an army of chariots—an army that strikes fear in the heart of men. Who can stand before the onslaught of an army of charioteers, not to mention ones that have breastplates of iron?

“They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months” (v. 10). Here is the way they use their tails: to sting men, and to hurt them for five months. What is the significance of the five months? It is this: an ordinary plague of locusts would devour everything in sight, and then move on after a matter of *days*. These hellish locusts, however, remain for *five months*. The number is not literal; it is intended to communicate the severity and length of torment.

Such is the army of hellish locusts sent with the torments and judgments of hell upon the inhabitants of the earth. But we have yet to meet the fiercest of them all: their leader and their king. Note verse 11: “And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.” The king of these hellish locusts is the angel of the bottomless pit, the king of the abyss. His name is given in Hebrew and Greek because he is known universally. His name in Hebrew: Abaddon. His name in Greek: Apollyon. His name translated into English: Destroyer. Do you know the identity of their leader? Do you know the identity of their king (who is really no king at all)? Satan.

This, then, is the vision given to you in the fifth trumpet. The hordes of hell are unleashed to inflict the inhabitants of the earth with torment and pain.

Yet this is only a warning! We are still dealing with the trumpets, after all. Final judgment is not yet in view. Final torment is not yet in view. That this is only a warning of things to come is evident from verse 12, "One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things." As hard as it is to imagine, it is going to get worse!

Now, the challenge in all of this is that we do not read these things chronologically, as though the first four trumpets must be brought to completion before the fifth trumpet can sound. No, even as the first four trumpets have been sounding from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of His return, so the fifth trumpet has been sounding from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of His return. In other words, even now Satan and his minions are at work; and they are increasingly at work. As the great day of the Lord grows closer in time, the activity of Satan and his hellish hordes grows all the more intense. Even now Satan is prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Even now Satan is masquerading as an angel of light to deceive many and bring them into his realm of darkness. Even now Satan is sending forth his hellish hordes to carry out his devilish tasks.

Satan's Intent

In Revelation 9:1-12, you are given a picture of Satan's true intent. Here you are given a picture of the conspiracy that is Satan's. Note the identity of the ones whom he attacks.

Note the identity of the ones whom his hellish locusts torment. Note the identity of the ones whom his hordes hurt. Verse 4: "They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men *who do not have the seal of God on their forehead.*" Satan harms not those who are sealed by God. Satan harms his own; he harms the enemies of God, Christ and the church. Satan torments his own.

He enlists them in his service, promising them a place with him. "Better to reign in hell, than to serve in heaven" is Satan's lie. Remember the picture he painted of God before the woman: "You shall be like God!" In other words, "God is oppressing you; He has it out for you, but I have in view that which is best for you. I am your liberator; I am the one who will bring you true freedom. Listen to my word, and you can reign with me!" This is the promise Satan holds out, and yet what does he ultimately have in view? The torment and the torture of all the damned! He wants you to be like him! That is the lie of Satan!

He is rightly named Abaddon, Apollyon, Destroyer; he is the direct antithesis of Savior. He does not have in view your salvation. He has in view your destruction, eternal destruction. He wants to bring the torments of hell upon you: he wants you with himself, ever dying, but never dead! He wants you in the outer darkness with him! He wants to gnash his teeth against you! He wants you weeping forever!

He wants smoke to ascend from your flesh as it is burned with the unquenchable fire! He wants to unleash the gnawing worm upon you! It is with good reason that the Legion of demons begged Jesus that He would not command them to go out into the abyss (Luke 8:31); they knew something of the torments of that place, and they did not want to go there!

Here then is a most solemn warning. Jesus, through His servant John, would have you stand on the brink of the yawning abyss. He would have you stand here at the precipice of the fires of hell. Do you entertain the lies of the Devil? Do you play games with Satan? Do you consider enlistment in his army? Then consider yourself warned!

Revelation 9:1-12 is intended to disturb you; it is intended to terrify you; as a trumpet blast, it is intended to warn you. But there is also comfort here for the saints of God. For even as we stand here on the precipice of the fires of hell, always in view is heaven. And in heaven there is a throne, and there is One who sits on that throne. And the One who sits on that throne holds the keys of Hades and of Death (1:18). The One who sits on that throne is Christ. And please note it is Christ who gives the key to the bottomless pit to Satan. Satan is under the control of Christ. Satan has no authority except that which is given to him by Christ. To be sure, Satan can do much destruction, but only where Christ has allowed it. And where has Christ allowed the Destroyer to do his work? Only upon those who are not sealed by God.

In other words, Satan cannot touch you. His minions cannot touch you.

In Revelation 9:1-12, you are given a picture of Satan's true intent.

The judgments described here in Revelation 9:1-12 will never fall upon you! And what is your confidence of that?! The judgments of hell will not fall upon you because Christ has stood in your place and summoned those judgments to fall upon Himself in your place! At the cross Christ entered in to the agonies and torments of hell. Hell ascended to meet Him at the cross, bringing upon Him the unquenchable fire, the gnawing worm, the unending tears, the gnashing of teeth. And even as He was enshrouded in darkness on the cross so that no eye could see the torments of hell, so here, in Revelation 9:1-12, the agonies and torments of hell are pictured only in terms of a vision so that no eye can see the true torments of hell. But then consider this: while what has been described to you here is symbolic, the reality is far worse!

Do you begin to understand that from which you have been saved? Do you begin to understand what your Savior has taken in your place? Indeed, as you hear the eagle screech of impending woes and judgment, may you rejoice and find comfort in your Savior, who has borne you up on eagles' wings, and who has saved you from the terror and agony of hell!

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The New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (Part Seven)

Paedocommunion: Concluding Observations

In the course of my treatment of the subject of paedocommunion, I have considered the principal arguments of advocates of paedocommunion and found them unpersuasive. Despite the insistence of paedocommunionists that the Reformed churches have failed to recognize the implications of the inclusion of the children of believing parents in the covenant, I have argued that the Reformed view represents a coherent and biblical understanding of the way the sacraments are to be administered. In our review of the biblical evidence regarding the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and its proper administration, we have also seen that the traditional requirement of the church—that covenant children profess their faith before being admitted to the Lord's Table—is a proper and necessary application of biblical principles.

On the basis of the findings of my previous articles on paedocommunion, I would like to conclude with a number of observations that summarize the argument in favor of the historic practice of the Reformed churches. The purpose of these observations is not to repeat all the particulars of the arguments of previous articles, but to offer a succinct summary of the case we have presented. After summarizing the arguments that I have adduced in this series of articles, I will also offer in

a subsequent article a few comments on the aberrant covenant theology that constitutes the principal occasion for the contemporary advocacy of paedocommunion.

The Relative Weight of Scripture, Confession and Historic Practice

Throughout the course of my evaluation of the paedocommunion position, I have emphasized that one of the most important features of the contemporary debate regarding paedocommunion is the relative weight that is granted to Scripture, the church's confessions, and the historic practice of the churches. If an answer to the question of paedocommunion is to be given, it must be based upon an evaluation of all the biblical, confessional, and historical evidence. Furthermore, these distinct kinds of evidence must be distinguished in terms of their relative importance and normativity.

For example, the answer to the question whether covenant children should be admitted to the Lord's Table ultimately depends upon a careful reading of the Scriptures. Though the historical practice of the church, and in particular the summary of Scriptural teaching set forth in the confessional symbols of the Reformed churches, are important considerations in determining an answer to this question, these are not finally normative for the

church's faith and practice. The reformational principle of *sola Scriptura* requires that we be prepared to address this question in a fresh way, and upon the basis of a renewed study of the Scriptures. The ultimate resolution of the debate regarding who should be admitted to the Table of the Lord may not be determined solely by an appeal to history, or even the summary of Scriptural teaching that is provided in the church's historic confessions. Consequently, a satisfactory evaluation of the argument for paedocommunion must carefully interact with the arguments from Scripture that paedocommunionists often adduce. It is not enough to answer the case for paedocommunion by appealing to the confessions of the church or historical practice.

Though the confessions of the Reformed churches are subordinate to Scripture, it should be noted that some contemporary advocates of paedocommunion underestimate the extent to which the confessions' summary of Scriptural teaching militates against the paedocommunion position. In the historic confessions of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, a number of articles clearly suggest that admission to the Lord's Table demands a prior profession of faith, which is necessary to attest the presence of the kind of faith that is able to remember, proclaim, and discern the body of Christ in the sacrament. These articles include: the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. & A.'s 171, 173, 174 & 177; the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 29.7; the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 81; and the Belgic Confession, Article 35. Though some paedocommunionists maintain

that an advocate of paedocommunion could justifiably appeal to the confessions in support of his position, this claim does not comport with the language of the confessions or the historical practice of the Reformed churches, which represents an application of their teaching. The burden of proof that is required of advocates of paedocommunion, therefore, includes not only the need to provide a Scriptural case for the admission of covenant children to the Lord's Table, but also to show how these confessional affirmations are not a faithful summary of Scriptural teaching.

The Historical Evidence

Advocates of paedocommunion often confidently assert that this practice best conforms to the ancient practice of the church. Just as the biblical case for paedobaptism is bolstered by a consideration of the evidence available from church history, so the case for paedocommunion enjoys the sanction of history as well. However, a careful study of church history indicates that this confidence is unwarranted. The evidence from church history for paedocommunion is at best ambiguous. Furthermore, if the evidence from the confessions and history of the Reformed churches from the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation is included, the paedocommunion case from history becomes even more tenuous. Contrary to the claims of some paedocommunionists, the historical evidence that paedocommunion was the earliest, and universal, practice of the Christian church, is at best uncertain. In our study of the historical evidence, we reached the following conclusions.

First, the testimony to the practice of paedocommunion in the antiquity of the church does not compare to that for the practice of paedobaptism. The evidence for paedocommunion warrants only the inference that it was a practice introduced into some sectors of the church by the middle of the third century. However, there is earlier third-century evidence that indicates that paedocommunion may have been an innovation when it was first introduced.

Second, by the time of Augustine and thereafter, the practice of paedocommunion became increasingly widespread in the Eastern and Western branches of the church. The practice of paedocommunion in the Eastern church, which continues to the present, was established during this period. The practice of paedocommunion in the Western church became the prevalent one until the twelfth century. However, even in this period the practice of paedocommunion was never as universal in the West as it was in the East.

Third, any evaluation of the widespread practice of paedocommunion in the church during the period prior to the high Middle Ages and the Reformation must take note of the diverse reasons offered to encourage or to discourage this practice. An assessment of the practice of paedocommunion may not ignore, for example, the close connection between a growing sacramentalism, which viewed baptism as a means of granting new birth to its recipients, and the admission of children to the Lord's Table. Those who would appeal to the practice of paedocommunion in this period

have to reckon with the dubious sacramental views that encouraged the admission of children to the Table.

And fourth, the reasons for the decline of the practice of paedocommunion in the Western church are complex. Advocates of paedocommunion often cite the emergence of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the growing fear of desecrating the consecrated elements if paedocommunion continued to be practiced. They also appeal to the practice of withholding the cup from the faithful, a practice that allegedly made the participation of infants in the sacrament by means of intinction difficult, if not impossible. Though these factors may have played a role in the decline of paedocommunion, there are other factors that tend to be overlooked, for example, the long-standing conviction of the church Fathers, Augustine included, that insisted upon a believing and informed reception of the sacrament of communion. The development of the sacrament of confirmation and its association with the admission of believers to the sacrament has its roots in the earliest teaching and practice of the church.

As these conclusions indicate, the evidence for the practice of paedocommunion in the early church is mixed and not nearly as strong as that for the practice of paedobaptism. It should also be noted that the theological arguments for the practice of paedocommunion in the third and subsequent centuries are *directly relevant* to any evaluation of the historical evidence. By the standard of biblical teaching and the Re-

formed view of the sacraments, these arguments are often unbiblical and rife with a kind of *ex opere operato* (“by the work performed”) conception of sacramental efficacy.

The Confessional Evidence

In my survey of the classic confessions of the Reformed churches, I also argued that there is compelling evidence the Reformed churches believe that the Lord’s Supper ought to be administered only to professing believers. These confessions express a comprehensive understanding of the sacraments as a means whereby the grace of Christ is communicated to his people. They affirm that the children of believers, together with their parents, are recipients of the gospel promise and ought accordingly to receive the sacrament of baptism, which is a sign and seal of their incorporation into Christ and membership in the covenant community, the church. However, they also insist that such children, prior to their reception at the Table of the Lord, require instruction in the Christian faith in order that they might be prepared to receive properly the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament.

One of the basic features of the confessions’ view of the sacraments is that they are subordinate to and confirmatory of the gospel promise that is primarily communicated by means of preaching. The saving power of the gospel Word is only communicated to those in whom such faith is produced by the Holy Spirit. Because the sacraments are visible signs and seals of the gospel promise, their effectiveness, like that of the Word they visibly attest, also requires a believing

reception on the part of their beneficiaries. Just as the gospel Word is received through faith, so the sacramental pledges and seals of the gospel require faith on the part of their recipients. Though the children of believers are to be baptized, since they together with their parents are included in the covenant community, their baptism summons them to the same believing response that the gospel Word demands. Baptism (no more than the Lord’s Supper) does not work by its mere administration. It only serves to confirm and bolster faith, which is principally worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel.

In the Reformed confessions, a clear distinction is also drawn between the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Whereas baptism is a once-for-all sign and seal of incorporation into Christ and his church, the Lord’s Supper is a frequently-administered sign and seal of the gospel that nourishes faith. Because the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is designed to strengthen faith, it requires a prior attestation of the presence of such faith on the part of its recipients. Though the language may be a little misleading, the Lord’s Supper, unlike baptism, requires for its proper reception an *active* and *believing* participation in Christ. Believers are summoned at the Table of the Lord to “take, eat, remember and believe.” The purpose of the catechetical instruction of children of believing parents is to prepare them to make a credible confession of faith, which in the traditional practice of the Reformed churches is effected by means of a “public profession of faith.”

In the setting of their doctrine of the Word and sacraments, the Reformed confessions uniformly insist that only believers are to be admitted to the Table of the Lord. Participation in Christ through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper requires that believers eat and drink in the way of faith, "which is the hand and mouth of our soul" (Belgic Confession, Article 35. The most explicit statement of the confessions in respect to the question of paedocommunion, is found in the Westminster Larger Catechism. In answer to a question about the difference between the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Larger Catechism states:

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper differ, in that Baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's Supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves. (Q. & A. 177)

Admittedly, the Reformed confessions do not stipulate a particular age at which such a profession should be made. Nor do they spell out in detail the kind of instruction in the faith that ought ordinarily to precede a mature profession of faith and admission to the Lord's Table. However, they clearly insist, in keeping with the nature of the sacraments in general and of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in particular, that the pathway from

the baptismal font to the Lord's Table requires a confirmation of the baptized believer's embrace of the promise of the gospel.

The Scriptural Evidence

Since the heart of the debate regarding paedocommunion focuses upon exegetical considerations, my treatment of the biblical evidence constitutes the most important part of the case in favor of the historic position of the Reformed churches. The biblical evidence that we considered was primarily of two kinds. The first of these addresses the subject of the Old Testament precedents for the participation of children in various covenant meals, especially the Passover feast. The second of these addresses the subject of the New Testament's teaching regarding participation in the Lord's Supper, especially in a passage like 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

No Real Old Testament Precedents for Paedocommunion

Proponents of paedocommunion often cite a number of Old Testament precedents for paedocommunion. The most important of these is the inclusion of children in the celebration of the Passover. Since the Lord's Supper is closely linked with the Passover, the practice of including children in the Passover meal is of special significance to the paedocommunion case from the Old Testament. In evaluating the paedocommunionist appeal to the Old Testament Passover, I identified several problems with the claim that it represents a precedent for the admission of children to the Lord's Supper.

In the first place, the appeal to the Passover as a precedent for admitting children to the Lord's Supper tends to minimize the important differences between the administration of the old and new covenants. Though the Lord's Supper was instituted on the occasion of a Passover celebration, there are a number of important differences between these two rites. Since the administration of the Lord's Supper belongs to the new covenant economy, it must be governed primarily by the stipulations of the New Testament Scriptures. Advocates of paedocommunion often overstate the similarities between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, and fail to reckon with the implications of the New Testament's teaching for determining who should be admitted to the Supper.

Even were we to grant a significant degree of similarity between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, there are several features of the Old Testament practice regarding the Passover that do not support the claims of paedocommunionists. In our study, we noted the following such features.

First, there is an important distinction between the first and subsequent celebrations of the Passover. Whereas the first Passover in Egypt was clearly a household celebration, the stipulations for later celebrations of the Passover require that it and the other two pilgrim feasts (Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Weeks) be kept only by the male members of the covenant community (Deut. 16:16; Ex. 23:17; 34:23). Though the stipulation that only circumcised men of the covenant community keep the Passover at the central

sanctuary in Jerusalem does not expressly exclude the participation of women and young children, it does represent a significant change in the way the Passover was to be celebrated. The Deuteronomic provisions for the annual celebration of the pilgrim Passover did not require the participation of the women and younger children of the covenant community.

Second, it is not clear that all the children of the Israelite households ate the Passover meal. This is a possible construction of the Old Testament evidence, but it is not as likely as paedocommunionists claim. Even advocates of paedocommunion are compelled to acknowledge that unweaned infants could not eat some of the elements of the Passover meal (for example, the meat). The elements of the Passover meal included roast lamb, unleavened bread (a kind of dry biscuit), and bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8ff.; Num. 9:11). While newly weaned infants and younger children might possibly be able to eat the unleavened bread, it is implausible that they could digest the roast lamb and particularly the bitter herbs.

Third, the Passover feast included, as one of its prescribed features, a kind of “catechetical” exercise. At a certain point in the Passover rite, the children of the household were to ask, “What do you mean by this service?” (Ex. 12:27). In reply to this question, the head of household was to declare, “It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck

the Egyptians but spared our houses.” The presence of this catechetical exercise in the context of the Passover rite does not by itself argue conclusively for or against the participation of infants and younger children. It does suggest, however, that the participation of children in the meal required a measure of understanding and discernment on their part.

And fourth, the historic practice of Judaism does not support the paedocommunionist claim that all members of Israelite households ordinarily participated in the Passover Feast. The history of Jewish practice teaches us that the inclusion of women and younger children in the Passover feast was not the characteristic pattern in the Old Testament economy. The practice of Israel during the Old Testament era was largely shaped by the provisions in the law for keeping the pilgrim Passover annually in Jerusalem, not the household Passover in Egypt. Only circumcised males were required to keep the Passover Feast, and preparations for the Feast included fasting and the ceremonial cleansing (cf. Num. 9:6; John 18:28) of the pilgrim celebrants. In the traditions of Judaism, an “age of discretion” was stipulated for those who kept the Passover.

In my review of the paedocommunionist argument from the Old Testament, we maintained that these problems militate against the claim that the Passover provides a sufficient precedent for the admission of children to the Lord’s Table.

The New Testament’s Teaching

The New Testament teaching regarding the Lord’s Supper can be summarized in terms of three lines of evidence: 1) the accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper; 2) the teaching of John 6, which illustrates that participation in Christ requires faith on the part of those who would be nourished by the body and blood of Christ; and 3) the important instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, which provides a clear description of the manner in which recipients are to partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Institution of the Lord’s Supper

The first piece of evidence is the language used by our Lord in the institution of the Lord’s Supper. In the Gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the Lord instructs those who celebrate the Lord’s Supper to take or receive the sacramental elements, and to do so “in remembrance” of him (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23). Participation in the Lord’s Supper occurs in response to a command, “do this,” and calls accordingly for a *responsible engagement* on the part of those who take and eat the bread, and take and drink the wine. The act of taking or receiving the sacramental signs and tokens of Christ’s body and blood is to be performed as a means of *remembering* and *believing* that Christ’s death was an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. In this respect, the communicant’s reception of Christ through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is different from the way the sacrament of baptism is

received. The Lord's Supper requires the active participation of its recipient in a way that is not required of the recipient of baptism, who in a manner of speaking is the *passive* recipient of the sacramental sign and seal of the gospel promise. The language of the words of institution requires that the church's practice conform to the principle that those who participate in the sacrament do so in responsible obedience to the Lord's command to "do this in remembrance of him."

John 6 and Participation in Christ

An important piece of evidence in the New Testament for addressing the issue of paedocommunion is John 6. Since this passage contains a long discourse by Christ on the manner in which believers partake of his body and blood, it has significant implications for how this participation is effected sacramentally. This holds true whether or not the discourse refers to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as many in Christian tradition have maintained. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a divinely-appointed means whereby its recipients enjoy a true participation in Christ's body and blood. The description of the nature of *any such participation*, which is given to us in this discourse, is, therefore, of particular significance for the question how Christ is received in the sacrament.

The implication of this passage (see esp. vv. 35, 40, 47-8, 50-51, 53-54) is expressed well in the language of the Belgic Confession, which declares that "the manner of our partaking [of Christ by means of the Lord's Supper] is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith" (Ar-

ticle 35). Without specifically citing John 6 as a proof text, the Belgic Confession echoes the teaching of Jesus' discourse, when it insists that "we ... receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life." Ordinarily, there is no communion with Christ apart from a believing appropriation of the gospel Word that declares him to be the Word become flesh for us and for our salvation. Unless the Father grant a believing response to the gospel in the hearts and minds of believers, they will not be able to come to Christ to eat his body and drink his blood. The necessary prerequisite to a full participation in Christ is this divinely-worked response of faith. If this holds true for the believer's general participation in Christ, it holds true for the believer's particular, sacramental participation in him and his saving work.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

In my treatment of the New Testament evidence, I observed that 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is the most important and decisive passage in the Scriptures for answering the question of the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper. In this passage, we have the most extensive New Testament treatment of the sacrament, and one that spells out in precise language what is required of those who, as members of the body of Christ, eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. In this passage, the apostle Paul moves from a description of a particular problem in Corinth (vv. 17-22) to the institution of the Lord's Supper (vv. 23-26) and instruction regarding proper participation in the sacrament (vv.

27-32). In doing so, the apostle offers *general* instructions that apply to *all members* of the covenant community who come to the Lord's Table. There are at least three obligations that participants of the Lord's Supper must meet when they receive the sacrament.

First, those who are admitted to the Lord's Table are enjoined to do so in the way of an active faith. Participants in the sacrament are expected to be believers whose faith is able to "remember" and "proclaim" Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross. This follows from the nature of Christ's words of institution, which place recipients of the sacrament under the obligation to come in active remembrance of Christ.

Second, recipients of the sacrament are also obliged to come only after they have "examined" themselves to ascertain whether their faith is genuine, and exhibits the normal marks of a true Christian profession. The verb Paul uses in this passage for such self-examination has the general meaning of "to test something to determine its genuineness." The closest possible parallel to what such self-examination requires is found in 2 Corinthians 13:5, where the apostle summons all believers to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith." In the Reformed tradition, the self-examination required of believers in this passage is a responsible testing to ascertain whether their faith is genuine. Believers are to come to the Table of the Lord after they have tested or examined their faith, looking for the ordinary marks that belong to a Christian profession. The marks of such faith are an ac-

knowledge of sin and its consequences, a heartfelt trust in Christ and his saving work, and a genuine desire to live gratefully in obedience to the Lord.

And third, in this passage recipients of the sacrament are also obliged to “discern” the body of Christ. Discerning the body of Christ involves a proper “recognition” or “understanding” of the body of Christ that was offered as a sacrifice for sin. Though this recognition or understanding has obvious ecclesiological implications, namely, that all who participate sacramentally in Christ are members of the one body, the church, it primarily focuses upon a right understanding of the body of the Lord represented in the sacramental elements of bread and wine. This discernment will be reflected in a pattern of conduct within the body of Christ that is consonant with the meaning of Christ’s body and blood that were given as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. Such discernment does not require an extraordinary level of sanctification or intellectual apprehension of the meaning of Christ’s body. But it does require of every participant in the sacrament that he come to the Table and partake in the way of an active faith, which is capable of remembering, proclaiming, and discerning the body of Christ.

On the basis of my understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, I concluded that it provides sufficient warrant for the historic view and practice of the Reformed churches. The children of believing parents must be instructed and nurtured in the Christian faith in order to prepare them to profess publicly the

kind of faith that is required in order to receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Such a public profession amounts to a confirmation that their participation in Christ by means of the sacrament will be an eating and drinking “with the mouth of faith.”

Conclusion

This summary of the evidence in favor of the historic practice of the Reformed churches concludes my evaluation of the paedocommunion position. Despite the claims of proponents of paedocommunion, there is no compelling historical or biblical case for overturning the church’s practice of requiring a profession of faith before admitting children of believers to the Table of the Lord. On the basis of my review of the biblical evidence, I can only conclude that the practice of the churches faithfully reflects the teaching of the Scriptures regarding what it means to partake of Christ by means of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

However, this does raise a question that I would like to pose in a subsequent article: Why are contemporary advocates of paedocommunion so adamant and persistent in their claims that all children of believing parents be admitted to the Table of the Lord without a prior profession of faith? In that article, I will propose that the principal argument for paedocommunion is not a biblical or exegetical, but a theological one. The real occasion for the contemporary push for paedocommunion in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches is a covenant theology that claims that all members of the covenant community, believers and their children,

enjoy the fullness of salvation in union with Christ. This covenant theology is often connected with a doctrine of baptismal efficacy that has more in common with historic Roman Catholicism than the Reformed faith.

Dr. Cornelis Venema is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana. He is also a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

Looking Out and About

• Dr. Timothy Trumper of Wales, and more recently of Philadelphia, has accepted the call extended to him by the Seventh Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Trumper is scheduled to be installed on Sunday, June 3, 2007.

• Six hundred registrants were in attendance at the 2007 Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology which was held at the First Christian Reformed Seminary of Byron Center, Michigan on April 20-22. The theme "The Word Above All Earthly Powers" was developed by Legon Duncan, Donald Carson, Mark Dever, and Philip Ryken.

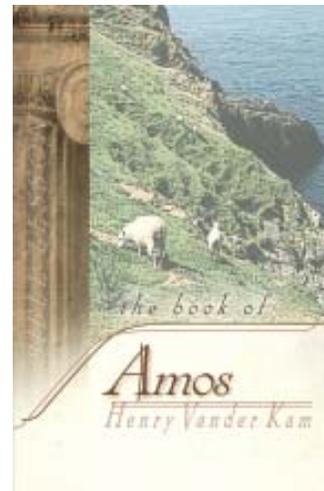
• Rev. Jacques Roets, the pastor of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa, has accepted the call extended to him by the Redeemer United Reformed Church of Dyer, Indiana. Rev. Roets will be the first pastor of the recently organized Dyer church.

• Mr. Steve Postma, a 2006 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, has accepted the call extended to him by the Eastmanville United Reformed Church in Coopersville, Michigan. Mr. Postma was installed on May 20, 2007.

• Professor Meredith G. Kline, who taught for many years at Westminster Theological Seminary at both Philadelphia and Escondido, died on April 14, 2007. Mr. Kline had also taught at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. Professor Kline was 84.

• Rev. William Vander Woerd, who has served the Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) since 1998, has accepted the call to the Covenant Reformed Church in Grande Prairie, Alberta.

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Book Review

Teellinck, Willem. *The Path of True Godliness*, tr. by Annemie Godbehere, ed. by Joel R. Beeke. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006. Reviewed by Rev. J. Wesley White.

Have you ever wished that you had a little manual to help show you how to live the Christian life? Perhaps someone to guide you through the Bible and show you what it means to live a godly life in this age? Perhaps a north star to point you in the right direction?

If so, I would highly recommend to you Willem Teellinck's (1579-1629) *The Path of True Godliness*. Teellinck's book is not only powerful and profound but also extremely readable. Jacob Koelman (1632-1695) recommended it as one of the books that you should give to your children to read, and it is also a book that is rich with insights for pastors and elders who are trying both to lead a godly life and teach others to do so.

Willem Teellinck was a leader in the Dutch Reformed Church in the 17th century promoting godliness. He emphasized that we must not only know Reformed doctrine but also live a godly life. He along with several other writers produced the spiritual classics of the Dutch Reformed Church that are only now being translated into English through the labor of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society.

Even though *The Path of True*

Godliness has been loved by many through the past centuries, a book like this is especially important in our godless and irreligious day. Everything in our society directs our attention to this present world and scoffs at those who take religion seriously. This book will help you gain your bearing as the north star does for those lost at sea or in the woods (*The North Star* was the original title in the book).

Teellinck begins his book by describing the general character of godliness. According to Teellinck, it begins with a firm resolve to live a godly life. This is a simple but yet profound point. How many of us begin every day with a resolution like the Psalmist, "I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:106)? How much would our lives change if we began with this simple resolution?

This is not a Pelagian belief in our own ability. Teellinck is quick to add that on our own we can do nothing. He writes:

Above all things of the world, we should seek to experience the power of Christ's death in order to put to death our members, which are upon the earth, and all evil desires and to feel the power of his resurrection in order to rise again in newness of life and so express the life of Christ in our own life (p. 35).

We must go to Christ and seek from Him all things and especially the ability and power to live a godly life.

Teellinck then gives an outline of the enemies that we must face in living a godly life. This is particularly important in light of the fact that today we tend to severely underestimate the enemies of the Christian, especially Satan himself.

His descriptions of Satan's attacks are particularly helpful. It is interesting to see how things that we often chalk up to modern, relativistic philosophy were just as much a problem in Teellinck's day because they are the result of Satan's deceptions in every age.

He explains how Satan seeks to get people to make false conclusions about the facts of the world. For example, we often hear today, "Everyone sins. Nobody's perfect." Teellinck says that Satan tries to get us to conclude from this fact that "we should not be too concerned about godly living." And this is the conclusion that so many draw from it! The right conclusion is that since even the best of us continues to sin, no one can be justified by works (see pp. 76-77).

Similarly, Satan points out to people that even wise men make errors and do not know the truth. Satan then tries to get us to conclude that we should not be too concerned about finding out the truth. This is, of course, the wrong conclusion. The conclusion that we should draw from the fact that all men are liars (Romans 3:4) is that "each person must deny his own opinions and subject all his thoughts to God's Word" (pp. 77-78).

In chapters 4-6, Teellinck describes what we must do to promote the kingdom of light and destroy the kingdom of darkness. To accomplish this we must understand the goal of our lives and the true purpose of life. We must be diligent to use the means God has given and conduct ourselves wisely in the use of these means.

The true purpose of life is rather simple but something we often forget. He says that the true purpose of life is to promote the glory of God, our soul's salvation, and the salvation of others. We might easily pass by this as obvious, but how often do we live as if other things such as our work, entertainment, vacations, getting our children good jobs, or any number of other things are more important?

We see this especially in the use of means. Teellinck emphasizes that if we are serious about attaining a godly life, then we will apply the means that God has given toward that end. Consider (this is my example) if a college student said he wanted to be a doctor, but he never wanted to take any biology or chemistry classes. How serious would we think he is about becoming a doctor? Similarly, if we do not make diligent use of God's promises, works, and holy ordinances to advance God's glory and our salvation, then are we really serious about wanting to be godly?

In chapter 6, Teellinck offers a great deal of practical advice on just how we can carry this out. Teellinck emphasizes that if we are going to be godly, we must have a disciplined life in which there are established times and fixed hours

for our duties. In doing this, we must follow these three guidelines. First, put God first. Second, practice mercy, which includes showing love and care to our friends and members of the Church. Third, do what is most important. He emphasizes that if we hope to accomplish something with the limited amount of time that we have, we must do what is most important first. Again, this is an obvious rule but one that is easily neglected.

There is much in this book to challenge us. If we read this book, we will find out just how far we all fall from godliness. But this is not surprising. We are often ready to recognize that we not where we should be as Christians, but we are less willing to hear about it when it comes to particular sins and sinful habits and how we can correct them. This book will help show us exactly where we are failing and how can we live a more godly life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Teellinck concludes his book with motivations for living a godly life. He especially emphasizes that we must keep our eyes focused on eternity and the goodness of God. When we consider how much God has done for us, the eternal fruit that will come from seeking after godliness, and the horrible result of rejecting godliness, we should easily be able to discern what we should do and why.

From every side today we hear that we should not worry too much about "religious matters." We are told to worry about health, vacations, houses, food, and retirement. While these things indeed have some value, they are really nothing

compared to the eternal value of godliness (1 Tim. 4:8). And this is really to say nothing more and nothing less than that our relationship with God is more important than anything else (Mt. 6:33, Dt. 6:5). This is not only a message that is profitable for Christians of all ages and conditions, but in its simplicity and readability this book is particularly well-suited to deliver that message.

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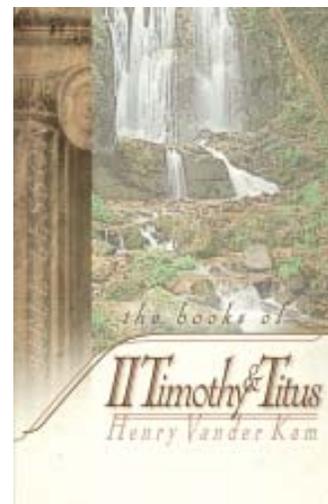
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