

the words of God to Abraham, “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7), the promise not of an Old Testament covenant that does not include New Testament believers, but the promise of one everlasting covenant sealed by the circumcision of infants in the Old Testament and the baptism of infants in the New Testament.

“But,” someone will say, “these two signs are so different in appearance that they cannot be the same.” Nevertheless, they are fundamentally the same. Both signify the removal of sin by the shedding of blood, though in the New Testament that blood must be symbolized, for no actual blood may ever be shed again, since the Lamb of God has died. Colossians 2:11-12 identifies the two for the reality of circumcision, the circumcision made without hands (from which no female is excluded), is the same as being buried and raised with Him in baptism through the faith of the operation of God.

The identity of Israel and the church means that I, a Gentile, am a true child and a descendant of Abraham, not by fleshly generation but by spiritual descent, by the same faith in Christ that Abraham had: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). As a child of Abraham, all God promised him is mine also, not those earthly things, for they were only shadows, but the true spiritual realities: Canaan, really Messiah’s land (Rom. 4:13); a city (Heb. 11:16); a seed (Gal 3:16) and all the rest. The identity of Israel and the church means that I am justified, as Abraham was, by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law (Rom. 4). There is only one way of salvation, and that is the way of free and sovereign grace.

The identity of Israel and the church means, too, that there is but one future home for both. As we have seen, to come to the true and heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, is to come to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn (Heb. 12:22-23). Abraham, who never received the inheritance of the earthly land of Canaan, “not so much as to set his foot on” (Acts 7:5), though God had said, “to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (Gen. 13:15), was content for he “desire[d] a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11:16). All those who go to that heavenly country will rest in the bosom of Abraham as Lazarus did (Luke 16:22).

The *Heidelberg Catechism’s* teaching on the unity of the church is both true and comforting: “What believest thou concerning the ‘holy catholic church’ of Christ? That the Son of God, *from the beginning to the end of the world*, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, *out of the whole human race*, a [or one] church *chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith*; and that I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof” (Q. & A. 54).

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The Church and Israel (2)

In the previous issue of the *News*, focusing on Acts 7:38, we showed that Old Testament Israel and the church of the New Testament are one people, one body. Israel, according to Acts 7:38, was “the church in the wilderness” and the New Testament church is the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:15-16). Coming in the New Testament to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn is the same as coming to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-23). When the angel shows John “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” he has a vision of the new Jerusalem “descending out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:9-10).

We should remember, as we consider the biblical identity of the two, that not all who were of Old Testament Israel were the true Israel of God (Rom. 9:6). There were those who were Jews only outwardly. Really, they were not Jews at all, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (2:28-29).

The same is true of the New Testament church. There are those who are members of the church in name, who receive the sacraments and hear the preaching, but who are merely tares among the wheat, as those sown by Satan, the arch-enemy of the church (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (I John 2:19). All of which is to say that the identity of the elect, redeemed and regenerated people of God in both testaments is that of the true Israel of God and “the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

This is of immense importance as far as the promises of the Word are concerned. If Old Testament Israel is not the church, then the promises God made to Israel are not for the church. Then, though the Old Testament may be a matter of curiosity to me, it has no application to me as a New Testament Gentile member of the church. Then the Psalms, those precious melodies, may be sweet music to my ears but the words are of no real value to me. Then my singing them or reciting them is little different from the poetry of John Keats or William Wordsworth. The rhythms may tickle my ears but they speak a different spiritual language.

It is this truth, that Israel and the church are one, that makes the promise of God concerning children applicable to New Testament Christians. Then, and only then, are

(continued on p. 4)

Adam's Federal Headship and Common Grace?

A friend forwarded the following to me from one of his theological opponents: "You believe in creation ordinances. Don't you also believe that Adam was the federal head of humanity (of the reprobate as well as the elect)? Yet Genesis 1:28 says that God 'blessed' that federal head of all men, implying that all mankind in him (including the reprobate) partook of that blessing and favour of God. The rest of this verse mentions the privileges of (1) marriage, (2) having children and (3) exercising dominion over the earth as part of this general blessing upon the federal head."

Right at the start of our response, we need to consider the significance of Adam's federal or covenant headship, as the first man and one who represented the human race. What does Adam's federal headship include and what does it not include?

Like the animals and birds before the fall, Adam did not eat meat (29-30). Since he is the covenant head of humanity, should everyone be vegetarian? The first and representative man was commanded to cultivate the Garden of Eden (2:15). Does this require or imply that all work as gardeners? Prior to his sin, Adam, our federal head, did not wear clothes (25). Ought everybody be a nudist, therefore?

I would anticipate that you, dear reader, are somewhat puzzled by the (specious) reasoning of the previous paragraph. You sense that the answer to all three of the questions is, "No!" However, you may not be sure why this is the correct response, though you probably think that, with some time, you could come up with the proper explanation.

This underscores the point that the Bible itself must tell us what is, and so what is not, included in Adam's covenant headship. The answer is at hand, for Scripture treats this topic definitively and at some length in Romans 5:12-21.

"One" man (12, 15, 16, 17, 19), namely, Adam (14), was constituted by God as a federal head—over against Christ, the other federal head (14-19), whom he typifies (14). More specifically, the one man, Adam, represented us in his one and singular act, referred to as his "transgression" (14), "offence" (15, 17, 18) or "disobedience" (19), namely, his eating the forbidden fruit and not any of the subsequent sins he committed during his long life of 930 years (Gen. 5:5). All of humanity, Christ only excepted, "sinned" in Adam (Rom. 5:12), and have thus fallen under God's judgment (16) and condemnation (16, 18), causing us to be totally depraved by nature (Ps. 51:5). This is the unique, astounding and humbling Christian doctrine of original sin.

There is a second biblical passage that presents Adam's covenant headship, again contrasted, as to its results, with Christ as the federal representative of His own: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:21-22).

One might think, at first blush, that mankind receives two (unrelated) things through Adam's headship, with Romans 5 teaching that we *sinned* in Adam and I Corinthians 15 declaring that we *died* in him. However, sin and death are intrinsically linked, for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), a point made repeatedly in Romans 5 regarding

Adam's sin and our death (14, 15, 17, 21), and stated most famously in the key text in that passage: "Wherefore, as by one man *sin* entered into the world, and *death* by *sin*; and so *death* passed upon all men, for that all have *sinned*" (12).

In short, Adam's federal headship means that sin has come upon mankind and, therefore, judgment, condemnation and death. Thus my friend's correspondent has it all wrong. Instead of humanity being "*blessed*" through Adam, our covenant representative, the human race is *cursed* in him (cf. Gal. 3:10; Rev. 22:3)!

Now we come to the creation ordinances. First, to those who are in Adam and, therefore, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), marriage, though a good thing and a privilege, is not a blessing. Potiphar's wife, Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah and Herodias were not signs or bearers of God's love to their ungodly husbands!

Second, being "the children of disobedience" (Col. 3:6) in Adam, having children is not a proof or manifestation of divine favour either. Idolatrous Sennacherib was murdered by his two wicked sons (II Kings 19:37; Isa. 37:38)! Regarding unbelieving parents and children, God declares, "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field ... Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body" (Deut. 28:16, 18).

What about, third, the earthly dominion of the ungodly? Think of profane Esau (Heb. 12:16) to whom God in His providence gave Mount Seir with much wealth and livestock (Gen. 36:6-8). Yet Jehovah "hated" him (Mal. 1:2-5), something which is true of all who are reprobate (Rom. 9:13). The Antichrist will be powerful and popular throughout the whole world (Rev. 13), being worshipped by absolutely everyone on earth, except the elect (8). But surely it is a terrible blasphemy to claim that God loves the "man of sin" and "son of perdition" (II Thess. 2:3)!

The truth is that all of Jehovah's blessings are found alone in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3), "the last Adam" (I Cor. 15:45), the other and far greater covenant head! By His sacrifice on the cross, He "redeemed us from the curse," which came through the sin of the first Adam, so that God blesses all who believe His gracious promise (Gal. 3:13-14).

As those who receive Christ's imputed righteousness and not Adam's sin (Rom. 5:16-19), and so will be gloriously resurrected (I Cor. 15:21-22), marriage and children (Ps. 128), and whatever land and possessions we may have (Deut. 28:1-14), are to us a blessing through faith and in the way of thankful obedience. This clear Christian doctrine is opposed to the anti-biblical philosophy that things are or convey God's blessing to those who are in unbelief in Adam and outside of the Lord Jesus (cf. Ps. 73; Mal. 3:15).

The quotation with which this article began shows how the theory of common grace—a temporal, changeable (and unrighteous) divine love for the ungodly reprobate apart from the Saviour and His cross—leads to a sidelining and corrupting of the biblical and confessional truth regarding the federal headship of Adam (and, therefore, also of Christ), original sin and the creation ordinances. False principles work through! Using ingenious (but fallacious) arguments, common grace claims that the reprobate wicked are cursed *and blessed* in Adam, and so are blessed in all their activities—despite their being enemies of God and Christ (Gen. 3:15)!

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