

the fact that the elect, ransomed and regenerated church is “according to the whole” of mankind in space and time. It is more accurate and helpful to refer believing the true faith to the church’s attribute of apostolicity rather than catholicity.

It is beneficial here to present some evidence for the powerful witness in God’s Word to the catholicity of the church. There are two whole Old Testament narrative books which treat catholicity as a theme from beginning to end. One is named after a woman, Ruth (from the land of Moab); the other is named after a man, Jonah (whose preaching God used to convert many in pagan Nineveh). The Old Testament poetic or wisdom book with most to say regarding catholicity is the Psalms. Among the four Major Prophets, Isaiah especially comes to mind. He wrote so much about Christ and His work that he necessarily spoke often of God’s church being gathered out of the nations through His sacrifice and power. Among the Minor Prophets, it is Zechariah that contains most predictions of the calling of the Gentiles.

Of the five historical books at the beginning of the New Testament Scriptures, it is Acts that speaks most of the church’s catholicity. The resurrected Christ’s statement to His apostles in Acts 1:8 is programmatic: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Acts 2:9-11 lists people from many countries and cities who heard the apostles preach the gospel in their own languages. Some 3,000 of them were converted and baptized on the day of Pentecost (41). In Acts 10-11, we read of the conversion of Gentile Cornelius to the faith of Jesus Christ, without his having to be circumcised or become a Jew or keep the law of Moses. These crucial issues pertaining to the catholicity of the church were treated decisively by the Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

Paul’s missionary journeys illustrate the church’s geographical catholicity. In his first missionary journey, the apostle and Barnabas are sent by the Holy Spirit and the church of Antioch in Syria (Acts 13:1-4) to Cyprus and southern parts of (what is now) Turkey, where they preach the gospel and labour to establish congregations (Acts 13-14). Paul’s second and third missionary journeys include Greece, and so see him travel from the continent of Asia to Europe in the service of the Word of Christ. After his arrest in Jerusalem and over two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (cf. Acts 24:27), the apostle is conveyed by ship across the eastern Mediterranean to Rome, the capital of the Empire.

Thus, amongst the penmen of the inspired New Testament epistles, it is Paul (rather than Peter, James, Jude or John) who writes most about the church’s catholicity, particularly in connection with the inclusion of the Gentiles. In this regard, we would point especially to his letters to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and Colossians. *Rev. Stewart*

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The Church’s Catholicity: Perspectives and Scripture

Last time, we spoke of Christ’s church in terms of its geographical, anthropological and historical catholicity. This fits with the beautiful idea of the word “catholicity”: Christ’s church is “according to the whole.” God saves the elect *world* in our Lord Jesus and not merely people from special nations or particular races or some languages or certain centuries or specific economic classes. The Triune God redeems and gathers as living members of His church all kinds of people (anthropological catholicity) in space (geographical catholicity) and time (historical catholicity).

To these three aspects or perspectives of the church’s catholicity, Roman Catholicism would (erroneously) add another: the catholicity of numbers (one could refer to this as *mathematical* catholicity!). This especially arose as part of Rome’s polemics against the Reformation. The Roman church argued that it was the true catholic church of Christ because its membership was larger than that of the Protestant churches. It is worth pointing out that, since the sixteenth century, the numerical gap between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism has narrowed.

More significantly, greater numbers are no guarantee of truth. Just ask Noah and the other seven people in the ark! Even if an error is very popular, the Word of God forbids our compliance: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil” (Ex. 23:2). The Northern Kingdom consisted of 10 of the 12 tribes, yet it was a false church. *Belgic Confession* 27 on “The Catholic Christian Church” observes that, out of the many hundreds of thousands in Israel, there were only 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (I Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4). The true church is always a remnant (e.g., Rom. 9:27; 11:5). The way to heaven is through a narrow gate and along a narrow way, with few ever finding it; whereas the gate and way to hell is wide, and many are headed there (Matt. 7:13-14).

In their polemics against Rome, some Protestants have included the catholicity of the faith under the catholicity of the church (one could call this *theological* catholicity!). The *Athanasian Creed* speaks repeatedly of the “catholic faith” (1, 3, 44) and the “catholic religion” (20). In answer to the question, “What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?” the *Heidelberg Catechism* answers, “All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our *catholic* undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us” (Q. & A. 22), before going on to quote (A. 23) and expound the truth of the *Apostles’ Creed* (Lord’s Days 8-24).

It is, indeed, true that people and churches must embrace the biblical and catholic faith to be part of the catholic church. However, belief of the catholic faith is not part of the *definition* of the catholicity of the church, for the catholicity of the church expresses

— The Differences Between the Two Versions of the Decalogue —

This month's question is: "How do you explain the differences between the two versions of the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21?"

The main differences are five, here presented in order:

(1) The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 do not begin with the words, "And God spake all these words saying ..."

(2) The fourth commandment in Exodus starts with the words, "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy," but in Deuteronomy it begins, "Keep the sabbath day, to sanctify it"—not a major difference of wording.

(3) In Deuteronomy 5, there is a long addition to the fourth commandment: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day."

(4) In Deuteronomy, the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth commandments begin with the words "Neither shalt thou ..." instead of "Thou shalt not ..." as in Exodus.

(5) In the version of the Ten Commandments recorded in Deuteronomy, the words, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's *house*, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's *wife* ..." are switched around, so that the neighbour's wife is mentioned first and his house second.

Besides these, there are only some very minor variations in wording. Difference (4), regarding the opening words of commandments 6-10, is relatively insignificant.

Difference (5) is of some importance in our polemic against Roman Catholicism. In defence of its practice of image worship, Rome combines the first two commandments (it sees no difference between idolatry and image worship). In order still to have *ten* commandments it takes "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house" as the ninth commandment and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife" as the beginning of the tenth commandment. The fact that these phrases are switched around in Deuteronomy shows that they belong to the same commandment and are not two separate commandments as Rome teaches. Nor are idolatry and image worship the same thing. In spite of what Rome says and does, image worship is wicked and forbidden by God.

Difference (1) is the result of the fact that in Exodus God Himself is reciting the Ten Commandments from the top of Sinai out of the smoke and fire upon the mount, one of the very few times that Jehovah spoke directly to His people. In Deuteronomy, God is not speaking directly but Moses is retelling the story of the giving of the law. The emphasis in Exodus is significant, though. That God spoke the words of the Ten Commandments and spoke them in the hearing of the people underlines their importance, and the fact that they are the unchangeable Word of God. Usually God spoke to Israel through Moses or others but in this case He Himself spoke. No wonder, then, that Jesus said of the law, "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

Differences (2) and (3) concern the fourth commandment regarding the sabbath. They

are the most important of all. The additions and changes in Deuteronomy's version of the Ten Commandments reflect the fact that the nation of Israel was then at the borders of the land of Canaan and ready to enter the land in fulfilment of God's promise. That land was for them the sabbath land, the land of rest (sabbath means "rest"), a picture of the rest which still remains for the people of God (Heb. 4:9), a land in which their whole life would be controlled and ordered by the weekly and yearly sabbaths.

In preparation for their entry into that land, God speaks through Moses more fully of the sabbath in Deuteronomy than He does in Exodus, a reminder to them of the important place that the sabbath would have in Israel's life and, therefore, of the important place that He would have in their lives. It is no different for us. The sabbath, now celebrated on the "Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10), reminds us both of the rest that still remains for us in heaven and of the place that God has in our lives as the One in whom we find rest for our souls. Israel heard the fourth commandment repeated by Moses, and we too are on the borders of the land that God has promised us and will soon be entering it.

The difference in the opening words of the fourth commandment is not especially important. Sanctifying the sabbath and keeping it holy are the same thing, and we remember the sabbath by keeping it holy. If anything at all stands out in the different versions of this commandment, it is the word "keep" in Deuteronomy. That word means both that the Sabbath must be guarded and that it must be observed. Few, then or now, are interested in keeping the day as a special day or in behaving differently on the day. Of all the commandments, it is the least valued and many, sadly, do not even believe it is in force for New Testament Christians.

The addition to the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy is important. One might think that the words, "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day," consign the commandment and its observance to the Old Testament, but the opposite is true.

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a foreshadowing of our deliverance from the bondage of sin and Satan, and God is speaking to us as well as to them when He says, "therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." This is taught in *Belgic Confession 34*, which speaks of the saving power of baptism (not the sign but the reality): "Not that this is effected by the external water, but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and to enter into the spiritual land of Canaan."

In Jesus Christ and by His atoning sacrifice, God has brought us out of the bondage of sin and we are on our way to the heavenly Sabbath land, the rest that still remains for the people of God. Both in thankfulness for what God has done in delivering us and in hope of that better rest, we keep the New Testament sabbath, the sabbath of the first day of the week on which our Saviour rose from the dead.

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