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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

—Exodus 25:17–22 (See also 37:6–9.)

The Mercy Seat

The second article of furniture for the tabernacle that God revealed to Moses was the mercy seat. Although the mercy seat would serve as a lid for the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat was an article of furniture in its own right, with its own special meaning and symbolism. As the lid of the ark, the mercy seat would also be in the most holy place.

The mercy seat was a rectangle of pure, solid, shining gold. On top of the mercy seat were two golden cherubim, one on the left, the other on the right, both facing the center of the mercy seat. The faces of the cherubim were bowed toward the mercy seat, and their wings were spread high over the mercy seat. The angels were not fastened to the mercy seat but were made from the very gold of the mercy seat itself, so that the mercy seat and the angels were all of one piece.

The mercy seat served as the covering of the ark of the covenant. Its dimensions matched that of the length (forty-five inches) and breadth (twenty-seven inches) of the ark so that it could be set atop the open box that was the ark and cover it. The name of the mercy seat in Hebrew literally means *a cover* or *a covering*.

The mercy seat was important in Israel's worship of Jehovah. In Moses' day the mercy seat

was the place where Jehovah met with Moses to commune with him and to give him instructions for the children of Israel (Ex. 25:22). This means that Moses was allowed to enter the holy of holies regularly. However, Aaron and all of the high priests after him were only allowed to enter the holy of holies once each year on the great day of atonement. On that day the high priest would kill a bullock and take its blood within the veil and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat seven times. He then would repeat this with the blood of a goat (Lev. 16:14–15).

It is especially in that sprinkled blood that we find the meaning of the mercy seat. The mercy seat was truly a covering! It was not named *covering* because it was the lid of a box but because it perfectly and exactly covered what was in the box: the law of God, written on stone tables and kept in the ark (Ex. 25:21). If left uncovered in the open, that law could only condemn the children of Israel as they stood before Jehovah, who appeared in the holy of holies in the cloud of his glory (Lev. 16:2). The mercy seat served to cover the law and thus to conceal the sins of God's people. But how can sins be concealed before the eyes of Jehovah, who surely does not forget the

commandments that he wrote with his own finger? Only by blood can sins be covered because only death can pay for sins. Thus the blood of atonement—the blood of covering—was sprinkled upon the mercy seat, as a type of the blood of Christ.

For the mercy seat, the covering, is Jesus Christ. God has given him as our covering through

his blood of atonement (Rom. 3:25 and I John 2:2, where *covering* is translated *propitiation*). He perfectly and beautifully obeyed the law, fulfilling it (Matt. 5:17), so that the law no longer condemns us. In the holy of holies, which is Jehovah's dwelling, behold our savior, who has covered all our sin.

—AL

THE CANONS OF DORDT

Translation Comparison: Heads 3–4, Rejection of Errors

Corrected Translation	Current Translation	Original Latin
Rejection of Errors. The orthodox doctrine having been explained, the synod rejects the errors of those:	The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod <i>rejects</i> the errors of those:	Rejectio Errorum. Exposita doctrina orthodoxa, Synodus rejicit errores eorum:
Error 1: Who teach that it cannot properly be said that original sin in itself is sufficient to condemn the whole human race, or to deserve temporal and eternal punishment.	Error 1: Who teach that it cannot properly be said that original sin in itself suffices to condemn the whole human race, or to deserve temporal and eternal punishment.	I. Qui docent, 'Proprie dici non posse, quod peccatum originis per se sufficiat toti generi humano condemnando, aut temporales et æternas pœnas promerendo.' Contradiciunt enim Apostolo, dicenti, Rom. 5:12: <i>Per unum hominem peccatum in mundum introiit, ac per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors transiit, in quo omnes peccaverunt.</i> Et vers. 16: <i>Reatus ex uno introiit ad condemnationem.</i> Item, Rom. 6:23: <i>Peccati stipendium mors est.</i>
Rejection: For they contradict the apostle, who says: <i>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</i> (Rom. 5:12). And: <i>The judgment was by one to condemnation</i> (v. 16). Also: <i>The wages of sin is death</i> (Rom. 6:23).	Rejection: For these contradict the apostle, who declares: <i>Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned</i> (Rom. 5:12). And: <i>The judgment came of one unto condemnation</i> (Rom. 5:16). And: <i>The wages of sin is death</i> (Rom. 6:23).	
Error 2: Who teach that spiritual gifts, or good characteristics and virtues, such as goodness, holiness, and righteousness, could not possibly have had a place in the will of man when he was first created, and accordingly, these could not have been separated therefrom in the fall.	Error 2: Who teach that the spiritual gifts, or the good qualities and virtues, such as goodness, holiness, righteousness, could not belong to the will of man when he was first created, and that these, therefore, could not have been separated therefrom in the fall.	II. Qui docent, 'Dona spiritualia, sive habitus bonos, et virtutes, ut sunt bonitas, sanctitas, justitia, in voluntate hominis, cum primum crearetur, locum habere non potuisse, ac proinde nec in lapsu ab ea separari.' Pugnat enim hoc cum descriptione imaginis Dei, quam Apostolus ponit Eph. 4:24;

Rejection: For this conflicts with the description of the image of God that the apostle gives in Eph. 4:24, where he defines it in terms of righteousness and holiness, which undoubtedly have their place in the will.

Error 3: Who teach that no spiritual gifts are separated from the will of man in spiritual death, since the will in itself has never been corrupted, but only hindered by the darkness of the mind and the disordering of the affections; and that, these hindrances having been removed, the will is free to exercise its own innate ability, that is, of itself it is able either to will and choose, or to not will and not choose, whatever good may be proposed to it.

Rejection: This is an innovation and an error, and demands that the powers of a free will should be extolled, contrary to the declaration of the prophet Jeremiah: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked* (Jer. 17:9); and of the apostle: *Among whom* (the children of disobedience) *also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind* (Eph. 2:3).

Error 4: Who teach that the unregenerate man is not strictly nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all capacity for spiritual good, but that he is yet able to hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and to offer the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit, which is acceptable to God.

Rejection: For such is contrary to the description of the image of God which the apostle gives in Eph. 4:24, where he declares that it consists in righteousness and holiness, which undoubtedly belong to the will.

Error 3: Who teach that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts are not separate from the will of man, since the will in itself has never been corrupted, but only hindered through the darkness of the understanding and the irregularity of the affections; and that, these hindrances having been removed, the will can then bring into operation its native powers, that is, that the will of itself is able to will and to choose, or not to will and not to choose, all manner of good which may be presented to it.

Rejection: This is an innovation and an error, and tends to elevate the powers of the free will, contrary to the declaration of the prophet: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt* (Jer. 17:9); and of the apostle: *Among whom* (sons of disobedience) *we also all once lived in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind* (Eph. 2:3).

Error 4: Who teach that the unregenerate man is not really nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God.

ubi illam describit ex justitia et sanctitate, quæ omnino in voluntate locum habent.

III. Qui docent, ‘Dona spiritualia non esse in morte spirituali ab hominis voluntate separata, cum ea in sese nunquam corrupta fuerit, sed tantum per tenebras mentis, et affectuum inordinationem impedita; quibus impedimentis sublatis, liberam suam facultatem sibi insitam exerere, id est, quodvis bonum sibi propositum ex se, aut velle, sive eligere, aut non velle, sive non eligere possit.’ Novum hoc et erroneum est, atque eo facit ut extollantur vires liberi arbitrii, contra Jeremiæ prophetæ dictum, cap. 17:9: *Fraudulentum est cor ipsum supra omnia et perversum*. Et Apostoli, Eph. 2:3: *Inter quos* (homines contumaces) *et nos omnes conversati sumus olim in cupiditatibus carnis nostræ, facientes voluntates carnis ac cogitationum*.

IV. Qui docent, ‘Hominem irregenum non esse proprie nec totaliter in peccatis mortuum, aut omnibus ad bonum spirituale viribus destitutum, sed posse justitiam vel vitam esurire ac sitire, sacrificiumque Spiritus contriti, et contribulati, quod Deo acceptum est, offerre.’ Adversantur enim hæc apertis

Rejection: For these are contrary to the plain testimony of scripture: *Who were dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5). And: *Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Besides this, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and to those that are called blessed (Ps. 51:19 and Matt. 5:6).

Error 5: Who teach that the corrupt and natural man can make such good use of common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or of the gifts still left after the fall, that he by that good use is gradually able to gain a greater grace, namely, evangelical or saving grace, as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God on his part shows himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, seeing that he sufficiently and efficiently administers to all men the means necessary for the revelation of Christ, for faith, and for repentance.

Rejection: For scripture, along with the experience of all ages, testifies that this is false. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them* (Ps. 147:19–20). *Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways* (Acts 14:16). Paul and his companions were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, and after they were come to Mysia,

Rejection: For these are contrary to the express testimony of Scripture. *Ye were dead through trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5); and: *Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Moreover, to hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery and after life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and those that are called blessed (Ps. 51:10, 19; Matt. 5:6).

Error 5: Who teach that the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, namely, the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself. And that in this way God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since He applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion.

Rejection: For the experience of all ages and the Scriptures do both testify that this is untrue. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his ordinances, they have not known them* (Ps. 147:19, 20). *Who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways* (Acts 14:16). And: *And they (Paul and his companions) having been forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia,*

Scripturæ testimoniis, Eph. 2:1, 5: *Eratis mortui in offensis et peccatis.* Et Gen. 6:5 et 8:21: *Imaginatio cogitationum cordis hominis tantummodo mala est omni die.* Adhæc liberationem ex miseria et vitam esurire ac sitire, Deoque sacrificium Spiritus contriti offerre, regenitorum est, et eorum qui beati dicuntur. Ps. 51:19 et Matt. 5:6.

V. Qui docent, ‘Hominem corruptum et animale gratia communi, quæ ipsis est lumen naturæ, sive donis post lapsum relictis, tam recte uti posse, ut bono isto usu majorem gratiam, puta evangelicam, sive salutare, et salutem ipsam gradatim obtinere possit. Et hac ratione Deum se ex parte sua paratum ostendere, ad Christum omnibus revelandum, quandoquidem media ad Christi revelationem, fidem, et resipiscentiam necessaria, omnibus sufficienter et efficaciter administret.’ Falsum enim hoc esse præter omnium temporum experientiam Scriptura testatur. Ps. 147:19, 20: *Indicat verba sua Jacobo, statuta sua et jura sua Israeli, non fecit ita ulli genti, et jura ista non noverunt.* Acts 14:16: *Deus sivit præteritis ætatibus omnes gentes suis ipsarum viis incedere.* Acts 16:6, 7: *Prohibiti sunt (Paulus cum suis) a Spiritu Sancto loqui sermonem Dei in Asia. Et, Quum venissent in Mysiam, tentabant ire versus Bithyniam, sed non permisit eis Spiritus.*

they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not (Acts 16:6–7).

Error 6: Who teach that in the true conversion of man no new qualities, characteristics, or gifts can be infused into man's will by God, so much so that even faith, by which we are first converted and on account of which we are called believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man; and that in no other respect can faith be said to be a gift, except in the power to attain it.

Rejection: For these contradict the sacred scriptures, which testify that God does infuse the new qualities of faith, of obedience, and of the consciousness of his love into our hearts. *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts* (Jer. 31:33). *For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed* (Isa. 44:3). *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Rom. 5:5). They are also repugnant to the continuous practice of the church, which prays with the prophet: *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God* (Jer. 31:18).

Error 7: Who teach that the grace whereby we are converted to God is nothing more than a gentle persuasion; or (as others explain it) that the most excellent manner for working conversion in man, which is also the most suited to human

and when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit suffered them not (Acts 16:6, 7).

Error 6: Who teach that in the true conversion of man no new qualities, powers, or gifts can be infused by God into the will, and that therefore faith, through which we are first converted and because of which we are called believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it cannot be said to be a gift, except in respect of the power to attain to this faith.

Rejection: For thereby they contradict the Holy Scriptures, which declare that God infuses new qualities of faith, of obedience, and of the consciousness of His love into our hearts: *I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it* (Jer. 31:33). *And: I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed* (Isa. 44:3). *And: The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which hath been given us* (Rom. 5:5). This is also repugnant to the continuous practice of the church, which prays by the mouth of the prophet thus: *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned* (Jer. 31:18).

Error 7: Who teach that the grace whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising, or (as others explain it) that this is the noblest manner of working in the conversion of man, and that this manner of working, which consists in

VI. Qui docent, 'In vera hominis conversione, non posse novas qualitates, habitus, seu dona in voluntatem ejus a Deo infundi, atque adeo fidem, qua primum convertimur, et a qua fideles nominamur, non esse qualitatem seu donum a Deo infusum; sed tantum actum hominis, neque aliter donum dici posse, quam respectu potestatis ad ipsam perveniendi.' Contradicunt enim hæc sacris literis, quæ testantur Deum novas qualitates fidei, obedientiæ, ac sensus amoris sui cordibus nostris infundere. Jer. 31:33: *Indam legem meam menti eorum, ac cordi eorum inscribam eam*. Isa. 44:3: *Effundam aquas super sitientem, et fluenta super aridam; effundam Spiritum meum super semen tuum*. Rom. 5:5: *Charitas Dei effusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum, qui datus est nobis*. Repugnant etiam continuæ praxi Ecclesiæ, sic apud prophetam orantis: *Converte me, Domine, et convertar*. Jer. 31:18.

VII. Qui docent, 'Gratiam, qua convertimur ad Deum, nihil aliud esse quam lenem suasionem; seu' (ut alii explicant) 'nobilissimum agendi modum in conversione hominis, et naturæ humanæ convenientissimum esse,

nature, is that which takes place by persuasions; and that nothing hinders this lesser or merely moral grace from making the natural man spiritual; indeed, that God does not bring about the consent of the will otherwise than by a moral approach; and that the efficacy of the divine working, whereby it surpasses the working of Satan, consists in this, that God promises eternal benefits, while Satan promises only temporal ones.

Rejection: This is altogether Pelagian indeed, and contrary to the entire scripture, which, besides this, recognizes yet another, far more effectual and divine manner of the Holy Spirit's working in the conversion of man. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh* (Ezek. 36:26).

Error 8: Who teach that in the regeneration of man, God does not bring to bear such powers of his omnipotence as those by which he might powerfully and infallibly bend man's will to faith and conversion; but that when all the operations of grace that God employs in man's conversion have been accomplished, man can yet so resist God, and in actual fact often does so resist God and the Spirit, who exerts himself for man's regeneration and who wills to regenerate him, that man utterly thwarts his own regeneration; and thus that it remains in man's power to be

advising, is most in harmony with man's nature; and that there is no reason why this advising grace alone should not be sufficient to make the natural man spiritual, indeed, that God does not produce the consent of the will except through this manner of advising; and that the power of the divine working, whereby it surpasses the working of Satan, consists in this, that God promises eternal, while Satan promises only temporal goods.

Rejection: But this is altogether Pelagian and contrary to the whole Scripture which, besides this, teaches yet another and far more powerful and divine manner of the Holy Spirit's working in the conversion of man, as in Ezekiel: *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh* (Ezek. 36:26).

Error 8: Who teach that God in the regeneration of man does not use such powers of His omnipotence as potently and infallibly bend man's will to faith and conversion; but that all the works of grace having been accomplished, which God employs to convert man, man may yet so resist God and the Holy Spirit when God intends man's regeneration and wills to regenerate him, and indeed that man often does so resist, that he prevents entirely his regeneration, and that it therefore remains in man's power to be regenerated or not.

qui fiat suasionibus; nihilque obstare quo minus vel sola moralis gratia homines animales reddat spirituales; imo Deum non aliter quam morali ratione consensum voluntatis producere: atque in eo consistere operationis divinæ efficaciam, qua Satanæ operationem superet, quod Deus æterna bona, Satan autem temporaria promittat.' Omnino enim hoc Pelagianum est, et universæ Scripturæ contrarium, quæ præter hunc etiam alium, et longe efficaciorum ac diviniorem Spiritus Sancti agendi modum, in hominis conversione agnoscit. Ezek. 36:26: *Dabo vobis cor meum, et spiritum novum dabo in medio vestri, et auferam cor lapideum, daboque cor carneum*, etc.

VIII. Qui docent, 'Deum in hominis regeneratione eas suæ omnipotentiae vires non adhibere, quibus voluntatem ejus ad fidem et conversionem potenter et infallibiliter flectat; sed positis omnibus gratiæ operationibus, quibus Deus ad hominem convertendum utitur, hominem tamen Deo, et Spiritui regenerationem ejus intendenti, et regenerare ipsum volenti, ita posse resistere, et actu ipso sæpe resistere, ut sui regenerationem prorsus impediatur, atque adeo in ipsius manere potestate, ut regeneretur vel non regeneretur.' Hoc enim nihil

regenerated or not to be regenerated.

Rejection: For this is nothing less than the abolishing of all the efficacy of God's grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of the almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles, who teach: *And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power* (Eph. 1:19). And: *That our God would...fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power* (II Thess. 1:11). Also: *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness* (II Pet. 1:3).

Error 9: Who teach that grace and free will together are the component causes that combine to initiate conversion; and that grace, in order of causality, does not precede the influence of the will; that is, that God does not efficaciously help the will of man unto conversion until the will of man itself stirs and commits itself.

Rejection: For the ancient church long ago already condemned this doctrine in the Pelagians, from the apostle: *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy* (Rom. 9:16). And: *For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* (I Cor. 4:7). Also: *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13).

Rejection: For this is nothing less than the denial of all the efficiency of God's grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of Almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles, who teach: *That we believe according to the working of the strength of his power* (Eph. 1:19). And: *That God fulfills every desire of goodness and every work of faith with power* (2 Thess. 1:11). And: *That his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness* (2 Pet. 1:3).

Error 9: Who teach that grace and free will are partial causes, which together work the beginning of conversion, and that grace, in order of working, does not precede the working of the will; that is, that God does not efficiently help the will of man unto conversion until the will of man moves and determines to do this.

Rejection: For the ancient church has long ago condemned this doctrine of the Pelagians, according to the words of the apostle: *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy* (Rom. 9:16). Likewise: *For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* (1 Cor. 4:7). And: *For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13).

aliud est, quam tollere omnem efficaciam gratiæ Dei in nostri conversione, et actionem Dei omnipotentis subicere voluntati hominis, idque contra Apostolos, qui docent, *Nos credere pro efficacitate fortis roboris Dei*. Ephes. 1. 19. Et, *Deum bonitatis suæ gratuitam benevolentiam et opus fidei potenter in nobis complere*. II Thess. 1:11. Item, *Divinam ipsius vim omnia nobis donasse, quæ ad vitam et pietatem pertinent*. II Pet. 1:3.

IX. Qui docent, 'Gratiam et liberum arbitrium esse causas partiales simul concurrentes ad conversionis initium; nec gratiam ordine causalitatis efficientiam voluntatis antecedere;' id est, 'Deum non prius hominis voluntatem efficaciter juvare ad conversionem, quam voluntas ipsa hominis se movet ac determinat.' Hoc enim dogma Ecclesia prisca in Pelagianis jam olim condemnavit, ex Apostolo Rom. 9:16: *Non est volentis nec currentis, sed Dei miserentis*. Et, I Cor. 4:7: *Quis te discernit?* Et, *Quid habes quod non acceperis?* Item, Phil. 2:13: *Deus est qui in vobis operatur ipsum velle et perficere pro suo beneplacito*.

Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Rejection of Errors

Rejection of Errors. The orthodox doctrine having been explained, the synod rejects the errors of those:

Error 1: Who teach that it cannot properly be said that original sin in itself is sufficient to condemn the whole human race, or to deserve temporal and eternal punishment.

Rejection: For they contradict the apostle, who says: *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* (Rom. 5:12). And: *The judgment was by one to condemnation* (v. 16). Also: *The wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6:23).

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Rejection: For these are contrary to the plain testimony of scripture: *Who were dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5). And: *Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Besides this, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and to those that are called blessed (Ps. 51:19 and Matt. 5:6).

Error 5: Who teach that the corrupt and natural man can make such good use of common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or of the gifts still left after the fall, that he by that good use is gradually able to gain a greater grace, namely, evangelical or saving grace, as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God on his part shows himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, seeing that he sufficiently and efficiently administers to all men the means necessary for the revelation of Christ, for faith, and for repentance.

Rejection: For scripture, along with the experience of all ages, testifies that this is false. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them* (Ps. 147:19–20). *Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways* (Acts 14:16). *Paul and his companions were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, and after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not* (Acts 16:6–7).

Error 6: Who teach that in the true conversion of man no new qualities, characteristics, or gifts can be infused into man's will by God, so much so that even faith, by which we are first converted and on account of which we are called

believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man; and that in no other respect can faith be said to be a gift, except in the power to attain it.

Rejection: For these contradict the sacred scriptures, which testify that God does infuse the new qualities of faith, of obedience, and of the consciousness of his love into our hearts. *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts* (Jer. 31:33). *For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed* (Isa. 44:3). *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Rom. 5:5). They are also repugnant to the continuous practice of the church, which prays with the prophet: *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God* (Jer. 31:18).

Error 7: Who teach that the grace whereby we are converted to God is nothing more than a gentle persuasion; or (as others explain it) that the most excellent manner for working conversion in man, which is also the most suited to human nature, is that which takes place by persuasions; and that nothing hinders this lesser or merely moral grace from making the natural man spiritual; indeed, that God does not bring about the consent of the will otherwise than by a moral approach; and that the efficacy of the divine working, whereby it surpasses the working of Satan, consists in this, that God promises eternal benefits, while Satan promises only temporal ones.

Rejection: This is altogether Pelagian indeed, and contrary to the entire scripture, which, besides this, recognizes yet another, far more effectual and divine manner of the Holy Spirit's working in the conversion of man. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh* (Ezek. 36:26).

Error 8: Who teach that in the regeneration of man, God does not bring to bear such powers of his omnipotence as those by which he might powerfully and infallibly bend man's will to faith and conversion; but that when all the operations of grace that God employs in man's conversion have been accomplished, man can yet so resist God, and in actual fact often does so resist God and the Spirit, who exerts himself for man's regeneration and who wills to regenerate him, that man utterly thwarts his own regeneration; and thus that it remains in man's power to be regenerated or not to be regenerated.

Rejection: For this is nothing less than the abolishing of all the efficacy of God's grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of the almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles, who teach: *And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power* (Eph. 1:19). And: *That our God would...fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power* (II Thess. 1:11). Also: *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness* (II Pet. 1:3).

Error 9: Who teach that grace and free will together are the component causes that combine to initiate conversion; and that grace, in order of causality, does not precede the influence of the will; that is, that God does not efficaciously help the will of man unto conversion until the will of man itself stirs and commits itself.

Rejection: For the ancient church long ago already condemned this doctrine in the Pelagians, from the apostle: *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy* (Rom. 9:16). And: *For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* (I Cor. 4:7). Also: *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13).



Article CXXV: The New King and His Kingdom: Circumcision (continued)

“And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your fore-skin, and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” — Gen. 17:11

“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being yet uncircumcised.” — Rom. 4:11

The question now arises: What was the significance of circumcision? What was its meaning? What did it obsignate? What did it signify for him that received the sign?

If we are to answer this question correctly, we must first of all make an attempt to ascertain the significance of circumcision as such, regardless of the persons that received it. The objective significance of circumcision is to be established before we ask the question what was its meaning for the persons that were circumcised.

In ascertaining the importance and significance of both baptism and circumcision, difficulty arises from the fact that they are considered immediately in relation to their subjects. The question is not so much: What does baptism mean? or What was the significance of circumcision? But much rather the question is asked: What does baptism promise and assure to the person that is baptized or that was circumcised in the old dispensation? And as soon as the meaning of circumcision and of baptism is to be determined by the answer that is given to the question: What does it seal and signify to every person that receives the signs? the importance of both is naturally minimized.

Fact is, thus the argument then runs, that not all is Israel that is called Israel. There were those in the old dispensation that were of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh and

nevertheless were not children of the promise. All were circumcised. The result was that persons were circumcised that had no part with the Kingdom of God and his covenant. How, then, could circumcision be a seal of the righteousness of faith unto them? Ishmael was circumcised. Yet the Scripture saith: “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Esau was circumcised as well as Jacob. Yet, the Word of God has it: “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated.” And this was said before the children were born. And what was true under the old dispensation is true in the days of the New Testament. Not every one that is baptized proves to be a true child of the covenant and of the Kingdom of God. If you take our nominally Christian world in the broadest sense of the word, there are perhaps more baptized people that depart from the way of God’s covenant than that are faithful. Now, this fact is made to reflect on the meaning of circumcision and of baptism in such a way as to depreciate the significance of both. If it is claimed that circumcision obsigned cleansing from pollution, becoming one plant with the Great Seed of Abraham ultimately; that it sealed the righteousness of faith, the objection is raised immediately that this cannot be true of all, since there were those that were not spiritually of Israel, that were not cleansed from pollution, that were not justified, that possessed not the faith of Abraham. It could not be true of Esau. Neither can it be true, as far as the meaning of baptism is concerned, of those children of the covenant in the new dispensation that become like Esau, fornicators. Hence, objections are raised against the first question asked of parents that offer their children for baptism: “Whether you acknowledge, that although our

children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of his Church ought to be baptized?” Or, if no objections are raised against the question, it is explained in such a way that its force and meaning are practically lost. “Sanctified in Christ” and “members of his Church” is understood in a certain outward sense. It really asserts nothing of the children of the congregation. Or, if the meaning of these terms is allowed in their full significance, it is said that this is simply supposed. It is a supposed regeneration, a supposed sanctification in Christ, that constitutes the ground for their receiving the sign and seal of baptism. As if the parents were asked whether they dared **suppose** such a thing! And what is true of the first question of our Baptism Form is also true of the thanksgiving of that same form. People have hesitated to follow the minister when he gives thanks to the God of the covenant in the bold and assured language of the form: “We thank and praise thee that thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism.” This is no uncertain language. There is no mere supposition in that. It is the assurance of faith. But, always coming with the objection of the children of the Kingdom that are cast out, and intending to ascertain the significance of baptism and circumcision with a view to them, many have refused to accept the meaning of this bold and firm language and have either rejected it or explained it to their own satisfaction.

In reality, the same difficulty exists with the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. For who would deny that even of the supper people partake that have no real part with God’s covenant? Especially if also here you take Christianity in its broadest sense, you feel immediately that many partake of the Holy Supper that have long ago broken with God’s covenant and truth. Only, with the supper

the difficulty is not so obvious. Those that partake of it are, at any rate, confessing members. But children of eight days old were circumcised and children are baptized. All the children of the church receive the sign of God’s covenant. Hence, the difficulty is more evident with regard to the sign and seal of circumcision and baptism. And the difficulty became more obvious and more pressing according as the Church grew weaker in discipline and opened wider its doors to those that evidently departed from God’s covenant way.

We will, therefore, not approach the subject from this angle.

Before we ask concerning the significance of circumcision with relation to those that received it we will first of all ask what was the meaning of the sacrament as such. The question is in the first place: What was the significance of circumcision objectively, regardless of its subjects?

Scripture does not leave us in the dark in regard to this question. It tells us that circumcision was a sign, a token of the covenant between God and his people, and that it was a seal of the righteousness which is by faith. In Gen. 17:11 we read: “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” And in Rom. 4:11 the holy apostle writes: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being yet uncircumcised.”

That, therefore, is the meaning of circumcision. It is a sign of God’s covenant with his people. And it is a seal of the righteousness which is by faith. That significance must be maintained. Those that were circumcised carried in their flesh the sign of God’s covenant with his people. They bore the seal of righteousness by faith. All that were circumcised had this sign and this seal. With it they stood before God. With it they walked in the world. Esau had this sign and seal as well as Jacob. Neither must it be said that circumcision lost its meaning because Esau trampled it under foot and became a fornicator. Objectively considered, circumcision was a token of God’s covenant and a seal of the righteousness which is by faith.

It was first of all a token, a sign, a thing that pictured, that signified something, and by its very picture and institution as such became a sacred sign.

Two questions must be answered in this connection.

In the first place, the question is: What, according to the Word of God, did circumcision signify? Of what was it a sign, a token?

And in the second place: What was the analogy between the sign and the thing thus signified?

But the discussion of these questions we must leave to another essay.

—Grand Rapids

