



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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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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Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them. The length of one curtain shall be eight and twenty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and every one of the curtains shall have one measure. The five curtains shall be coupled together one to another; and other five curtains shall be coupled one to another. And thou shalt make loops of blue upon the edge of the one curtain from the selvedge in the coupling; and likewise shalt thou make in the uttermost edge of another curtain, in the coupling of the second. Fifty loops shalt thou make in the one curtain, and fifty loops shalt thou make in the edge of the curtain that is in the coupling of the second; that the loops may take hold one of another. And thou shalt make fifty taches of gold, and couple the curtains together with the taches: and it shall be one tabernacle.

And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair to be a covering upon the tabernacle: eleven curtains shalt thou make. The length of one curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and the eleven curtains shall be all of one measure. And thou shalt couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and shalt double the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle. And thou shalt make fifty loops on the edge of the one curtain that is outmost in the coupling, and fifty loops in the edge of the curtain which coupleth the second. And thou shalt make fifty taches of brass, and put the taches into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one. And the remnant that remaineth of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remaineth, shall hang over the backside of the tabernacle. And a cubit on the one side, and a cubit on the other side of that which remaineth in the length of the curtains of the tent, it shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle on this side and on that side, to cover it. And thou shalt make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering above of badgers' skins.

—Exodus 26:1–14 (See also 36:8–19.)

God's Tabernacle Home

Curtains upon curtains upon curtains. The tabernacle would be made of many, many curtains: ten enormous curtains here of fine twined linen, eleven expansive curtains there of goats' hair, more curtains above of rams' skins, and many curtains more of sealskins ("badgers' skins"). By blue loops and golden clasps, curtain would be joined to curtain to make larger curtains yet. Curtains upon curtains upon curtains. Great billowing sails of curtains, all draped over the wooden frame of the tabernacle in their specified places. Here the curtains would stretch tight, there the curtains would be folded back, and there the curtains would overlap; but everywhere the eye could see would be curtains

upon curtains upon curtains. The tabernacle would be one grand structure of curtains.

There is a name for a structure made of curtains: *tent*. The tabernacle was a tent. Not a palace; not a castle; the tabernacle was a tent. So important was it that the tabernacle be a tent that God named the structure *tabernacle*. *Tabernacle* means *tent*, and *tent* means *tabernacle*, so that by its very name God taught his people that his home in the wilderness would be a tabernacle-tent.

Why would such a thing be? A tent is the lowliest of dwellings. Nomads and sojourners and strangers live in tents. Vagabonds and the homeless and the destitute live in tents. Why

would the living God, who made the heavens and the earth, come to the wilderness to dwell in a tabernacle-tent?

Oh, the curtains of God's tabernacle-tent were certainly beautiful. They were made of luxurious materials: fine twined linen, fine leather, exotic sealskin, soft goats' hair, and springy wool. They were lovely in their colors: blue, purple, scarlet, and red. They were joined by golden clasps of rich and deep luster. They were enormous in their dimensions. They were adorned with figures of angels, the heavenly host of warriors and messengers and servants. Yes, the curtains of God's tabernacle-tent were beautiful.

But when all was said and done, the curtains were still just curtains. The tent was still just a tent. Why would the God of heaven dwell in a tent?

Ah, it is the gospel of our salvation. For God is no sojourner, but his people are. God is no nomad or stranger, but his people are. God is not a vagabond, not homeless, not destitute; but his people are. In our sin and misery and weakness, we would perish in the way. And so the living God came down to his people's waste howling wilderness to abide with them. Making his home a tabernacle-tent that could be packed up and moved with them, he led them and dwelled with them all the days of old.

And why would God do such a thing? Because he is a God of infinite mercy and eternal grace for his poor people in Christ. In Christ God tabernacles with man. For "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

—AL

EDITORIAL

God of God: Nicea's Septendecicentennial (6)

Three Camps

The delegates to the Council of Nicea were divided into three main camps regarding the question of whether Jesus is God.

The first camp was that of the Arians. These men were fully committed to Arius' doctrine that Jesus is not God. They were willing to say many wonderful things about Jesus. They were even willing to go so far as to say that Jesus is a god and that Jesus is divine. But they refused to acknowledge that Jesus is God. Their doctrine was that Jesus is not coeternal with God but that he is only the highest and greatest of all God's creatures, begotten by the Father through an act of the Father's will. Their rallying cry was that there was a time when the Son was not. Because Jesus is not coeternal with God, neither is he coequal with God.

Arius himself was not a delegate to the Council of Nicea and so could not vote, but he attended and was often asked his opinion. The Arian cause was represented by a very influential bishop named Eusebius of Nicomedia. Eusebius of Nicomedia was skilled in political arts and knew which words to whisper in whose ears. He was a wolf among the Lord's flock, a serpent among the trees. Just as the serpent of old had hissed against Christ, just as the wolf always slinks into the Lord's flock to devour Christ, so Eusebius of Nicomedia came to Nicea to deny Christ. And long after the Council of Nicea was finished, Eusebius of Nicomedia would continue to administer his poison in the church.

The fully-committed Arians were a relatively small camp at Nicea. Of the more than three hundred delegates, only about twenty bishops followed Eusebius of Nicomedia. Nevertheless,

the Arian camp arrived at Nicea brimming with confidence in its position.

This small group was convinced that what Arius taught was so patently correct that all that was needed was a clear exposition of the logic of the argument, and the assembly would vindicate Arius and rebuke Alexander for having condemned his teachings.¹

The second camp at Nicea was the impossibly small band of orthodox men, who confessed that Jesus is God. Their rallying cry was the doctrine of scripture that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Over against Arius they confessed that Jesus is coeternal with the Father and that he is therefore coequal with God.

Bishop Alexander of Alexandria represented this orthodox camp at Nicea. Alexander had deposed Arius. Alexander had also publicized the controversy by sending letters to all the churches detailing Arius' deposition. People then were just as averse to doctrinal controversy as people are today, and Alexander had been widely criticized for making his unpleasant controversy public in the church.

Also present with Alexander was the young deacon Athanasius of Alexandria. Because he was not a bishop, nor was he a delegate to the council, Athanasius could not vote; nevertheless, he was allowed to speak, and he participated zealously and eloquently in the debate. After the Council of Nicea had concluded, God would continue to use Athanasius to defend the truth that Jesus is God. Although Athanasius could not know it as a young deacon at Nicea, he stood on the threshold of a long life of reproach and persecution for the gospel truth that Jesus is God. There would be times after Nicea when it would seem that Athanasius was the lone voice in all the world confessing that truth. His lonely stand

for the truth would become known as *Athanasius contra mundum*—Athanasius against the world.

This little orthodox band was hopelessly outnumbered at the Council of Nicea. Its men were pious and spiritual, gifted and orthodox; but they were so few. This camp could count less than a dozen in its ranks. If the full-fledged Arians were a small camp with only twenty bishops, then the orthodox were a downright tiny camp of nearly single digits.

The third and by far the largest camp at Nicea was neither Arian nor orthodox. Rather, this camp hoped to avoid the controversy altogether and to smooth things over in its beloved church institute. It is something of a proverb in church history that whenever controversy appears on the horizon, the majority of men are ready to flee to the hills of compromise. Most of the more than three hundred delegates at Nicea belonged to this compromising camp. According to one historian,

They bemoaned the outbreak of a controversy that threatened to divide the church at a time when persecution had finally come to an end and new opportunities and challenges needed to be met. It seems that at the beginning of the sessions these bishops hoped to achieve a compromise that would make it possible to move on to other matters.²

According to another historian,

Many of them had an orthodox instinct, but little discernment; others were disciples of Origen, or preferred simple biblical expression to a scholastic terminology; others had no firm convictions, but only uncertain opinions, and were therefore easily swayed by the arguments of the stronger party or by mere external considerations.³

¹ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 187.

² González, *The Story of Christianity*, 188.

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* (1910; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 628.

The majority camp was represented by Eusebius of Caesarea. Eusebius of Caesarea was perhaps the most influential bishop present at the Council of Nicea. He was well known in his day as a paragon of learning. His writings were well received throughout the Christian world. Even yet today, Eusebius of Caesarea is well known for his church historical writings, including his account of the Council of Nicea. He was given the honor of delivering the welcoming address to Emperor Constantine upon the emperor's arrival at the council. Eusebius of Caesarea also was given the place of honor at the emperor's right hand throughout the council's proceedings. If any one bishop would be able to steer the Council of Nicea to the compromise position that hundreds of the delegates preferred, it would be Eusebius of Caesarea.

From an earthly point of view, the cause of the truth was hopeless as the Council of Nicea convened. The orthodox belonged to the smallest camp by far of the three represented. The whole church was desperate for an end to the hostilities and was willing to compromise to get it. And unbeknownst to the orthodox, the council had been stacked against them before the proceedings

had even begun. Eusebius of Caesarea had come to the council armed with an ancient Palestinian confession that he hoped could be adopted as a compromise between the Arians and the orthodox. Emperor Constantine "had already seen and approved this confession."⁴ Before a single argument was made at the council, the alluring strains of the sweet siren song of compromise already filled the air. How could the truth even find a hearing in such an atmosphere?

But the truth is never hopeless. The truth prevails, even when men do not want it and even when men deny it. And the arm of God is never shortened. Where human possibility ends, there divine power operates. So it has always been, and so it shall always be. Men came to the Council of Nicea to forge a compromise. But God came to the Council of Nicea to preserve his truth and his church. From his throne at God's right hand, Jesus sent his word and Spirit to show men the truth of himself: Jesus is God.

And God would use a most unexpected means to begin to turn the Council of Nicea toward to the truth.

To be continued...

—AL



⁴ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 628.

REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

THE MATERIAL PRINCIPLE OF THE REFORMATION

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2025 | 7:00PM

What was the great sixteenth-century Reformation of the church about?

Well, it was about a great many things.

- It was about popes and penance.
- It was about corruption and conscience.
- It was about monks and masses.
- It was about the truth and the lie, Christ and antichrist, righteousness and unrighteousness.
- And much more besides.

Yes, but what was the Reformation about? What was it essentially about? What was the heart and the kernel of the Reformation? What was the issue that lay at the root of all that was said and done in the great Reformation of the church? What, in short, was the Reformation about?

Ah, therein lies the gospel. For the Reformation was about justification by faith alone.

We call the doctrine of justification by faith alone the material principle of the Reformation. That is, justification was the doctrine, the essence, the heart, the kernel, the issue—the material—of the entire Reformation.

And what marvelous material is justification by faith alone! For it is the gospel of our salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

This Reformation Day, we would be delighted if you would join us to hear about and rejoice in the wonderful gospel of justification by faith alone, the material principle of the Reformation.

HOST

**Remnant Reformed
Church**

SPEAKER

Rev. Andrew Lanning

FORMAT

**Lecture followed by
Q&A and refreshments**

VENUE

Pavilion Christian School, 9181 Kenowa Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534

lawgospel.com

Article CXXIX: The Children of the Promise

“In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”—Gen. 21:12; Rom. 9:7

The question that must still be discussed in connection with the historical establishment and development of God's covenant with Abraham is whether all the children of Abraham were as such objects of the promise, whether the children of the flesh and the children of the promise were identical.

We discussed the significance of the covenant God established with Abraham. We saw that this covenant implied, indeed, temporal blessings, according to the dispensation in which believers of the old dispensation lived, temporal blessings that were an image of things to come. It implied the development into a great nation, power and glory, the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. But we also found that in last instance the covenant was essentially the relation of eternal friendship between God and his people, Abraham and his seed. God was Abraham's friend and the friend of his seed. His protection and exceeding great reward was he. And Abraham was the friend of God. And the ultimate blessing of the covenant that would come to the seed of Abraham was, not that they should live in an earthly country, however rich it might be, but that they should be heirs of the world. We discussed further that in its historical manifestation and development this covenant was to run in the line of Abraham's generations. With Abraham and his seed, throughout their generations, God established his covenant. And finally we saw that as a token of this covenant and as a seal of the righteousness which is by faith God instituted the rite of circumcision. All the seed of Abraham, according to the flesh, in as far as they

were male descendants, were to receive this sign of God's covenant with them.

But now the question arises naturally: Were, then, all the sons of Abraham according to the flesh children of the promise? To speak in terms of our own time: Did the covenant of God with Abraham and his seed signify that every one that was circumcised or, still more broadly, that every one that proceedeth from Abraham's loins was saved? It is well known how the people in Jesus' own days answered this question in the affirmative. To be children of Abraham was sufficient. To be sons of Abraham according to the flesh was to be saved. To be circumcised was to be a child of the kingdom of God in very deed. Children of the flesh and children of the promise meant one and the same thing. Neither is the question void of practical import in our own day. How often is not the question raised: Do not the children of the covenant according to the flesh that despise God's covenant and go astray never to return make God's covenant and promise of none effect? Children are born in God's covenant. They are baptized in the name of God Triune. We confess as a congregation that we believe that our children, though conceived and born in sin, yet are sanctified in the Lord. We thank our covenant God that he received us with our children as his own. These children are brought up with all the seed of the covenant in the fear of God's name. They receive all the blessings of God's covenant in the outward sense. In the outward sense they receive all things in common with God's people. Surely, if you wish to speak of “common grace,” you must look for it in its clearest and brightest manifestation in the sphere of God's covenant. Yet, they turn away,

despise God's covenant, trample the blood of the New Testament under foot, become fornicators like Esau, and often fall so deeply that they can come to repentance nevermore. These are simply undeniable facts. And the question often arises: Do these apostates make God's covenant with Abraham and his seed of none effect? Did Ishmael make the Word of God of none effect? Did Esau bring the promise to naught? Did the Israelites, that all passed through the Red Sea and were baptized unto Moses, that all drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, which was Christ, but that were cast down in the wilderness, make God's covenant vain? Did the people of Israel, that turned to the service of Baal and defiled God's holy temple, that soon turned into captivity, never to return, as was the case with many of Abraham's seed, bring God's promise to naught? And, when finally the Great Seed is come and Israel rejects its King, crucifies him, and invokes the curse of his blood upon itself and its children, has then the promise of God with respect to Abraham's seed failed absolutely?

You feel the question is an important one. It is one of tremendous significance. It does not concern only a few of Abraham's children that went astray and became alienated from God's covenant. The question concerns thousands. It involves a majority of Abraham's seed. It finally involves the entire nation as such. God had promised to establish his covenant with Abraham and his seed. And what, now, is the actual outcome of history? That with the majority of Abraham's seed God was not well pleased. The facts are plain and undeniable.

It need cause no surprise, in the face of these tremendous facts, that many, especially on premillennial standpoint, look for the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in the future. Israel as a nation is now for a time in captivity, but is ultimately to be restored, and the promise of God's covenant with Abraham is still to be fulfilled literally. The Word of God, however, points us in an entirely different direction for the solution of this problem.

In Rom. 9 the Apostle Paul discusses the very same question. Had the Word of God come to naught with respect to Israel? That is the question, and this question the apostle answers in the negative. When the apostle in verse 6 speaks of the word of God, he refers particularly to the promise of God's covenant delivered to Abraham with respect to his seed, as is plain from the context. The word of God was that he would continue his covenant with the seed of Abraham. But now it seemed as if that word of God had failed completely. It seemed as if that word had been brought to naught. For a time Israel had been God's people. Theirs was the adoption, theirs the glory, the service of God, the law. Theirs were the promises, the covenants. From them was Christ according to the flesh (vss. 1-5). But now it seemed as if the entire covenant of God with Israel had failed. Israel seemed rejected. The sons of Abraham had been cast off, and Jehovah had turned with the blessings of his covenant to the Gentiles. And this fact brings the apostle to the questions whether the word of God with regard to his continual covenant with Abraham's seed had been brought to naught, had failed in its ultimate effect. And this question the apostle answers in the negative. He maintains that the promise of God had always been fulfilled, and was being fulfilled in his own day. The word of God had not been brought to naught. But how does the apostle prove this contention? How does he make plain that God's promise had not failed in the face of the fact that thousands of Abraham's sons had been rejected, and that now the nation of Israel as such had been forsaken by Jehovah? Many would probably expect an entirely different line of argumentation from the one actually followed by the apostle. Many would reason that the word of God had remained the same and was still the same for Israel as the seed of Abraham. That promise of God, so they would reason, embraced all the sons of Abraham according to the flesh. As far as God was concerned, his promise, his word, was valid for every Israelite in the national sense of the word. But the trouble had been Israel's disobedience. Israel had rejected the promise.

And the disobedience of Israel had actually made the promise of God to the sons of Abraham of none effect. The word of God was unlimited. The purpose of God was to save all. But the disobedience of the children according to the flesh had limited that word in its actual effect. In other words, the answer of many would be: Yes, the word of God has been brought to naught with respect to Israel, but not because God was unwilling to fulfill his word and make all the children of the flesh spiritual children of the covenant, but because the children of the flesh refused.

The apostle does not look for the solution of the problem in this direction. Neither is it a solution. For the question would remain: Was it not after all the operation of God's irresistible grace that was to make his word effective in Israel? And did he not fail, then, to realize his word? And, therefore, the apostle starts out from the principle that the word of God itself was limited, that it did not embrace all the children according to the flesh, but the children of the promise. And he maintains that this word, embracing the children of the promise, and following the line of election, was in no respect brought to naught but completely fulfilled.

"They are not all Israel that are of Israel, neither because they are Abraham's seed are they all children, but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed" (vss. 6–8). The word of God has not failed. It is realized completely. If it is only remembered that the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed.

To show that this is actually the case the apostle quotes from history. First of all he shows that God had plainly stated that not Ishmael, but Isaac was the child of the promise. Secondly, he points to the fact that God had said in regard to Jacob and Esau before they were born, "The elder shall serve the younger." And thirdly, the apostle reminds us of the fact that even to Moses he had revealed the freedom of his sovereign grace when he said: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

This threefold reference to the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel we must consider a little more closely in order to understand that the word of God's covenant is never brought to naught.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

