

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 45

DECEMBER 2005

NUMBER 4

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Exodus in the New Testament

David Lau

Exodus Sermon #4

Readings: Exodus 4:27-5:9 (*Moses' first encounter with Pharaoh*)
Exodus 5:22-6:8 (*The LORD will deliver His people as promised*)

Sermon Texts: Romans 9:14-20a; 2 Timothy 3:8-9

Romans 9:14-20a – What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?

2 Timothy 3:8-9 – Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

After Moses reluctantly accepted God's call to lead the children of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, he returned to Egypt. On the way he was met by his older brother Aaron, whom he had not seen for 40 years. Together Moses and Aaron talked to the elders of Israel and told them that God was now going to keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and deliver His people. They did the signs that God had given them:

Moses' rod became a serpent and then became a rod again; Moses' hand became leprous and then became healthy again. The initial response of the children of Israel to this word from their God was faith and worship.

Then Moses and Aaron were permitted a meeting with the great Pharaoh of Egypt. They did not ask for much at first: only permission for the Israelites to go into the wilderness for three days to celebrate a religious festival. They presented this request as the word of Jehovah, the God of Israel. **“Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”** But Pharaoh's initial response to this request was anger and defiance: **“Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.”**

This was the beginning of the long confrontation between Jehovah, the almighty God of Israel, and Pharaoh, the mighty king of Egypt, the world's most powerful ruler at that time. Pharaoh's first reaction to this request was to make life more miserable for the Israelite slaves. The Israelites previously had been given straw for their task of making bricks. Now they were to find their own straw and still make the same number of bricks as before. It was an impossible situation, and in their distress the elders of the Israelites blamed Moses and Aaron for their problems. Moses was upset and discouraged too and complained bitterly to the Lord: **“Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? ... You have not delivered Your people at all.”**

In response to this complaint the Lord repeated His word that the time had come for Him to keep His promise and covenant with Abraham: **“I will bring you out... I will rescue you... I will redeem you.... I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.”** However, when Moses repeated this promise to the Israelites, they did not believe him.

Then came, one after the other, God's great signs and the ten terrible plagues. Aaron's rod became a serpent before the eyes of Pharaoh. But Pharaoh was not impressed. He summoned his wise men and sorcerers, chief among them Jannes and Jambres. Through their sorcery their rods also became serpents somehow. But even though Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods, Pharaoh stubbornly hardened his heart and continued to resist the voice of God.

Then came Plague #1: the turning of the river into blood. Somehow Jannes and Jambres and their crew were able to duplicate or imitate this miracle too, and Pharaoh remained stubborn.

Plague #2: **“Frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.”** Somehow Jannes and Jambres and the sorcerers of Egypt were able to imitate this miracle as well. They **“brought up frogs on the land of Egypt.”** But apparently, the magicians were unable to remove any of these frogs, for Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and asked them to ask their God to remove the frogs. In fact, Pharaoh promised to let the Israelites go for their religious feast, if the frogs were taken away. When the frogs were gone the next day, Pharaoh again hardened his heart; he changed his mind and refused to let his slaves leave their work and worship their God in the wilderness.

The next plague was the plague of lice, which Jannes and Jambres and the magicians were not able to imitate. They abandoned their attempts and claimed, **“This is the finger of God.”** But Pharaoh refused to listen to the voice of God or acknowledge His power, because he had hardened his heart.

So the plague of flies came next, with the same stubborn response of Pharaoh hardening his heart. As a consequence of his continued defiance against God, the Lord promised to send a plague of disease, which would kill all the livestock of Egypt, but leave the livestock of Israel unharmed. When the plague came as promised, Pharaoh sent investigators to check whether the cattle of the Israelites were suffering from the disease. When he learned that none of the Israelite cattle were harmed, he still hardened his heart and refused to let the Israelites go.

Of course, there was yet another plague, the plague of boils, which troubled all the Egyptians and particularly so the magicians. Now in this connection the Bible describes in different terms what was going on in Pharaoh's heart. It says: **“The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them.”** After all the times Pharaoh had hardened his own heart and resisted God's will on his own, the Lord Himself hardened Pharaoh's heart, thus making it impossible for him to become humble or responsive to God's Word. We recognize this to be a terrible judgment from God – the Old Testament equivalent of the sin against the Holy Ghost, which, as Jesus said, could never be forgiven.

There would be more plagues after the boils. We shall consider them in our service next Sunday. At this point let us see how our New Testament texts treat this part of the history of God's Old Testament people. From the writings of the apostle Paul we see HOW GOD SHOWED MERCY TO ISRAEL on the one hand, and on the other, HOW HE HARDENED PHARAOH'S HEART.

Paul asks the Christians in Rome: **“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses: ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but God who shows mercy.”**

We may be tempted to think that God was merciful to the Israelites because they responded so well to God’s Word and command. In other words, the Israelites are thought of as the good guys and the Egyptians as the bad guys, and God throughout this history was simply rewarding His people for a job well done. Not so! Yes, it is true that the Israelites exhibited faith and devotion to their God when, for example, Moses first began his work of deliverance. But there were other times when the Israelites showed very little faith and were, in fact, a proud and rebellious nation, as we shall see. God never said He was going to deliver them because of their goodness or obedience. On the contrary, God presents His grace and mercy as entirely free on His part, as something He decided to demonstrate in His love, not as something they deserved from Him because of their obedience. Thus He said to Moses: **“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy.”** God chose the Israelites to be His people of His own free will. Their status as such did not result from their will or desire to become His people, or their obedient running forth to carry out His will. Their being His people was only the result of God’s merciful choice of them to be His own, even from all eternity.

Of course, this is true also of us Christians today, who have become God’s people by faith in Christ Jesus. We are not God’s children because God looked down and saw that we were the good guys and then decided to reward us because of our goodness. Not at all! If today we are God’s people who trust in God’s Son as our only Savior from sin, it is because God in His free mercy and compassion chose to be merciful to us in keeping with His eternal plan. That is, He sent Christ to be our Savior. And He sent the Holy Spirit with His Gospel Word to bring us to faith in Jesus. Whenever we begin to think that we deserve any of these blessings, we are in deep spiritual trouble. We cannot ever obligate God to be good to us, for **“it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”**

Now when we talk about God’s eternal choice of Christians to be His own according to His mercy and grace, some get the idea that the unbelievers, like the Pharaoh of Egypt, must be the way they are because God chose them from eternity to be condemned. Some English translations of the book of Romans even seem to give this impression. But the Bible says nothing of the kind. In fact, it clearly says: **“God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.... Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Tim. 2:4, 6). If Jesus died for all human beings, then He died also for the Pharaoh of Egypt, for His chief magicians Jannes and Jambres and for all the Egyptians. God wanted them to be saved too, but they resisted His truth and kept on resisting His truth. So it is written: **“As Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.”** Surely these words do not indicate that God wanted to see Jannes and Jambres in hell. Rather, it was they who resisted the word God wanted to give them through Moses. God does not accept the responsibility for their resistance. It is **“their”** folly, not God’s fault.

The same thing is true of the Pharaoh of Egypt. God knew ahead of time what was going to happen. He knew that Pharaoh would persistently resist God’s will, and that God would consequently harden his heart for the glory of His name and the salvation of Israel. But it cannot be said that God had determined from eternity that the Pharaoh should be lost. God showed patience with this mighty king. He did not have Moses and Aaron ask for much at first: a mere three days’ journey into the wilderness for a feast of worship. It was Pharaoh who intentionally and defiantly resisted even this mild request. And he continued to be stubborn in his resistance, even though the Lord confirmed the word of Moses with miracles that could not be duplicated or imitated. In other words, Pharaoh hardened his own heart many, many times before God hardened it and made it impossible for him ever to repent.

“Whom He wills He hardens.” God has the right to choose when He will harden someone, as well as the right to choose whom He will harden. It is not for us to tell God how patient He should be in each individual case. It is not right for us ever to find fault with God. **“Indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?”**

When God speaks, the time to listen is at once, rather than to ask, as Pharaoh did, **“Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?”** When He summons His believing people to follow a certain course of action, the time to listen and to act is now. When God invites us to trust in His Son Jesus for forgiveness of sins and eternal life, the time to believe His truth and receive His gift is now. As it is written: **“In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the**

day of salvation.” Amen.

Exodus Sermon #5

Readings: Psalm 105:26-36 (*God's intervention though the plagues in Egypt reviewed*)
Exodus 12:1-13 (*The first Passover in Egypt*)

Sermon Text: Luke 22:7-20

Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.” So they said to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare?” And He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.”

So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

In a series of ten destructive plagues the true and almighty LORD (Jehovah), Creator of heaven and earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, showed His superiority over the Pharaoh of Egypt and all the false gods of Egypt. In the last sermon we noted that after the sixth plague, the plague of boils, the Lord Himself hardened the heart of Pharaoh, so that he refused to let the children of Israel go. Then came the seventh plague, the plague of hail, “so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation... and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field.” While the hail was coming down, the Pharaoh said to the Israelites, “I will let you go.” But as soon as the hail stopped, he changed his mind in the hardness of his heart and refused to let the Israelites go.

Then came the eighth plague, the plague of locusts, which “ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left.” The chief advisors of the Pharaoh told him: “Let the men go.... Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?” But after the locusts were gone, the Pharaoh again was stubborn. The Lord had hardened his heart.

When the ninth plague followed, “the thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days,” the results were the same: the Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. The Lord then told Moses what He would do. “About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the beasts.” What a horrible plague this would be! A plague, let’s remember, that was brought about by the Pharaoh’s stubborn refusal to listen to God and let His people go.

In connection with this tenth plague God told Moses how the Israelites should prepare for the coming of the angel of death. Every household in Israel was to kill an unblemished male lamb, smear the blood of this lamb on the doors of their homes, roast the lamb in fire and eat it that same night, “with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand,” ready to leave the land of Egypt as soon as word was received.

That night the Lord God killed the firstborn in Egypt, but passed over all the homes of the Israelites which had the blood of their lambs smeared on their doors. This lamb was to be known and called the Passover Lamb. God instructed His people to celebrate the Passover every spring thereafter in remembrance of what God had done for them, for when the firstborn in Egypt died that night, the Pharaoh commanded the Israelites to leave his land, which they did at once. Of course, we know that the Pharaoh changed his mind afterwards and pursued his fleeing slaves, but that is another story for us to consider at a later time. Today we shall concentrate

on the Passover festival itself, in particular HOW THE PASSOVER WAS CELEBRATED BY OUR LORD JESUS almost 1500 years after the first Passover took place.

Our text from the Gospel of Luke tells us: **“Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.”** This would be the 14th day of the month Nisan. At the time of Jesus the Passover lambs were slaughtered by the priests in the temple courts, and so Jesus told Peter and John, **“Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.”** Jesus also told Peter how they would find the right place for this festival meal. They would see a man carrying a pitcher of water. They would follow this man, and the house that he entered would be the place where Jesus would eat the Passover with His disciples. In addition to preparing the lamb and securing the place for eating it, Peter and John no doubt took care of the other needs: the unleavened bread they would eat that night, the bitter herbs, the dipping sauce and the grape wine that had become a traditional part of this meal over the years.

In obedience to their Lord’s command Peter and John **“prepared the Passover. And when the hour had come, Jesus sat down (or reclined at the table), and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’”**

This was not the first time that Jesus celebrated the Passover with His apostles. But it was to be the last time and a very important time, as far as Jesus was concerned. Because of the special significance of this particular celebration, Jesus could hardly wait to eat this Passover with His disciples. We consider His words spoken at an earlier occasion: **“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!”** Jesus knew He had come into the world for one chief purpose: to suffer and die for the sins of the world. Therefore He wanted to get on with it, to complete the task and finish His work. This last Passover was a sign that the end was near. **“With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”**

Certainly Jesus ate this Passover with His disciples, so that He and they could remember what God had done for the children of Israel in delivering them from their slavery in Egypt through the blood of an unblemished lamb. But the Passover celebration was not only the remembrance of things past. It was also the prophetic portrayal of a future deliverance. As Jesus said: **“I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”**

The killing and eating of the Passover lamb was clearly a prophecy of the suffering and death of Jesus, as well as the eternal fellowship meal with God that would result from His suffering. For it is written: **“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”** (1 Cor. 5:7). The apostle’s statement here indicates the truth that the unblemished male lambs slaughtered for the Passover celebration in Israel were types or pictures of Jesus Christ, the true Lamb of God without spot or blemish, who was put to death on the cross of Calvary. Just as the blood of the Passover lambs smeared on the door saved the Israelite firstborn from certain death, so also the blood of Jesus poured out on the cross, smeared on our hearts by faith, saves us from God’s wrath and punishment and establishes us as God’s purchased people, forgiven from all our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is no wonder that Jesus had such fervent desire to eat this particular Passover meal. It was to be the last Old Testament Passover before fulfillment. And of course, it was part of God’s eternal plan that His Son Jesus would suffer and die for the sin of the world during the Passover celebration going on in Jerusalem. On Thursday night Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples. On Friday He fulfilled what the Passover portrayed by dying on the cross for the sins of all, making possible for us all to have an eternal celebration in heaven. That is **“when many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,”** enjoying eternal fellowship with the almighty God, all because of the sacrificial blood atonement made by Jesus Christ, the Passover lamb.

Now truly there was another reason for Jesus to look forward to this particular Passover meal. It was at this time that Jesus instituted a new meal for New Testament Christians, a meal to sustain us in our pilgrimage in this life, as we look forward to and press on to our eternal home. Thus **“He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’”**

Under the old covenant they ate the meat of lambs, which were pointing ahead to Jesus, the Lamb of

God. But in the new covenant which Jesus established by His death for our sins, He has given us, to eat and to drink, His own body, the one given for us on the cross, and His own blood, that which was poured out for us on the cross. Yes, in the bread He gives us His body, and in the wine He gives us His blood, to assure us of the forgiveness of sins that He won for us. This is how Jesus celebrated His last Passover, and some day we shall see its final fulfillment, when we shall sit at His heavenly table, eat of the eternal manna and drink of the river of His pleasure forevermore. May our gracious God through the precious means of grace that He gives, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, strengthen our faith in Jesus, our Passover lamb, so that we may enjoy His fellowship forever. Amen!

Exodus Sermon #6

Readings: Exodus 12:14-20 (*The Passover festival instituted for future generations*)
Exodus 12:29-39 (*The final plague leads to the Exodus from Egypt*)

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

It must have been a night to remember. The Israelites had carefully followed the Lord's instructions which He had given them through His servant Moses. The unblemished lambs had been killed, and the blood of these lambs had been smeared on their doors. And now they were eating the meat, which had been roasted whole in the fire, without any bones being broken. As commanded, they held the first Passover with a belt on their waists, sandals on their feet and a staff in their hands. At midnight the Lord went through the land of Egypt, striking down the firstborn in every home where blood was not smeared on the door. As the book of Exodus says: **"There was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead."** However, the Lord had passed over and spared all the Israelite homes, for they were protected by the blood of their Passover lambs.

Finally, the Pharaoh of Egypt issued new orders, which he would not recant; he said to his Israelite slaves, **"Rise, go out from among my people. Go, serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, and be gone."** The Egyptians too had urged the Israelites to leave their land before the Egyptian people were all dead. Thus the Israelites left the land in a big hurry. In fact, they left so quickly that they did not have an opportunity to put any leaven or yeast in the bread dough which they took with them. They were forced by circumstances to bring and eat only unleavened bread, as they made their quick getaway from their bondage in Egypt.

Since this was to be a night to remember, the Lord gave instructions to His people as to how they should commemorate this night and the Lord's faithful, miraculous deliverance. They were to celebrate two festivals at the same time: the festival of the *Passover* and the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Every year in the springtime they were to eat a Passover Lamb, **"with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs,"** in memory of the first Passover which brought them out of Egypt. At the same time they were to get rid of all the old leaven in their homes for a period of seven days, during which time they would eat nothing but unleavened bread. This also was in memory of that deliverance from Egypt, when they were compelled by circumstances to eat only unleavened bread.

From the facts of history we can thus see WHY THE COMBINATION OF THE FEASTS OF PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD IS SO FITTING. Both of these feasts commemorated events in Israel's history that took place at the same time. Yet our New Testament text from Paul's first letter to the

Corinthians reveals a deeper reason why the combination of these feasts is truly fitting and worthy of our attention. Both the festival of the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread portray basic facts regarding our Christian life today.

First of all, it is certainly clear from our text that the Passover celebration had pointed ahead to our Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. Paul said, **“Indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”** The Passover Lamb was to be a year-old male. When Jesus came into the world, John the Baptist pointed to Him and said, **“Behold the Lamb of God.”** The Passover lamb was to be without blemish or defect. So Jesus became the perfect Lamb of God, **“a lamb without blemish and without spot,”** according to 1 Peter 1. The Passover lambs had to be slaughtered; their lives had to be sacrificed. So also Jesus gave Himself for us as **“an offering and a sacrifice to God”** (Eph. 5:2). The blood of the Passover lamb saved the Israelites from the death of their firstborn. So we too have been **“redeemed”** from sin, death and hell by the **“precious blood of Christ.”** The bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken. In a similar way our Lord Jesus died on the cross without any of His bones being broken, in order to fulfill Old Testament prophecy (Exod. 12:46, Num. 9:12, Ps. 34:20).

What a tremendous thing this is – that **“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us!”** This means for us the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death, the promise of a new life, yes, even eternal life. For if our sins have been given to the Lamb and He has atoned for them all, then there is nothing to keep us from the blessing of God now and the presence of God eternally in heaven. It is our Christian conviction that we are saved alone by the blood of the Lamb. Martin Luther’s Easter hymn says it well: **“Here the true Paschal Lamb we see, Whom God so freely gave us; He died on the accursed tree – So strong His love! – to save us. See, His blood doth mark our door. Faith points to it, Death passes over, And Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!”** (TLH 195:3).

Of course, we should ask what significance the Feast of Unleavened Bread has for us New Testament Christians today. Paul identifies the significance in our text, his words to the Christians at Corinth: **“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”**

It is clear from this context that leaven is a picture of sin. The “old leaven” indicates the old sinful life, into which we are born in this world. For we all come into this world as the slaves of sin, in bondage to Satan, until our Lord sets us free by bringing to us through Baptism and the Word the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice in our place and deliverance from our old ways. The Israelites were to get rid of all the old leaven in their homes for a period of seven days. The old leaven was something they left behind when they fled from Egypt. It was also to be a picture of the old sinful nature. Once we become God’s redeemed people, saved from sin and death by the blood of the Lamb, we are to put off the old man and put on the new man. **“Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump,”** Paul says. Get rid of the old leaven of “malice and wickedness,” and eat the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Let’s notice, however, that we do not gain forgiveness by getting rid of sin. Oh, no! Forgiveness comes about solely and surely through the sacrifice of Christ! **“You truly are unleavened, for Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”** Yes, **“the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanses us from all sin.”** But now that we are forgiven through the blood of Christ, now that we have this perfect cleansing in Him and have been deemed “unleavened” in His sight, it only follows that we will continue to remove the leaven of sin in our lives and live like the unleavened Christians God has made us.

You see, it is really impossible to have the one without the other. Passover and Unleavened Bread go together. God wants and carries out a combination of the two. First, He leads us through our Spirit-given faith to recognize ourselves as saved from death, forgiven from sin and made clean entirely through the blood of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. Secondly, He works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit a continual struggle of daily repentance and renewal, in which we unceasingly fight against the sin in our lives and seek to get rid of the leaven that continually wants to cling to us. Paul says in another place, **“As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.... Put on love.... Put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth”** (Col. 3:12, 14, 8). These things are leaven that we must purge out, since God has made us unleavened in Christ.

Now what is true of the individual Christian is also to be true of the Christian congregation. As the

Christian is to purge out the leaven in his life, so also the Christian congregation is to purge out the leaven caused by unrepented sin, for **“a little leaven leavens the whole lump.”** If someone in the congregation continues in an open sin without repentance and the whole congregation tolerates this, then the leaven of the one becomes the leaven of them all.

In Corinth a member of the congregation was committing adultery with his father’s wife. But the Christians who knew that this was going on did nothing about it. They almost seemed to be proud of this situation happening in their midst. But Paul said to them, **“You are unleavened.”** That is, you have forgiveness through Christ and are thereby holy in God’s sight. Therefore purge out this old leaven which does not fit at all into a congregation of redeemed Christians. Forgiveness of sin does not mean permission to sin. It means a constant struggle against sin, out of love and devotion to our Lord who gave Himself for us.

To us too Paul says: **“Deliver the impenitent sinner to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”** The leaven must be removed for the sake of the congregation and for the sake of the impenitent person. Putting the impenitent sinner out of the congregation is necessary in order to make him realize the condemnation of his sin and so bring him to repentance, with the ultimate goal that he may be saved from eternal condemnation on the Last Day. This, then, is the right way for all believers today to keep the feast, to keep both feasts: Passover and Unleavened Bread. May the Lord move us to heed the apostle’s call to combine joyful Christian conviction with sincere daily repentance: **“Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”** Amen!

Exodus Sermon #7

Readings: Exodus 13:17-14:9 (*Pharaoh’s army pursued the Israelites*)
Exodus 14:13-31 (*God led Israel safely through the Red Sea*)

Sermon Texts: Acts 13:16-17; Hebrews 11:27-29; 1 Corinthians 7:21-23

Acts 13:16-17 – Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.”

Hebrews 11:27-29 – By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

1 Corinthians 7:21-23 – Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

After hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt, the children of Israel were now free. Their Lord God had shown His power over all the idol gods of Egypt by killing the firstborn in every Egyptian home. The Israelites had escaped through the lambs’ blood which they had smeared on their doors at the Lord’s direction. The Pharaoh of Egypt now gave the orders that they were eagerly waiting to hear: **“Go, serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, and be gone.”** So the children of Israel left the land of Egypt. They were now free at last.

Or were they? The Pharaoh of Egypt once again changed his mind. How could he be so foolish as to let his slaves go free? He pursued them with his horses and chariots and caught up with them as they were encamped near the Red Sea. Now he had them trapped. Surely they would surrender and return to captivity; otherwise they would all die. For the Red Sea was in front of them, and Pharaoh’s army behind them. There was no escape.

Their situation was so desperate that the children of Israel in great fear said to Moses, the leader God appointed for them, **“Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? It would have been better for us**

to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.”

Moses and the Israelites cried to the Lord, and the Lord heard them. Their fear and unbelief had made them unworthy of God’s help, but God in His love and mercy nevertheless came to their aid. He told Moses to lift up his rod over the sea. As Moses did this, the waters of the sea were divided, and a wide path of dry land was provided to them – right through the middle of the Red Sea! The two million-or-so Israelites walked through the divided waters to the other side. Now the Egyptians tried to follow them down the same path. But the Lord **“troubled”** the Egyptian army; **“He took off their chariot wheels.”** When they decided to turn around and go back, Moses again stretched out his hand over the sea. The waters returned to their original place, and all of Pharaoh’s horses, horsemen, chariots and charioteers were drowned. The Bible says, **“Not so much as one of them remained.”** **“So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.”** The Israelites were now truly free at last.

There are many today who look at this story as a legend or a myth. They don’t believe it really happened in the way the Bible describes it. After all, they have not discovered the evidence of any Egyptian records which make reference to this event. But this is not surprising. Why would the Egyptians want to preserve any record of such a disaster? It was common for ancient kings to preserve only the records of their triumphs and successes.

As New Testament Christians we do believe this Bible story as a completely accurate report of what happened, for it has been recorded in those Scriptures, of which our Lord Jesus said: **“The Scripture cannot be broken.”** And Jesus also said to His Heavenly Father: **“Your Word is truth.”** When the apostle Paul came to a new community on his mission journeys, he usually went first to the Jewish synagogue in that place. On one such occasion the first words he addressed to the local synagogue were the words of our text from Acts 13: **“Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.”** This was common ground between Paul and his Jewish audience. He started with something they both accepted: God’s deliverance of His people from their slavery in Egypt. Notice Paul’s emphasis on the fact that this was God’s action in every way: God chose them; God exalted them; God brought them out.

In the letter to the Hebrews the writer points out how Moses in particular responded with faith in God’s promise of deliverance. **“By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest He who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.”**

It was God who directed the operation every step of the way. God through His promises had created and strengthened Moses’ faith, and as a fruit of that faith Moses did what God told him to do. And the Israelites themselves, although they were very weak in faith, did cross the Red Sea on dry land as God directed them, and thus they were enabled to witness that tremendous victory over the mightiest nation of the ancient world. Egypt’s slaves were now free. Imagine if the United States would have been defeated by Nicaragua or Grenada. A super power absolutely overwhelmed by an unarmed band of frightened, helpless slaves. It does not make any sense to human estimation. But it happened, and God be praised that it did. **“The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians.”**

Now what does all of this have to do with you and me today? Does it simply provide us the thrill of reading a sensational victory which took place in the distant past? No, there is much more to it than that. We should realize that the God who set the Israelites free from their slavery is the God who has set us free from our slavery too. For the children of Israel were the bearers of the promise of future victory over the enslaver of the whole human race. This enslaver was the devil, who had succeeded in getting Adam and Eve to sin. Thus the devil gained control over the hearts of all human beings. They became his slaves to do his bidding.

From the beginning, however, God promised that a Savior would come to destroy the power of the devil and set the slaves free. This Savior would be born of a woman, do battle against the devil and destroy him absolutely and completely, so that the slaves would have liberation and release to permanent safety and freedom. The children of Israel were chosen as the nation through whom and in whom this Savior would be born. The future victory of the Savior would depend on the escape of Israel from Egypt. And the Savior’s triumph over the devil would be just as great a triumph as Israel’s triumph over the Egyptians at the Red Sea. In fact, it would be an even greater triumph, for more was at stake than the freedom of one nation from the oppressive control of another. What was involved here was the deliverance of the whole human race from the bondage of the devil.

Our Lord Jesus is that promised Savior, and He Himself spoke of His work as setting people free from

their bondage. In John 8 He said to those Jews who believed Him: **“Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin,”** but **“if you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”** **“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”** Thus it is written in the letter to the Hebrews: **“Christ shared in flesh and blood, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”**

Freedom from the slavery of sin is possible only through Jesus Christ. On Good Friday Jesus, our Passover Lamb, poured out His atoning blood to set us free from the guilt, punishment and bondage of our sins. On Easter Sunday Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim His victory over sin, death and Satan. Therefore we can call Good Friday the day when the blood of the Lamb saved us from death, just as the blood of the unblemished lambs saved Israel. And we can call Easter the day when the forces of the enemy were totally overwhelmed, even as Pharaoh and all his hosts were drowned in the Red Sea.

The emphasis in the New Testament is on spiritual slavery rather than physical slavery, and on spiritual deliverance rather than physical deliverance. That is one reason why those Christians today who emphasize liberation from bad social conditions as the church’s main message are on the wrong track. Look at Paul’s words in our text to the Christians at Corinth. Some of his readers were slaves in a physical sense; others were free men. Paul writes to them all: **“Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave.”**

In other words, the outward social condition of a person is not that important. To the Christian slaves Paul essentially says, “Don’t be concerned about your physical slavery. If you can find a way to become free, take advantage of it. But the real important thing is the spiritual freedom which you have in Christ.” **“You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”** Christ paid for you with His precious blood; you are spiritually free from all men; Christ is your Master; you belong to Him. Christ is no tyrant who lays heavy burdens on you like Pharaoh of old or like the devil today. Christ is your loving Lord who died for you to make you His own and give you the eternal inheritance of life everlasting.

Oh, there is so much more that could be said on this topic, but we need to stop for now. Let’s simply focus on this: We were all slaves of sin by nature and from birth. Christ has truly set us free by His blood, and the benefits of His death have been brought to us by His Word. Returning to the old slavery by obeying sin, we only lose our freedom. But continuing in His Word of truth, you and I are free from the condemnation of the law, free from the curse of hell and free from the devil’s control – all because **“you were bought at a price.”** Therefore **“do not become slaves of men”** or of the devil, but follow the gracious Lord who bought you. Amen!

(To be continued)

Exegesis of Romans 2:25-29

Steve Sippert

In the previous section of his epistle, covering Romans 2:17-24, Paul examined the spiritual condition of the Jewish people of his day. Although they prided themselves in having the status of God’s chosen people and claimed to know the law so well, they failed in evident ways to keep the law which God had given them. Consequently, they followed in the footsteps of their Old Testament ancestors by blaspheming through their transgressions the name of God among the Gentiles.

In the verses which end chapter 2, Paul addresses a topic somewhat related to the previous verses. He debunks the Jews’ reliance on the rite of circumcision. The fact that the Jews relied on their circumcision even more than on the law is made apparent from the ancient rabbis who asserted: “He who is circumcised need not fear the pangs of Gehenna.”¹

Verse 25: For circumcision indeed is of value if you continually keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, this circumcision of yours has become uncircumcision.

Περιτομή μὲν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἔάν νόμον πράσσης

Περιτομή in this verse refers to the state of being circumcised, and ἀκροβυστία at the end of the verse refers to the state of being uncircumcised. In verses 26-27 both words will be used by way of extension – from abstract to concrete – to refer to the person himself as one who is either circumcised (e.g. the Jew) or uncircumcised (e.g. the Gentile).

Translating a Present Indicative (ὠφελεῖ) as linear depends on the context, since the aoristic Present Indicative occurs often. Translating a Present Subjunctive (πράσσης) as linear is more certain, since the Present Subjunctive was typically linear in its usage; thus the translation above: “if you *continually* keep (or practice) the law.”

The apostle here was not discrediting circumcision as worthless, but in and of itself it had no power to make one right with God through justifying faith in Christ. Circumcision was not a means of grace, for it did not dispense God’s forgiveness or bring about conversion.

We have another example of νόμος used in Romans without the article. The context makes it clear that Paul was thinking of the Law of Moses, i.e. the Law God gave to the Jews through Moses.

ἔάν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς, ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν.

Martin Franzmann offers useful perspective on the covenant significance of circumcision with the following summary of God’s intent for His Old Testament people: “Long before the Law was given through Moses, God made His covenant with Abraham and set upon it the sign and seal of circumcision. In circumcision God incised upon the flesh of man His covenant will, His pledge of ‘I will be your God.’ In an unrepeatable act, with an ineradicable mark, God pledged Himself to every member of His people.... Circumcision is the sign both of God’s gift to the Jew and of His claim upon the Jew; the covenant of which it is the sign put a man under both the promise and the commandment of God; the Jew speaks his Amen to the promise of God by obeying the law of God.... Circumcision is no magic spell but the dealing of the living God with responsible man. If man breaks the Law, his circumcision cannot save him; it indicts him” (*Romans: A Commentary*, pgs. 54-55).

Our understanding of Romans 2:25-29 is further aided by the apostle’s inspired words in Romans 4:11 and Galatians 5:3:

Romans 4:11 And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also.

Galatians 5:3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

If the apostle’s own countrymen were willing to face the truth, they would have to admit that because of their transgressions against God’s law “circumcision in itself” would “never save the Jews from wrath.”²

Verse 26: Consequently, if the uncircumcised continually observes the righteous requirements of the law, this uncircumcision of his will be regarded as circumcision, will it not?

ἔάν οὖν ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσση,

In verses 26-27 Paul presents the opposite scenario of verse 25. ἡ ἀκροβυστία refers to the Gentile believer in his state of not being circumcised. However, as evident fruit of his faith in Christ, his lifestyle is nevertheless pleasing to God, since he is continually led to pursue the attitudes and actions that God has expressed in His law. Note that the Gentile is said to “observe the righteous requirements of the law.” The direct object of φυλάσση is τὰ δικαιώματα, not νόμον. We can understand τὰ δικαιώματα to mean the specific regulations which spell out what is right (δίκαιος) in God’s sight. God never obligated the Gentiles to obey the regulations of Mosaic Law in the form in which they were given to the Jews. The ceremonial laws regarding clean and unclean food, Sabbath day, Passover and other religious festivals, animal sacrifices, ceremonial purification and so forth were never applied to them. But since the moral aspects of the Law of Moses were a definitive expression of God’s immutable will for all people, we can identify the essentials of the Ten Commandments as the prime example of the τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου which uncircumcised Gentile believers have been led to keep. Although φυλάσση can often mean “guard” or “preserve,” with the connotation of treasuring what is guarded or preserved, in this context it has the meaning of “observe” or “obey,” i.e. the

opposite of “break” or “transgress.” The faithful will “keep” the law from being violated by “obeying” what it says.

οὐχ ἡ ἀκροβυστία αὐτοῦ εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθήσεται;

The negative οὐχ expects the answer yes to the question Paul is raising, thus making the question a virtual statement. It functions as the conclusion of a 3rd class conditional sentence, which states a general truth.

The occurrence of ἀκροβυστία in this verse refers specifically to the person’s condition or state of not being circumcised. But notice how the lack of circumcision does not adversely affect the individual’s standing with God: “his uncircumcision will be regarded (λογισθήσεται) as circumcision.” The Ylvisaker-Lillegard commentary (previously cited in endnote 1) suggests taking the Future Passive here as a “logical future,” rather than a predictive reference to Judgment Day. The significance that God attached to circumcision, namely the divine seal of His Gospel covenant and His adoption of the individual as His own child, will also be true for the Gentile believer, even though his submission to God does not include the act of being circumcised.

Verse 27: And the naturally uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, will judge you, who in spite of having the written code and circumcision, are a breaker of the law.

καὶ κρινεῖ ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου.

The Future Indicative verb form κρινεῖ can be either predictive or gnomic.³ The predictive future could imply a scene on Judgment Day and thus be similar to the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:41: “The men of Ninevah will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” If Paul were expressing a similar thought as Jesus did, then the judgment of Gentile against Jew might very well be by way of contrasting example rather than words: the *example* of the uncircumcised Gentile fulfilling the law would in and of itself condemn the circumcised Jew who transgressed the law. If κρινεῖ is a gnomic or logical future, then Paul’s implication would involve words and determinations of judgment which the Gentile makes in reference to the Jew. If this were Paul’s intent, it could then be seen as an example of 1 Corinthians 2:15 taking place: “He who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.”

Since the phrase ἐκ φύσεως is in the attributive position, it modifies ἀκροβυστία, which again is used to refer to the uncircumcised person. I have chosen to render the ἐκ phrase (lit. “out of nature” or “by nature”) as an English adverb, “naturally.” Paul is calling to mind that the Gentile is uncircumcised by birth, i.e. God made him that way, and he did not actively pursue this state as some act of rebellion or defiance to God.

The present participle τελοῦσα, together with its direct object (τὸν νόμον), also modifies ἀκροβυστία. In this context the participle is adverbial (circumstantial) and may have a conditional sense: “if he keeps on fulfilling...” The exegetical grammars of Robertson and Wallace cite this verse as an example of the conditional participle. However, it’s also possible that the participle here expresses the idea of means: “by fulfilling the law...” Would the participle of means fit better with the idea mentioned above, namely that the faithful Gentile judges the unfaithful Jew by the example of his faithfulness?

The direct object (σέ) of the main verb (κρινεῖ) is easy to recognize. But the second accusative, τὸν ... παραβάτην νόμου, poses a question of identification. Does it express simple apposition to the direct object, or can we take it as a predicate accusative? The difference in meaning can be illustrated with the following translations:

Simple apposition – “...will judge you, who in spite of having the written code and circumcision, are a breaker of the law.”

Predicate accusative – “...will judge you as one who in spite of having the written code and circumcision, are a breaker of the law.”

According to the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon (BDAG 3rd ed.) κρίνω can take a direct object and predicate accusative. But the occurrence of such is rare in the New Testament; the only clear example is Acts 13:46.⁴ If this verse in Romans made use of the predicate accusative, it would be specifying exactly what judgment the faithful Gentile is speaking against the moralistic Jew. He would say: “Though you have the written law and circumcision, you are breaking the law you hold so dear.” I hesitate to insist on this view, especially when the appositional sense is sufficiently viable and no grammar, commentary or translation has

advocated the predicate sense for this verse. The appositional sense does not remove the guilt of what the Jew was doing. It simply puts the indictment into the apostle Paul's mouth rather than the mouth of the uncircumcised Christian. The use of the apposition further clarifies what kind of person Paul means by the pronoun σέ.

According to a variety of grammars and lexicons **διὰ** with the genitive can refer to attendant circumstance. Applying this sense to verse 27, we can translate: "with the written code and circumcision." Since the context seems to supply a concessive idea, I have chosen to render σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου with the wording above: "...you, who in spite of having the written code and circumcision, are a breaker of the law." The genitive γράμματος expresses how the Jew had in his possession the correct written form of the law. Having the exact law from God and the rite of circumcision were his security, or shall we say, his false hope of claiming a favorable standing with God. Paul wants such a person to realize that he doesn't have good standing with God at all, that he indeed lacks the needed righteousness to be accepted in God's sight. To make this point resonate with more forcefulness, he declares that the moralistic yet hypocritical Jew, who was prone to judge heathen Gentiles, will be judged by the faithfulness of the Gentile believer, who did not have the same advantages that God had given to the Jews.

I believe that verses 25-27 invite the following question. Is Paul speaking only hypothetically of a Gentile who, if it were possible, obeys the moral standards of God's law and thus by his own righteousness is justified and becomes one of God's people without the rite of circumcision? Or is he presenting a general truth that will be realized again and again, namely that a Gentile believer lives his life on earth in repentant conformity to the will of God as evident fruit of his faith in Christ? It seems to me that using a hypothetical example would weaken Paul's point. Why should the Jew feel indicted by a hypothetically obedient Gentile, if such a person was not known to exist in real life? On the other hand, by presenting a true scenario with actual occurrences arising in the course of time and visible to the Jews of his day, Paul can reinforce his point with realistic examples of Gentile Christians doing what the unbelieving Jews were not doing. We find Stoeckhardt making a similar point: "When the apostle speaks of Gentiles, who fulfill the law, that is no abstract possibility but something that often happens. And the Gentile, who judges the Jew, is a real person. To be sure, keeping the righteousness of the law and fulfilling the law describe the true obedience to the law, of which no heathen is capable by nature but which is only found among Christians, who have the Spirit of God. But Paul has in mind just these heathen who have become Christians."⁵

Verses 28-29: For he is not truly a Jew who is one externally, nor is external circumcision in the flesh true circumcision. But rather he who is inwardly a Jew is truly a Jew -- and the circumcision of the heart is true circumcision, in connection with the Spirit, not the written code -- whose praise is not from men, but from God.

Paul briefly introduces what he will further describe in chapter 9: only believers in Christ (both Jewish and Gentile) are to be regarded as the true Israel. For an interesting contrast of terms compare these verses with Romans 2:17: "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God."

οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν

Verses 28-29 use contrasting adjectives: φανερός (visible, plainly seen, evident) vs. κρυπτός (hidden, concealed, invisible). Each adjective is part of a prepositional phrase (ἐν), which is then used with the article to serve as a masculine substantive (ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ or κρυπτῷ). The context here is leading the reader to separate ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερω and Ἰουδαῖός as two distinct nominatives, one being the subject and the other the predicate. The linking verb ἐστιν is joining the two into a definitive statement. The sense expressed may be easier to grasp if we rearrange the word order in the following way: οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐστιν Ἰουδαῖός. Since Ἰουδαῖός lacks the article and is not technically a proper name according to Greek usage,⁶ we can identify the subject as the phrase ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερω. A somewhat loose translation would be: "not the one in the evident way is a Jew." The sense of this syntax at the beginning of verse 28 is then extended and implied in the rest of verses 28-29.

οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή

The syntax in 28b is essentially the same as 28a. It was not necessary to repeat the linking verb ἐστιν if it was obvious to the reader that the sense of such a verb should be supplied. To aid our English-speaking minds, we can envision the Greek as having a linking verb: οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ (ἐστι) περιτομή.

Recognizing ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερω as the subject and περιτομή as the predicate, we can loosely translate: “and not the kind of circumcision done in the evident way in the flesh is true circumcision.” Paul states nothing new here, but what the Old Testament had taught in Deuteronomy 10:16, Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4. God had always told His people that circumcision of the heart is the only circumcision that results in eternal blessing for the individual.

ἀλλ' ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαίος,

The pattern of verse 28 continues in verse 29: ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ is the virtual subject without the negative and Ἰουδαίος is the predicate, with the sense of a linking verb supplied. The meaning then would be: “but the one in the hidden way is a Jew.” While φανερω refers to the outward appearance, κρυπτῷ refers to what is hidden in the heart, namely the person’s faith in Christ, which is not visible to human sight.

καὶ περιτομή καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι

Circumcision in the flesh could be proven visibly, but this was not the circumcision that mattered in God’s eyes. God was seeking (and still is seeking) circumcision of the heart – something that can never be accomplished by the letter of the law, but only through the power of the Spirit. The LID form πνεύματι is not synonymous with καρδίας – i.e. not to be construed as the human “spirit” of the person. Even without the article it can refer to the Holy Spirit. Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:6 where πνεῦμα and γράμμα are used in contrast to each other, even as they are in this verse. The use of ἐν could be instrumental: “by means of the Spirit, not the letter.” The Ylviskaer-Lillegard commentary indicates as much on p. 43: “ἐν here then indicates not the sphere of action, which is proven by the fact that it does not go with γράμματι in this sense. It is used in the same meaning with both words, ‘spirit’ and ‘letter.’ In both cases ἐν gives the means.” This same commentary then goes on to say: “The law concerning circumcision cannot circumcise the heart; it cannot break the power of sin in the heart. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. This circumcision of the heart is, indeed, commanded, Jer. 4:4; Deut.10:16, but it is God who ‘worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:13). Such an one, with a circumcised heart, will be recognized by God as a true Jew, though not by men” (p. 43).

οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.

Some (*International Critical Commentary*) contend that Paul is using a play on words (Ἰουδαίος = Judah = “praise” and ἔπαινος in Greek = “praise”). Whether Paul intentionally used a word play or not, this much is certain: the believer in Christ, as one circumcised in the heart by the Spirit, has this praise from God Himself that he (or she) is one of God’s own and a spiritual Jew, even if he lacks in his body the mark of circumcision and does not have in his family tree the ethnic heritage of Jewish ancestry. Because of his God-given faith in Christ, the modern-day Gentile Christian may confidently identify himself (or herself) with this description.

Endnotes

¹ John Ylvisaker, “Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Chapters 1 to 4.” trans. George Lillegard (unpublished) 40.

² George Stoeckhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Erwin Koehlinger. 29.

³ “Gnomic Future” is the category name used by modern grammarians (e.g., Wallace and others), which may be similar to the “logical future” mentioned previously.

⁴ NKJ: “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” The second accusative “unworthy” (ουκ avxi,ouj) can only be taken as a predicate accusative.

⁵ Stoeckhardt, 30.

⁶ Names of ethnic groups were capable of expression in the plural and thus were not regarded as proper

names.

The Son of Man in His Interaction With the Children of Men

William Henkel

* The following article is an abridged English version of “Der Menschensohn im Umgang mit Menschenkindern,” which originally appeared in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Volume 22:1 (Jan. 1925), pages 1-22. It is the beginning of a multi-part series written in German by William Henkel and made available to our readers through the translation efforts of Norman Greve. The insertion of *headings* within the article, *words within brackets* and supplementary *endnotes* have been included for the sake of clarification.

No one is able to exhaust the theme stated in the title above, which we are treating at the suggestion of a pastoral conference. Whoever would wish to develop it fully from every aspect would need to write a complete biography of Jesus. And even then, he would not do it full justice. Though after painstaking study of the four Gospels and other portions of Scripture he portrayed each child of man with whom the Son of Man had come into contact during the days of His flesh, though he minutely displayed in what way and manner He dealt with them, still the portrait sketched would certainly fall far short of reality, no matter how many individual features it might contain and no matter what brilliant colors it might be painted. It would not highlight, as these details deserve, the Subject’s immaculate innocence and purity, His discernment and wisdom, His philanthropy and geniality, His love for sinners, His kindness and gentleness, or His compassion toward His brethren according to the flesh; nor would the portrait satisfactorily treat His virtue.

Yet even a dim portrait of the Son of Man, or one which accurately sketches in only the prominent features, will delight the eye and compel the confession, “You are the fairest among the children of men.” We must indeed allow the portrait as a whole to have its effect on us and not study only individual features. In addition, we who are called to teach and train others by the gospel are only too inclined to such a narrow focus. In Jesus we see, above all, the Shepherd of souls, the Pastor from whom as an unparalleled model and example we can learn how we are to conduct our office and become good preachers and ministers [*Seelsorger*]. The thought is not always first with us that He is our Shepherd also and that we should, first of all, give Him opportunity to influence us pastorally with all His doing and teaching. It is of the utmost importance that we present Him to our own souls and that we let ourselves glow entirely with the splendor of His grace, that we involve ourselves in the charm of His incomparable personality and let His divine greatness work on us in all its directness, before we try to learn from Him how we should conduct ourselves as ministers of others. We should not value our own souls less than others. We indeed need counsel in the same measure as, if not more than, all others. We cannot truly understand His pastoral work with others and make use of it in our calling if we have not experienced it ourselves. We do not want to lose sight of this.

What did Jesus mean when He called Himself the *Son of Man*?

In our theme we call Him the Son of Man whose interaction with the children of men we wish to address. He Himself in the days of His flesh preferred to call Himself this. Why? Even if we know who the Son of Man is, we still on that account do not know why He called Himself by that title. It is Jesus’ completely unique self-designation. If we were not familiar with it since childhood, it would immediately attract our attention. And Jesus has used it often, more than 30 times in Matthew alone and in more than 80 places in the four Gospels. We thus will not dare to neglect the question: what does the title “the Son of Man” really mean? And also the question: how does it come to have this meaning? We would gladly seek this, since much time and effort have already been expended on a solution and whole books have been written, without anyone having come to a result unassailed in all points. Among the proposed solutions there is none whose correctness is attested by the entire evidence.

The question of who the Son of Man is touches on an article of faith, which divides the spirits. It is answered by Matthew 16:13-16 and in many other passages of Scripture. The question of why He called Himself this, and what the designation signifies in itself, is a linguistic, or historical problem. Scripture itself offers no

solution, but only some clues, from which reason proceeds and over which it can stumble. But reason is permitted much leeway, and it has made rich use of it. It has gone down all sorts of twisted and tortuous paths, bringing more confusion than light to the matter, so that one New Testament scholar, Holzmann, has called the question concerning the Son of Man the most entangled and confused of all New Testament problems. Whoever wishes to form a judgment over the reliability of the scientific New Testament research, which so joyfully turns up its nose at our naïve biblical faith, only need read the discussions of many highly educated New Testament scholars on the question of the Son of Man and note upon what precarious foundations their theories often rest. Mark how prejudiced they are, although they are always stressing the feature that scientific investigation proceeds on the basis of having no presuppositions. Observe at what fundamentally different conclusions the investigators often arrive, who all proceed from the same premises. See how sure they are that their views are correct or, at the very least, that those of their opponents are wrong-headed. We wish to give only a brief overview of the principal understandings the title “the Son of Man” has borne and to offer a few words toward their evaluation.

Understanding *Son of Man* according to grammar

The meanings which the title “Son of Man” has borne can be divided into two classes: grammatical and historical. The advocates of the former think they can arrive at their goal solely along grammatical lines. They establish what the designation “Son of Man” means according to the rules of grammar and the usage of language and rest content with the results obtained in this way. First of all, they find that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is not a Greek idiom, but a Hebraism. It is the articular¹ translation of the not uncommon Old Testament phrase *Ben Adam*, corresponding to the Aramaic *Bar Enash*. In the exalted language of the prophets and psalmists this expression is a synonym of *adam* or *enash*. “Son of Man” would then be synonymous with “man.” Even if the article of this designation were to convey a more definite meaning, this much is certain, that the one so designated is included in the general human race.

Thus Theodor Zahn has stated in his commentary on Matthew; thus many of our older dogmaticians, although they do not advocate the purely grammatical meaning; and thus exegetes of the ancient church. But, they add, the article dare not be overlooked. It would have some meaning when Christ calls Himself not *a* but *the* Son of Man. “The determined generic character denotes the most distinguished example of the genus, that individual in whom the genus finds its consummate representation,” Zahn says. Therefore to him ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is the man κατ’ ἐξοχήν [par excellence], just as to the ancient Greeks ὁ ποιητής was the poet κατ’ ἐξοχήν, Homer.² This interpretation, which Herder already advocated – and even he was not the first – many recent exegetes share with Zahn. To them the Son of Man is that man in whom the entire humanity is embodied, who comprehends in Himself everything which belongs to humanity. By this perception some think of humanity in its empirical character, a humanity whose lot since Adam’s fall is lowliness, distress, suffering, grief and affliction. With this expression “Son of Man” Christ therefore designates Himself according to His lowliness. Others, such as Zahn, think more of humanity in its ideal character. The Son of Man is to them the ideal man, who is in perfection what man was first created to be: the image of God, the reflection of His being, the epitome of everything good, noble and true.

Von Hofmann stands somewhat apart. To him the designation υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is not entirely synonymous with ἄνθρωπος. To him the ἄνθρωπος is Adam; all others are, in his view, υἱοὶ ἀνθρώπου; and every individual of them υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου. Christ, on the other hand, is ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. “The article,” von Hofmann says, “indeed cannot confer the meaning ‘archetype of humanity, man in the highest sense of the word’ ... but it does indeed lie in the nature of the article to contrast with all other members of the human race this specific one who belongs to the human race.”³ “By this He (Jesus) designates Himself as one who is what every human as a member of the human race is, but in a sense that is exclusively peculiar to him, yet without specifying wherein the exclusivity lies nor on what it is based.”⁴ And of what does this exclusiveness consist? The designation υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is a summary of the history of mankind’s development. This development has two stages. The first presents ὁ ἄνθρωπος, Adam; the second the υἱοὶ ἀνθρώπου; Christ now names Himself ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as though He were the only descendant of Adam, since in Him the God-pleasing development of the human race comes to its conclusion and reaches its God-intended goal. Therefore the ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου should be synonymous with ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Matt. 11:3).

The author of the applicable article in Meusel’s *Handlexicon* agrees with each of these views and seeks

to unite them. To him the Son of Man is the representative of humanity in its every aspect. In Him is embodied the lowliness and suffering as well as the nobility, goodness and truth, which God bestowed upon the first people. And in Him the development of the human race comes to its God-intended conclusion.

Cremer, who at first agreed on the whole with von Hofmann's views, explains it in yet another way in the last edition of his lexicon under the article "Menschensohnheitel."⁵ To him the title is about the same as quotation marks. In Cremer's view "the Son of Man" is the one the Jews call "a son of man" and consider to be a mere human, but who, although He really is a son of man, is at the same time God's Son, the Son of the living God. De Wette, Tholuck and others propose a similar meaning: Jesus particularly assumes this title to make it clear that His servant's form does not stand in contradiction with His claim to be the Messiah, but rather is characteristic of the Messiah and is the necessary prerequisite for the activities of His call.

Understanding *Son of Man* based on Old Testament origin

The other meaning of this Messianic title is the historical. In this explanation ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is not man κατ' ἐξοχήν, but the well-known man, the man who has been spoken and written about and plays a role in the history of the kingdom of God, i.e. in prophecy. In this explanation "Son of Man" is the name and title of a historical person; its meaning must be obtained from history, not from grammar. Now where in the history of the Old Testament kingdom of God is mention made of a "Son of Man?" There are three categories of Old Testament passages to which the title "Son of Man" is traced back. First are those passages in which the prophets are addressed as children of man, "sons of man." In the book of Ezekiel alone this address occurs 90 times.⁶ Weizsäcker and others have therefore pointed out the possibility that Jesus wished, by calling Himself "the Son of Man," to refer to His membership in the fraternity of prophets. The article in front of the title would then be easy enough to explain: Christ is indeed the Prophet predicted by Moses in word and type, the Prophet who should come into the world, the Prophet come from God, the Prophet of all prophets.

To the second category of usage belong those passages in the Messianic Psalms in which the Messiah is called the Son of Man in typical or direct prophecy. He is so named in Psalm 8: "What is man that You think of him? And the Son of Man that You accept Him?"⁷ And in Psalm 80:17: "Let Your hand be upon the Man at Your right hand, and upon the Son of Man whom You strengthen for Yourself."

By far, most proponents of the historical understanding of the Son of Man title – the ancient church, the dogmatists of our church such as Chemnitz⁸ and Gerhard⁹ and, in addition, exegetes such as Bengel, Starke, Meyer, Weiss, Keil and many others (also the *International Encyclopedia*) – these all trace the title back to Daniel 7:13-14. In the verses before this passage four great world empires are prophesied, symbolized by four images of beasts. Then a fifth kingdom comes into view, and now it says, "And behold, there came One in the clouds of heaven as a Son of Man, and He was brought to the Ancient One. The same gave Him power, honor and rule, so that all nations, peoples and tongues should serve Him. His power is eternal, which never passes away, and His reign has no end." At this point it is said that these five kingdoms are presented, four earthly ones and the kingdom of God. The possessor and bearer of the kingly authority is in any case the King of the realm, and the animal figures under which the kingdoms are presented are therefore symbols of their kings. The King of the fifth kingdom, the eternal kingdom of God, appears in human-like form, the form of a Son of Man.¹⁰ How natural it is in connection with this passage to mention the coming King of God's kingdom, the Messiah, the Son of Man. That this is not only natural, but is also really the case, they continue, can be proved from an apocryphal, pre-Christian writing, the *Book of Enoch*, in which the term "Son of Man" repeatedly crops up as a Messianic title. And if we would compare declarations of Jesus, those in which He calls Himself the "Son of Man," with the passage from Daniel and notice how Jesus applied to Himself as a title – and indeed in almost the exact words – what Daniel 7 asserted of the One who had the appearance of a Son of Man (Matt. 26:64, Mark 14:62, et al.), then we could scarcely harbor any doubts that the passage from Daniel is the source of the Son of Man title.¹¹

Evaluating the grammatical and historical meanings of *Son of Man*

More or less important considerations have been raised against all these meanings of the Son of Man title. The grammatical meaning, according to which the Son of Man is the ideal man, holds some allure at first glance. Jesus, the ideal man – that sounds so lovely and also corresponds entirely to the facts. But after calm consideration this meaning seems almost completely impossible. How could Jesus have started calling Himself

the Son of Man without having in view a historical suggestion or any historical reference? This would be just as likely as someone in his daily conversation repeatedly calling the gift for poetry “songs of a sweet mouth” without presenting the historical precedent for saying this, without Schiller having coined this phrase. For the expression “Son of Man” does not belong to the common speech, but to exalted language, the language of prophets and psalmists.

Jesus would therefore certainly not have called Himself τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, but τὸν ἄνθρωπον, if He had wished to designate Himself the “ideal man,” the flower of humanity. But would His fellow countrymen then have understood Him? And wouldn’t it have been necessary to explain in what sense He called Himself *the* man? And is not the concept of an ideal man also alien to the New Testament? Is it conceivable that Jesus would have called Himself the ideal man 80 times and more without at least a few New Testament writers taking up, further expanding and pondering over the thought underlying this self-designation? And finally, how poorly the Son of Man title, when understood in this way, fits into the majority of Jesus’ expressions in which it appears. What sense would the title “the Ideal Man” have, for example, in the following passages?

Matthew 9:6: The Ideal Man has power to forgive sins.

Matthew 10:23: You will not work through the cities of Israel until the Ideal Man comes.

Matthew 12:32: Whoever speaks a word against the Ideal Man, it will be forgiven him.

Matthew 13:41: The Ideal Man will send His angel.

Matthew 16:27: The Ideal Man will come in the glory of His Father.

Matthew 18:11: The Ideal Man has come to save.

Matthew 24:27: This will be the time to come of the Ideal Man.

Matthew 24:30: The sign of the Ideal Man.

Mark 14:21: The Ideal Man indeed goes forth, as it is written of Him.

Luke 17:22: You will desire to see a day of the Ideal Man.

Luke 21:36: That you might be worthy to stand before the Ideal Man.

John 3:13: The Ideal Man who is in heaven.

John 6:53: You will not eat the flesh of the Ideal Man.

The explanation of von Hofmann has more in its favor. It moves within the range of biblical thought. Christ is, in fact, the υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, the offspring of man, who was to come in order to bring to its conclusion the development of the human race, and in whom the fate, the salvation of all the children of Adam is enclosed. But the way and manner in which von Hofmann gains these scriptural thoughts from the words “Son of Man” is not biblical, but Hofmannian; and if Jesus had expected the Jews to attain an understanding of the Son of Man title by this same path, then He would have given them a riddle they could have unraveled just as little as the Philistines did with Samson’s riddle.

Among the grammatical meanings of the Son of Man title belongs the one of Cremer, “the One who was held by the Jews to be a mere son of man.”¹² There is much that speaks against this meaning. It is not very likely that Jesus would prefer to designate Himself by a title that His enemies had given to Him and which contains only half the truth. Then too its use in no small number of passages is difficult, no matter how hard Cremer defends against this. We point out only a few instances. Matthew 11:18-19: “John has come, he did not eat or drink; and they say, ‘He has the devil.’ The Son of Man has come, He eats and drinks; then they say, ‘Look, how the man is a glutton and drunkard.’” The Jews, Christ says, are like moody children for whom no one can do right. When two witnesses of the truth, John and Jesus, appear among them, they blame the first for not eating and drinking and the second for eating and drinking. What sense would it yield in this context if Christ called Himself the one whom the Jews held to be mere man? He would then at least need to characterize the first witness also. But He should here certainly not be referring to a difference in the persons, but in the dealings. [Also] John 1:51: “From now on you will see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” Jesus spoke these words soon after the beginning of His teaching ministry. What reason could He have then to call Himself one whom the Jews declare to be an ordinary man at a time when the Jews scarcely yet knew Him, and therefore had not yet misjudged Him, and when He was not yet a sign generally spoken against? If we test the example, Cremer’s understanding also fails.

The historical meaning seems to us to be the most acceptable of all. It avoids the difficulties which the grammatical meaning offers by nature and the exegetical difficulties it creates for many passages. And the understanding of not one single passage among more than 80 is made more difficult through the meaning of the Son of Man title as the designation of the promised Seed of the woman, the future Messiah, the King of the

future kingdom of God. According to Zahn, Cremer and others the derivation of the title from the Daniel passage or from Psalm 8 offers insurmountable difficulties; and whoever does not see them is following the later dogmatists. We think that the difficulties are much fewer than the ones offered by the meanings they recommend. Even if one does not see the Messiah presented in the Daniel passage under the man-like appearance, but only His kingdom, one can surely not, without dogmatism, deny the possibility that the Son of Man title was still derived from this passage. If a form like the Son of Man represents the kingdom of God, as here seems apparent, that representation also applies to its King. Whoever derives the Son of Man title from the Daniel passage as thus understood indeed does not find in it a designation of the divine-human person of the Messiah. The title then describes only the King of the New Testament kingdom of God, without describing His person. However, in light of the passage in Daniel as understood of the person [rather than the kingdom], the “Son of Man” is the King of the future kingdom of God, who appears in the clouds of heaven and yet is formed as a man – the unique man in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, the Immanuel, the Word made flesh, the promised Seed of the woman and the Virgin’s Son, who is at the same time the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

It should not be asserted that by this meaning of the title “Son of Man” the problems concerning the Son of Man are solved without exception. But the lingering unsolved remnant is not as significant as many think. For example, if you say that it would be unthinkable that Jesus made use of a title not understood by His contemporaries to designate His Messianic person, then one first creates the problem of which he says that it can’t be solved by deriving the “Son of Man” title from the Daniel passage. It is an unproven (and not provable) assertion that the Jews of Christ’s time were unfamiliar with the title “Son of Man.” The opposite claim lets itself be proven more easily – without a great show of scholarship. Even if one does not accept as valid the pertinent witnesses from the Book of Enoch, but explains them as additions from a later period – whether they are set aside justly or not – yet one must still let stand the witness of the fourth Evangelist. In reporting a conversation of Jesus with the Jews, John writes in the 12th chapter, verse 34: “Then the people answered Him, ‘We have heard in the Law that Christ remains forever; how then do You say, ‘The Son of Man must be exalted?’ Who is this Son of Man?’” Some indeed have wished to prove from this very passage that the title “Son of Man” as a designation of the Messiah was strange to the Jews at Christ’s time, and they have explained the final words “Who is the Son of Man?” to this end. But it is apparent that the Jews did not wish to ask, “Who is the Son of Man? We have never heard of Him.” Rather they are asking, “Who is *this* particular Son of Man of whom You say that He must be lifted up from the earth, whereas truly the One prophesied in the Scriptures should rule an eternal kingdom on earth.” The accuracy of this exegesis follows from the context. Already in the first part of our passage the Jews let it be known that the title of the Son of Man is familiar to them, and indeed as one the Scripture confers on the Messiah. How could they otherwise say, “We have heard in the Law that Christ remains forever; how then do You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up?’”

Yet we do not conceal the fact that also with the historical meaning of the title “Son of Man” there remain many unanswered questions, which are suggested by its use in the New Testament. Foremost is the question of why it occurs only in the historical books – indeed exclusively in the four Gospels – as the self-designation of Jesus and then completely disappears, so that neither John (in whose Gospel it occurs a dozen times) uses it in his epistles nor Peter (who in Matthew 16:16 made a confession of the Son of Man in behalf of all the other disciples) use it in his epistles. This question, which would be easier to answer if only Jesus had named Himself the “Son of Man” and Stephen had not also once called Him this,¹³ will not be discussed here. A thorough handling of the problems related to the Son of Man was not envisioned. It would make a long article necessary and would not fit into the scope of this practical work.

How this Son of Man, who was not from earth as other children of men, but was come down from above and indeed went about in the form of sinful flesh;¹⁴ who was separate from sinners and higher than the heavens, but indeed was not a High Priest who could not have sympathy with our weaknesses and was tempted in all matters just as we are, only without sin; how this Son of Man, in more than three decades of His earthly walk, was accustomed to interact with His brethren in the flesh and how He presented Himself to them – this will be presented in our series of articles according to the following aspects:

1. The Son of Man as human relative interacting with His human relatives.
2. The Son of Man as preacher interacting with His congregation.
3. The Son of Man as pastor [*Seelsorger*] interacting with individual souls or individual classes of people.

Endnotes

¹ The German word here is *artikulierte*, which apparently indicates that the Greek translation of the Hebraism has the Greek article ο`.

² This use of the Greek article, designated in many grammars as *par excellence*, is aptly described by Daniel B. Wallace in his exegetical New Testament grammar *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*: “The article is frequently used to point out a substantive that is, in a sense, ‘in a class by itself.’ It is the only one deserving of the name.” After giving an example in English, he goes on to state: “It is used by the speaker to point out an object as the only one worthy of the name, even though there are many other such objects by the same name” (p. 222). In the next section Wallace defines a somewhat related use of the article called Monadic: “The article is frequently used to identify monadic or one-of-a-kind nouns, such as ‘the devil,’ ‘the sun,’ ‘the Christ.’ By way of “Amplification and Clarification” he then says: “The difference between the monadic article and the article *par excellence* is that the monadic article points out a *unique* object, while the article *par excellence* points out the *extreme* of a certain category, thus, the one deserving the name more than any other” (p. 223). As for the expression “the Son of Man,” in a footnote on page 240 he advocates that the expression employs what is called the “well-known” article, because the title referred to what the Jews would have known from Daniel 7:13.

³ Within the text of the *Quartalschrift* article Henkel offers in parentheses the source of his quotation in the following abbreviated form: “Bibl. Theol. des N.T. 1886. S. 47.”

⁴ Again the source of citation comes in abbreviated form: “Kom. zum Lukasevang. 1878. S. 138.” It is not certain to us whether Henkel has quoted von Hofmann again, but from a different source than the one indicated in footnote 2.

⁵ Literally in English: “Son of Man title”

⁶ When the Lord spoke directly to Ezekiel, He addressed him as “Son of man” numerous times.

⁷ Throughout this article Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are translations of the German employed by Henkel. Also, the capitalized forms “Man” and “Son of Man” are being used either to reflect Messianic meaning or Messianic interpretation.

⁸ At this point Henkel has the following insertion: *De duabus nat. XIV, 126.*

⁹ After Gerhard’s name Henkel has this insertion: *De duab. nat., loc. IV, 80.*

¹⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* has the following on מָן, which in Daniel 7:13 occurs as כִּבְרֵ אֱנָשׁ: “Used like the Hebrew ‘ēnôsh (no. 136a, q.v.), but also serves for Hebrew ‘îsh and ‘ādām. Used with bar ‘son.’ The phrase ‘son of man’ occurs only in Dan. 7:13. The corresponding Hebrew phrase is used frequently in Ezekiel to mean ‘a person.’ In Dan 7:13 it refers to a heavenly person (perhaps in studied contrast to the preceding beast figures), coming before the Ancient of Days in the judgment scene. It is this verse that Jesus applied to himself in Mt. 26:64 et al., thus filling his often used self-designation ‘Son of Man’ with the highest significance” (vol. II, p. 990).

¹¹ Cf. what Jesus said in Matt. 26:64 with Dan. 7:13: “I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

¹² The content of this paragraph has been abridged considerably.

¹³ Acts 7:55-56 NKJ: “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

¹⁴ The German has *in der Gestalt des sündigen Fleisches*, which is the same wording used by Luther in

his translation of Romans 8:3.

(To be continued)

Doctrinal Themes in the Book Of Concord

Confession and Forgiveness

Rollin A. Reim

[Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the *Journal of Theology* over 25 years ago (see Vol. 19, No. 4, Dec. 1979). We offer a reprint here in the hopes that to the majority of our readers the content will be both new and edifying.]

Is it good to feel bad about something you've done? Is it healthy to foster a sense of guilt in people?

One psychoanalyst, Dr. Theodore Rubin, calls it "a destructive form of self-hate." Another, Dr. Willard Gaylin, characterizes guilt as "guardian of our goodness." Most clinicians, however, distinguish between guilt that is normal and that which is neurotic. The one is a sign of health, the other a hazard to emotional well-being. Guilt gone underground, they say, may emerge as anxiety, a sense of worthlessness, fear of impending disaster, or simply a general feeling of discontent.

Christian churches today seem unsure of themselves about this, an area in which they should be specialists. Sometimes you hear prominent preachers decry all talk of sin and guilt as being "negative" and "emotionally unhealthy." More often, the Law simply lies buried beneath a whip-cream overlay of positive thinking talk which has no reference to grace and forgiveness. Many a secular psychologist would chide them for this, and brand them as a threat to mental health, if not civilization.

The Problem Faced

The Reformation Fathers had to deal with the question carefully. Yet they faced it squarely, and the answers they formulated in our *Book of Concord* still serve us well:

Since absolution or the power of the Keys is also an aid and consolation against sin and a bad conscience, ordained by Christ Himself in the Gospel, confession or absolution ought by no means to be abolished in the Church, especially on account of tender and timid consciences and on account of the untrained... (Smalcald Articles, III, VIII).

You can sense the pressures that would have done away with the practice of confession. And it is no wonder. Like Luther, who wrote these words, most of the people concerned with the *Book of Concord* had cruel memories of the confessional booth, which was something like a modern traffic court. Plead guilty and you may get off with a lighter sentence. According to the common practice, the confessing Christian had been led to believe that he could expect forgiveness only of specific sins that were remembered and recounted, and for which suitable satisfaction was rendered. In this people could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see nor can remember.

Full Disclosure

There is an answer to this problem. The Augsburg Confession picked it up from the venerable church father Chrysostom (AD 347-407), who had this splendid counsel:

I say not to you that you should disclose yourself in public, nor that you accuse yourself before others, but I would have you obey the prophet who says, "Disclose thy way before God." Therefore confess your sins before God, the true judge, with prayer. Tell you errors, not with the tongue, but with the memory of your conscience... .

So the Reformers protected confession from another kind of abuse, grandstanding. It is that style

of “witnessing” which recounts in lurid detail all the bad things I used to do “before I took Jesus into my heart.” Thus a shamefully wrong impression is given, namely, that I have no sin to confess since I was born again. This writer knew a Pentecostal missionary who would skip the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. That was for those who still had trespasses to forgive. Not for him!

Lutheran liturgical worship services enable the worshipper to make full disclosure. “I confess unto Thee that I am sinful and unclean, and that I have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed.” This covers the whole sordid list of our falling short of the glory that God would rightfully expect of us. It grants that in my flesh dwells no good thing. And this is the honest truth of the matter. It witnesses to our sinnerhood, even as we would witness to the Saviorhood of Jesus. As it should be.

Make It Personal

To enjoy the saving health of such confessing, we need to practice being specific in our minds about our known failures. When David said, “I have sinned against the Lord,” he certainly had the specific of adultery and murder in mind. Nathan had helped him become conscious of those particular sins with Bathsheba [and against Uriah¹]. It was necessary for him as it is for all of us to confront those particular sins which burden us with a sense of guilt. Here the practice of private confessing to a trusted Christian counselor is often useful. For it allows for that which does the healing – the forgiveness.

The Forgiveness

The Reformation re-introduced what had been lost in Confession:

Confession embraces two parts; the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor,² as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven (Small Catechism: part V on Confession and Absolution).

The second part, obviously, is the more important. It is the Gospel of forgiveness which does the healing, not our admission of wrong. Only when I am assured, authoritatively, that “the Lord hath put away your sin” (Nathan), am I relieved of the guilt-burden. Christian counselors have the only truly effective therapy for the troubled spirit. May they use it with confidence!

The trouble is, we tend to be more occupied with what we might do (the confessing) than with what God does (the forgiving). Luther was so confident of the latter, that he announced (on Maundy Thursday, 1523) that the usual practice of confession would be suspended. Instead, communicants were to announce for Communion to the pastor for an examination of Gospel understanding. Luther declared, “I have said that the Sacrament shall be given to no one except he be able to give an account of what he receives, and why he is going.”³ Luther, apparently, believed in the practice of what we sometimes call “close” Communion. The concern was for the communicant, that he should not fail to find in the Sacrament of the Altar its glorious and powerful message of forgiveness. Away with the guilt!

Is a sense of guilt a good thing? Evidently it is, if it is properly resolved. For it is a guardian of goodness in the sense that it brings some psychic⁴ pain to sinning. But it is a deadly thing, this guilt, if it is not dealt with in God’s own way. The Reformers found that way again. They gave it to the world in their teaching and practice of Confession with Absolution. And we thank them for it today, when so many are disconsolate. They know guilt; let them also know grace!

Endnotes

¹ The words contained in brackets are not in the original article.

² The word “confessor” appears also in *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) 349.

³ Cf. *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, F. Bente. (Concordia, 1921) 75. Emphasis indicated by underlining is the author’s, not Luther’s.

⁴ As the first definition listed for “psychic” *The American College Dictionary* (©1962) has “1. of or pertaining to the human soul or mind; mental (opposed to *physical*).”

Book Reviews

Betty Jane Bailey & J. Martin Bailey: *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, paperback, 235 pages.

The authors of this book lived in Jerusalem and then in Bethlehem in the 1990s as part of a Christian minority in the midst of the prevalent Jews and Muslims. Their work enabled them to become acquainted with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), which is described as “the most inclusive ecumenical body in the world, drawing together as it does Christians from all four of the great families of churches” (p. 25). The authors claim that many people are surprised to hear that there are any Christians at all in the region, and their aim in this book is to let Christians know that there are many Christians in the Middle East, coming from many different historical backgrounds.

In the brief introduction the authors say: “If we could start seminary again we would devote more time to church history and patristics” (p. x). The reason for this statement is that there are so many different Christian branches at work in the area, each with its own history. Many of these Christian groups go back to the early days of the church, when major doctrinal controversies separated the East from the West, the Chalcedonians from the non-Chalcedonians, etc. Christians need a book like this to sort through all of this history and see what groups are still active in the area after all the turmoil and confusion of past ages.

By the “Middle East” the Baileys understand the entire cultural region in Southwest Asia and North Africa, from Morocco in the West to Iran in the East and from Sudan in the South to Turkey in the North, including in particular Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The four families of churches working together in the MECC are the Eastern Orthodox family, the Oriental Orthodox family, the (Roman) Catholic family and the Evangelical (all Protestants) family. Still outside the MECC is the Assyrian Church of the East, which “holds the doctrine of the separation of the two natures of Christ” (pp. 130-131), that is, Nestorianism, which the other churches consider to be heretical.

The book is divided into three major parts. The first part is entitled “The Churches of the Middle East.” One point that is emphasized in this section is that the percentage of Christians in the region is dwindling, mainly because of the emigration of Christians from the area. For example, although at present “Christians in the Middle East number between ten and twelve million” (p. 13), Christians in countries like Lebanon and Iraq and cities like Jerusalem make up a much lower percentage of the population than earlier: Lebanon from 50% to 40%, Jerusalem from 50% to 10%. One reason for the formation of the MECC in 1974 was to help the Christians work together in a culture dominated by the Muslims (in most of these countries) and by the Jews (in Israel). We need to remember that not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Palestinians are Muslims.

The first part of the book includes an interesting timeline of Christianity in the Middle East, which traces events from Pentecost in Jerusalem, through the seven ecumenical councils accepted by the Eastern Orthodox churches, through the period of the Crusades, through the establishment of modern Israel in 1948, to the present-day activities of the MECC. The timeline, spanning six pages in the book, obviously covers a tremendous amount of history.

The second major section of the book is entitled “Profiles of the Churches.” Here we are given information about the history and the teachings of the four families of churches and their divisions. For example, the Eastern Orthodox family includes the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa and the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus. For each branch the present-day leader is named and briefly described, contact information is given, and an estimate of present membership is supplied.

As we might expect, the Evangelical family has the most sub-parts. The Baileys list not only those churches cooperating in the MECC, but also those outside. Are there any Lutheran churches in the Middle East?

One is listed: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (serving in Palestine, Jordan and Israel), known also by its legal name, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (pp. 106-108). This small church body, comprised of five congregations, has a total membership of 2,000. The Augsburg Confession was translated into Arabic in 1993. Services are held in Arabic and follow traditional Lutheran forms. The leader of the group at the time of publication was the Right Reverend Munib Andria Younan, Bishop. Website, e-mail address and telephone number are listed.

The last major section of the book is entitled "Church and State in the Middle East." Here the information is given country by country rather than church body by church body. There is considerable repetition here, but it is handy to have each country listed separately, with the church bodies active within that country. For example, four pages (pp. 162-165) are devoted to Iraq. The three main non-Christian groups are mentioned: the Shi'ite Muslims, the Sunni Muslims and the Kurds. It is stated that "there are nearly a million Christians in Iraq, or roughly 5 percent of the population" (p. 163). The largest Christian groups are the Chaldean Catholic Church (the largest by far), the Syrian Catholic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Protestants are very rare in Iraq. "The Evangelical family is represented by members of five isolated Reformed and Anglican parishes.... There is also a small Seventh-Day Adventist community and several other small unaffiliated Protestant bodies" (p. 163). Also of interest: "An estimated 18 percent of the Christian population has emigrated since 1991" (p. 165).

We pray that all those whom God has brought to faith in Christ in all of these many churches will be kept in that faith until the end, regardless of any persecutions or restrictions they may have to endure. As far as the work in the MECC is concerned, we can certainly understand the desire for unity among Christians where they are so vastly outnumbered by non-Christians. Nevertheless, our Lord's warnings against false teaching need to be sounded and applied today as much as they were in the past. If we want to remain faithful to our Lord, we cannot make common cause with those who do not accept all of God's Word. And even though we are isolated from other believers because of our confession of Christ and all of His teachings, it continues to be true and will always remain true: "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16).

Jacob Gartenhaus: *Famous Hebrew Christians*, International Board of Jewish Missions, Inc., Revised Edition 1998, paperback, 223 pages.

Almost all of the chapters in this revision were included in a 1979 publication by Jacob Gartenhaus. But two chapters have been added by Orman Norwood, one of which is the story of Jacob Gartenhaus himself. After an introduction which supports and promotes the preaching of the Christian Gospel among Jews, the various chapters present the careers of 33 famous Hebrew Christians in alphabetical order, plus the two added chapters.

With only few exceptions the Hebrew Christians whose lives are featured in this book lived and worked in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Many of them were as deeply enmeshed in Pharisaic Judaism as the apostle Paul before his conversion. Thus this book is a testimony to the power of the Gospel of Christ to turn sinners from darkness to light, from rejection and hostility to Jesus to zealous proclamation of the salvation Jesus came to bring to all, "for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Some of the names are well-known: Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), at one time Prime Minister of England; Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889), Bible scholar and expert on Jewish customs and rituals; Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), composer of the oratorios *Elijah* and *St. Paul* and champion of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. But equally impressive are the accomplishments of the others through whom the God of our fathers worked mightily. Joseph Schereschewsky (1831-1895), for example, translated the Bible into two different Chinese dialects. Aaron Adolph Saphir (1831-1890) wrote Biblical studies that are still available and useful today, especially his *Expository Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Isaac Salkinson (1820-1883) translated the New Testament into Hebrew, as well as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, all for the purpose of acquainting his fellow Jews with the Gospel of Jesus.

In His providence God very often has led those whom He has converted into spiritual agony and torment before their lives were turned around. For instance, Hyman Appelman (1902-1983) went through a nervous breakdown, extreme spiritual despondency and even a relapse into unbelieving despair before finding Jesus as his Savior. Like many of the others in this book, Hyman was rejected by his family because of his conversion.

Different was the experience of Joseph Rabinowitz (1837-1899). For we read (page 150): "Soon after Joseph's baptism, his wife and seven children, his brother and his family, and several other Jews who heard the gospel from his lips publicly confessed Christ as their Savior."

Many were converted in their young adulthood through the testimony of Christians or printed materials that came their way. Others were brought to Christ later in life, as, for example, Max Wertheimer (years not given), who labored for many years as a successful Jewish rabbi before the death of his young wife and subsequent sad experiences with occultism, spiritualism and the foolish philosophy of Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science.

Gartenhaus writes: "For long periods Wertheimer locked himself in his library studying, meditating, and supplicating God for light. As he searched the Scriptures, his thoughts were repeatedly directed to Isaiah 53.... As he read and pondered the passage, he saw clearly that the prophet could not be referring to the people of Israel.... Gradually, these Old Testament passages (such as Isaiah 53, Daniel 7:13-14, Psalm 110:1, and Isaiah 9:6-7), and many others turned his thought to 'the son of man [who] came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45) – the man of Calvary.... The more he studied it [the New Testament], the more he saw it to be complementary to the Old Testament. Christian doctrine which he had ridiculed as illogical, unnatural, and un-Jewish he now saw as perfectly logical and truly Jewish, although supernatural. He now found that such fundamental articles of faith as belief in the triune God, the divinity of Christ, and the virgin birth, were based solidly on the anticipations of the Old Testament" (pp. 195-196).

Personally, I love to read books like these, which show the power of the Gospel of Christ to change men's lives. So often we labor faithfully and long without seeing any fruit, and we tend to become discouraged. But the Gospel of Christ has lost none of its power, whether it is presented in oral or written form. It is for us to keep on talking, to keep on writing and to keep on praying for the conversion of those who do not yet know the Savior who died for them.

– David Lau

Alvin J. Schmidt: *How Christianity Changed the World*, Zondervan, 2004, 441 pages.

Alvin J. Schmidt is a retired professor of sociology at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois. He has reworked this book, including its title. It was formerly published with the title *Under the Influence*. The book is a fascinating study of fifteen different aspects of our modern culture, which find their roots in Christianity and its teachings as drawn from the Bible. This study is especially pertinent, given the push within our society today to remove all traces of religious and primarily Christian expression from the public square. Professor Schmidt's contention is that much of what is good within our culture is derived from Christian teaching and was developed by individuals committed to Jesus Christ! These Christian roots are increasingly unknown by the general public – a situation Professor Schmidt hopes to remedy.

His topics vary from respect for human life, to the freedom and dignity accorded women, to Christianity's imprint on education, to the Christian connection to modern science, to Christianity's impact upon architecture, music and literature. Professor Schmidt fills each chapter with names of and quotations from Christians of all ages – some well-known and others unknown, but all of which demonstrate the origins of the aspect of culture being considered. While the book cites thousands of historical facts, it is anything but a dry read. It is an insightful defense of the Christian faith, which will lead both pastor and layman to understand better the impact Christianity has had upon our society, to appreciate the fruits produced by the Spirit within the lives of so many Christians over the ages and to stand up for his faith, as others seek to remove its influence from our society.

While primarily concerned about the positive influence of Christianity upon society, Professor Schmidt does not hesitate to criticize individual Christians and churches when their confessions and actions have failed to live up to the principles outlined by the Bible. There are some areas where we confessional Lutherans will question some of Professor Schmidt's observations and conclusions, but overall, the book is well-written, very timely and worth the effort to read.

The book deserves a spot on any pastor's shelf. It will be of great interest to any layman interested in history or culture, and therefore it merits consideration for church libraries as well. It could well serve as a resource book for a world history course taught at the college level or as the basis for a series of Bible class discussions.

**Gene Edward Veith, Jr.: *A Place to Stand – The Word of God in the Life of Martin Luther*,
Cumberland House Publishing, 2005, 244 pages.**

Gene Edward Veith, Jr. is a professor of English at Concordia University-Wisconsin and the cultural editor for *World* magazine. This book is well-written, demonstrating both a high view of Scripture and an excellent understanding of the life of Martin Luther and the role Scripture played in his life.

The book is divided into three parts: 1) The Life of Martin Luther; 2) The Character of Martin Luther; and 3) The Legacy of Martin Luther. The first part provides an excellent summary of Luther's life. It is clearly written and demonstrates with great accuracy each of the critical stages of Luther's life from his birth to his death. It is based upon the latest and best Luther research. The chapters are brief, and this portion of the book reads like a novel. The second part of the book provides insight into various aspects of Luther's character. Each two-to-three page section begins with a quotation from *Luther's Works* and then goes on to illustrate the character quality of Luther with anecdotes from Luther's life. This section is well done and introduces the reader to Luther's writings in a way that general biographies do not. The third section of the book deals with six different aspects of Luther's legacy, focusing especially upon Luther's work of bringing the Word of God to bear upon life both within the church and within society.

This excellent biography of Martin Luther is part of a series of "Leaders in Action" biographies published by Cumberland House Publishing. Some of the other individuals included in the series are Stonewall Jackson, John Knox, C.S. Lewis, William Wilberforce and Booker T. Washington. This book would be a superb addition to any clergy or layperson's library. It would serve well as a confirmation or graduation gift. If anyone were to have a single volume on Luther in his library, in my opinion this book would be a good choice!

– Paul D. Nolting