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P R E F A C E

This is the second volume of a two-volume commentary on Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. The reader is encouraged to read the preface and introduction to the first volume of the set for a historical setting to the epistle and a detailed treatment of the theme of the epistle, as well as comments about the structure of the commentary and of each chapter.

Briefly, the theme of the epistle is walking in the way of love. That way of love as the believer is called to confess it and walk in it in his whole life is antithetical to man's supposed love and his call to other men to walk in the way of his false love. So the epistle calls the believer to reject man's corruption of love, to refuse his call to walk in the way of his corrupt love, and to confess the Spirit's word about love and heed his admonitions to walk in that way.

The chapters of this volume, as those of the previous volume, each treat a specific text of 1 Corinthians. Included in each chapter is an introduction that explains the setting of the text in its larger context in the chapter and in the epistle. All the chapters of the commentary relate the theme of each text to the main subject of the epistle—the calling of the believer to walk in the way of love. The commentary is written and divided into self-contained chapters so that each chapter can be read on its own. While not intended to discourage the reading of more than one chapter at a time, this structure facilitates reading one chapter at a time for ease of study and digestion of the material, and especially for the benefit of societies that use the commentary as a guide to the study of 1 Corinthians.

The publication of this second volume, as well as the first, was only possible because of the generous support and encouragement of the men and women of the Reformed Free Publishing Association. I thank the men of the book and publication committee for seeing this multi-volume, multi-year project through to the end. I especially thank the staff of editors and proofreaders who so tirelessly gave themselves and their time to reading and rereading; checking grammar, quotations, and references; and all the other minutiae that are part of publishing a commentary on scripture. My prayer is that this volume rewards their confidence and serves the churches of Jesus Christ by edifying them for their walk in the way of love as the Spirit teaches in 1 Corinthians.

INTRODUCTION

First Corinthians is scripture's detailed treatment of the subject of Christian love. The first volume of *Walking in the Way of Love* treated 1 Corinthians 1–9. This second volume explains chapters 10–16. This division is arbitrary and was dictated simply by convenience. The division occurs in the middle of the apostle's treatment in chapters 8–10 of the truth of Christian liberty in the Christian's walk in the way of love. So the first volume ends with the apostle explaining the Christian's liberty in Christ, and the second volume begins with the apostle still explaining this same truth.

Almost uniquely among the books of the Bible, the theme of 1 Corinthians is not explicitly stated until late in the epistle. Usually the theme of a book of the Bible is stated near the beginning, but in 1 Corinthians the Spirit does not state the theme until the last verse of chapter 12: "And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." While the King James Version includes this verse at the end of chapter 12, the verse more properly belongs as the introduction to chapter 13 and the Spirit's inspired ode to love in that chapter. Here at last is the theme that governed all the instruction of the apostle prior to chapter 13 and that controls all the instruction that follows from chapter 13.

This is the grandest praise of love in all of scripture, save Solomon's Song of Songs. Here love's excellence, practice, permanence, and glory are revealed and impressed on the believer in memorable and stirring language. This exultation of love concludes with the Spirit's own startling comparison of spiritual gifts:

“Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (v. 13). Even among this exulted triumvirate, love is the greatest.

If a man does not have this evaluation of love, he will neither esteem love very highly nor pursue it very ardently. Such was the attitude of the members of the Corinthian congregation, an attitude that they were taught and in which they were led by a bevy of false apostles who were intent on lording it in the church of Christ. Thus those false apostles also undermined the calling of the church to walk in the Spirit’s way of love in order that their own false instruction about love might govern in the church and they, not Christ, might reign in the church. With this moving song about love the apostle also calls the church and believer back to esteeming love as the greatest in order that they might pursue it with all their might in every area of their lives.

The second volume of *Walking in the Way of Love* also includes the doctrinal heart of the epistle. First Corinthians 15 contains the apostle’s glorious and fascinating treatment of the resurrection from the dead, perhaps the most detailed in all of scripture. From this chapter we also learn that the false apostles who afflicted Corinth with their pernicious instruction about love did so out of their unbelief in the resurrection. Their instruction about the way believers must live was carnal, full of man’s wisdom, and pleasing to the flesh. That instruction had its source in their carnal theology about the resurrection. Life always follows from doctrine. The false apostles’ carnal doctrine, “that the dead rise not” (15:15), was the root of their carnal instruction about life in the church and bore the fruit of a carnal church full of divisions and strife.

The way of love that the Spirit calls believers to confess and in which he calls them to walk is otherworldly, heavenly, and spiritual. That is why carnal men reject and malign that way of love as unloving and, indeed, as hatred. They do so out of ignorance of

the source of that way of love in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promised resurrection of believers. By the resurrection Christ became the living lord of his church who has the right to call all to walk in the way of love. Christ brought to light this way of love by his resurrection from the dead. By his cross Christ purchased the right of believers to walk in this way of love. As their living lord, Christ also raises believers by the wonder of grace to walk in this way of love. Over against all the labor and suffering—especially the malicious slander of those who hate this way of love against those who walk in it faithfully—Christ also promises believers that in their resurrection their labors in the way of love are not vain in the Lord.

Failure to walk in the way of love as revealed by the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians is an abject failure of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in one's own resurrection, a revelation of a carnal spirit, and a practical denial of the resurrection of Christ and of believers. A church might not deny the resurrection of believers *doctrinally*, but she denies it as *really* by her rejection of the Spirit's description and calling to walk in the way of love. Those who reject the Spirit's way of love also always have a carnal substitute driven by false love that they attempt to foist on the church as true love. Such a reaction to the way of love described in 1 Corinthians is as carnal and destructive in the church as the corrupt teaching of the false apostles that the dead in Christ do not rise and whose corrupt theology led to the practical destruction of the church's walking in the way of love. So the apostle grounds all of his instruction about the church's calling to confess and walk in the way of love in the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The apostle ends his first epistle to the Corinthians with a fearsome warning to the one who rejects this way of love as it is revealed in the epistle, slanders it, refuses to walk in it, and so reveals that he does not love the Lord Jesus Christ: "Let him be Anathema Maranatha" (16:22).

WALKING IN THE WAY OF LOVE

Such is the Spirit's love as the apostle reveals and describes it in his first epistle to the Corinthians. Such must be our love. In that way we are called to walk.

CHAPTER I

BAPTISM IN THE RED SEA

1 Corinthians 10:1–5

1. *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;*
 2. *And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;*
 3. *And did all eat the same spiritual meat;*
 4. *And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*
 5. *But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*
-

Introduction

In these verses the apostle appears to make an abrupt change of subject, but it is only an appearance. In chapter 10 he illustrates his doctrine regarding the believer's liberty in Jesus Christ and the calling of the free believer to live temperately in the Christian life (9:25–27). The believer's liberty in Christ Jesus is not freedom to do wickedly but freedom to live chastely and temperately in this present evil age because he has been brought into a covenant of grace in Christ. Temperance is the gift of God's grace to the

believer, a gift in which he is called to live and with which he is to use his liberty in Christ.

To confirm and to illustrate his doctrine, so that no believer will despise the admonition of the Spirit to live temperately, the apostle introduces the Old Testament type of the deliverance of God's people in Jesus Christ. The first part of the history to which the apostle refers is the formation of the nation of Israel in the Red Sea: "All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses" (10:1-2). This refers to the baptism of all Israel in the Red Sea and into Moses. The baptism in the Red Sea is the main thought of verses 1-5.

From that history the apostle draws one particular lesson: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (v. 12). From that history he sharply warns against a certain attitude of pride in the church. "We stand," the people say. "We are secure in our confession and in our understanding of the truth." But this is not their pride. That comes next when they say, "Now we can turn our attention to other things. We need not be careful. We have nothing that threatens us." This is the thinking of spiritual pride. Individuals and churches with such pride, which is trust in themselves, are as ripe for a fall as were thousands of Israelites in the wilderness and as Peter, who denied his Lord.

Paul's pointed application and warning in verse 12 comes out of his theology in verses 1-5. This theology the church and believer must understand in order to profit from the Old Testament, because all of its admonitions and warnings depend on and are drawn from this theology. The fundamental Old Testament theological lesson is that "our fathers...were all baptized unto Moses...but with many of them God was not well pleased" (vv. 1-2, 5).

Ignorance of this fundamental doctrinal lesson eviscerates the entire Old Testament. If the apostle's theology is misunderstood, ignored, or denied, the Old Testament is misunderstood,

ignored, or denied; and the Old Testament remains a sealed book, which the spiritually illiterate say they cannot read and the scribe says is sealed. Then there is no profit for the church in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, but they are misused as a source for mere moral lessons or as a prop for false theology. Knowledge of this basic theological lesson of the Old Testament is also basic to the believer's walk in love that "believeth all things" (13:7). Ignorance of this basic theological lesson of the Old Testament leads either to a Pharisaical self-righteousness or to rank worldliness in the church.

The Historicity of the Old Testament

Regardless of the theology of the first five verses of 1 Corinthians 10, and in fact before one can have a theology of the Old Testament from these verses, there is in them a lesson about the Old Testament generally and about the miracles and facts concerning Israel's passage through and deliverance in the Red Sea in particular. With these verses the Holy Ghost honors the Old Testament as real, factual, actual history.

Much that passes for Old Testament scholarship today denies this basic point about the Old Testament. Unbelieving scholarship treats the Old Testament as a collection of stories, myths, or sagas; freely criticizes the facts of the Old Testament; and views it as a badly bungled patchwork of fables put together by inept editors who retained many historical inaccuracies and contradictions. The miracles, the facts, and the people are denied. For unbelieving scholarship the Old Testament is a fable. It is not real, actual, factual history.

If some commentators are not bold enough in their unbelief to deny the historicity of the Old Testament outright, they cast doubt into the minds of their pupils regarding the reliability of the biblical accounts. For example, they say that the Israelites passed through another sea than the Red Sea, or the commentators deny that the Israelites were six hundred thousand footmen

when they left Egypt. Others make the division of the Red Sea the result of a tidal inundation or of some freak of nature. Some deny that the cloud went behind the Israelites, so that the angel of Jehovah was darkness to the enemy and light to the Israelites.

These commentators do not honor the Old Testament as history because they do not believe it is the word of God. If those who rip apart the account of the Red Sea and deny other miracles actually believed the scriptures to be the word of God, they would not say these things. That they actually dare to say such things about the word of God reveals their unbelief.

The consequence of such unbelief is that many learned tomes on the Old Testament are filled with pages of worthless arguments about which scribe wrote what section of the Bible and unbelieving denials and alternative explanations of the facts of Old Testament history. These tomes contain very little theological instruction, not to mention application of the history for the church today.

Such denials will eat as an acid until they have dissolved all the theology of the Old Testament and the New. This is true because the biblical facts are not mere facts, but they have been ordained and carried out by God to teach the truth of himself and of his salvation in Christ Jesus. Denial of the facts is denial of the substance of those facts in the truth of God and salvation in Christ.

Denial of the historicity and the biblical facts of the Old Testament is grounds for discipline. Love for God and for the church of Jesus Christ requires discipline of false teachers who deny the historicity of the Old Testament.

Just as dangerous as denying the historicity of the Old Testament is viewing the Old Testament as mere facts, facts that might have a quaint lesson or two for the church today, but that are not binding and authoritative theology.

Very different are the Holy Ghost and Paul, who treat the Old Testament as history and from it draw the fundamental

theological lesson taught by that history for the benefit of the church of all ages. From that theology they will also draw several practical applications for the church of the New Testament. Paul took his theology and his applications from the facts of the Old Testament. He did so because he believed it to be the word of God and thus also real, factual history.

Israel's Deliverance in the Red Sea

The factual history from the Old Testament to which the apostle draws our attention is Israel's deliverance in the Red Sea. The story is old but stirring. God had delivered Israel from Egypt by the ten plagues. Particularly devastating was the terrifying encounter with the word of God that promised the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt and deliverance for Israel through the blood of the passover lamb: "For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you" (Ex. 12:23).

What a terrifying sight it must have been to see the avenging angel open the doors to the houses, barns, stables, and bedrooms of all the firstborn of men and beasts to execute God's word and judgment. Afterward, Pharaoh thrust out the Israelites, and they spoiled the Egyptians and the kingdom of Egypt. Then Pharaoh had a change of heart, and six hundred chariots took the vanguard of an army that lusted for vengeance. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them" (15:9).

Worse, it appeared that Moses had gone the wrong way. Deeper in Egypt than ever before, shut in by the wilderness on either side, the Red Sea before, and Pharaoh's chariots thundering from behind, the Israelites rebelled. Moses told them, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (14:13). The

cloud took up its position behind the nation, separating between nation and nation, giving light to the Israelites and ominous darkness to the Egyptians.

O God, from Thee the waters fled,
 The depths were moved with mighty dread,
 The swelling clouds their torrents poured,
 And o'er the earth the tempest roared;
 'Mid lightning's flash and thunder's sound
 Great trembling shook the solid ground.¹

There on dry ground the Israelites passed through the sea with their little ones, flocks, and herds. There God overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses" (14:30–31).

In 1 Corinthians 10:1 the apostle begins his lesson from that Old Testament history with the word "all." All our fathers, all natural Israel according to the flesh, were "baptized unto Moses." They were "all...under the cloud, and all passed through the sea...all [did] eat the same spiritual meat...[and] drink the same spiritual drink" (vv. 1, 3–4). Crucial to the apostle's theological lesson is that all natural Israel passed through the sea and passing through were baptized.

That the Israelites were baptized "in the sea" means that they actually passed through the sea and by means of their passage through the sea were baptized. That they were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud" has the same basic meaning (v. 2). By means of the cloud that stood behind the Israelites they were separated from the Egyptians. By means of that baptism the Israelites were

¹ No. 211:2, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1927; rev. ed. 1995).

taken under the protection and shadow of the cloud and were also guided by it. In the cloud was the revelation of God, so that the Israelites lived beneath the name and before the face of God.

The Israelites were also delivered by their baptism in the sea. The Red Sea was their salvation and deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. After the Israelites' passage through the sea, their oppressors were dead. By the Israelites' passage through the sea, they were finally freed from the oppression of Egypt. By their passage through the sea, they were also delivered in principle into Canaan. While they stood on the shore of the Red Sea, Moses taught them to sing, "Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation" (Ex. 15:13). It was a gracious, powerful, and complete deliverance of the nation of Israel.

When the apostle calls that deliverance a baptism, he and the Holy Spirit mean that the Israelites' baptism was the sign and seal of God's covenant with them—believers and their seed—in which there was an eternal testimony of God's faithfulness to his promise, a testimony to which God again and again referred throughout the Old Testament. In that passage through the sea, God gave a promise and by it confirmed and affirmed his promise to Abraham. That passage was a sign of God's work of severing the Israelites from the wickedness of Egypt, in order to incorporate them into Christ Jesus on the basis of his sacrificial death and perfect righteousness.

The promise was that God freed the Israelites from the guilt, pollution, and dominion of their sins, which was particularly important because a few hours before they crossed the Red Sea, they had rebelled against God. The promise was that he was their God and they were his people. The promise was that he would care for and defend them and be a hedge about them. It was the promise that he would preserve and keep them all through their wanderings and bring them into the promised land and give them all the land he had promised to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. About this hope of the saints of that generation,

Moses sang so beautifully, “Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established” (v. 17).

Belonging to that close care of his people in fulfillment of that gracious promise, God gave and the Israelites “did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink” (1 Cor. 10:3–4). The reference is to manna and to water from the rock, which was not only their earthly food and drink but also their spiritual food and drink.

The apostle does not call those things “spiritual” because he denies that they were physical. Manna was some kind of bread that could be boiled, baked, or fried and eaten for physical nourishment to keep all the Israelites alive. The water that came from a “Rock that followed them” was real water (v. 4). The “Rock” followed the Israelites and wandered with them through the wilderness. From that “Rock,” when smitten or spoken to, came water that refreshed thirsty men, women, children, and beasts alike, just as water from a faucet does today.

The apostle calls the manna and water “spiritual” because he has in view the spiritual reality that each stood for. The baptism, the manna, and the water were all types. A type is a shadow of what was coming. The truth of Christ in the New Testament casts a shadow into the Old. That shadow consists of these types, which teach the truth about Christ. God miraculously provided both manna and water, and as such they belonged to the works of God’s grace. At that time they were means to communicate grace to his people by faith and to sustain their spiritual and physical lives. The water and manna were also ordained by God as types of the truth to come in Christ.

A Typical Deliverance

When the apostle compares the Israelites’ deliverance in the Red Sea to baptism (v. 2), he teaches that the event was a type.

Their baptism was a type of the New Testament reality of which baptism is a sign and a seal, so that whatever baptism signifies was also signified and sealed to the Israelites in their baptism in the Red Sea. The Belgic Confession says that “the Son of God... is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and to enter into the spiritual land of Canaan.”² The Reformed form for baptism says that God “drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, and hast led Thy people Israel through the midst of the Sea upon dry ground, by which baptism is signified.”³

The apostle teaches the same thing about the water from the rock when he says that Israel “drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (v. 4). The rock was Christ because it was a type of Christ ordained by God to prefigure Christ. The same is true for the manna. Christ said, “Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat...Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven...I am the bread of life...This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die” (John 6:31–32, 35, 50).

The Israelites’ baptism was a type of what New Testament baptism is a sign and seal—deliverance from sin through Jesus Christ and incorporation into him in the covenant of grace. Baptism teaches believers that they are completely, graciously, and powerfully delivered from the guilt, bondage, and pollution of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. It teaches them that the blood of Christ confirmed the new covenant that God has made with them and their seed.

2 Belgic Confession 34, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:426.

3 Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 261.

In baptism God likewise makes a promise. The Father promises to be a God unto his children and to avert all evil or to turn it to their profit. The Son promises to wash them in his blood from all their sins, to account them righteous before God, and to make them heirs of eternal life. The Spirit promises to keep them and to apply unto them what they have in Christ, namely the washing away of their sins and the daily renewing of their lives, until he presents them without spot or wrinkle as his elect in the heavenly kingdom. Baptism is a testimony to God's children that God will ever be their gracious God and Father.⁴ Baptism is of use to them not only when it is administered, but also throughout their whole lives.

God testifies the same promise in the preaching and signifies it in the Lord's supper as the means whereby he communicates to believers the content of that promise. The Israelites had water from a rock; we have water from Christ. They had bread from heaven; we have the Bread of heaven. The water and bread were types of the means of grace—the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments—ordained by God and used by the Holy Ghost to communicate the living water of Christ's salvation and Christ himself as the food and drink of righteousness for our hungry and thirsty souls.

This means as well that the Israelites had Christ in the Old Testament through the types, and those who ate and drank in faith received the same grace that we receive when we believe the word and partake of the sacraments in faith.

The Saving Efficacy of Israel's Baptism

All the Israelites were baptized. They all ate the spiritual meat. They all drank the spiritual drink. They all received them as we likewise all receive them. All the children of believing parents are baptized. All who are baptized are catechized and educated in good, Christian schools. All sit and hear the same preaching of

4 Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *ibid.*, 258.

the gospel. All are taught the same doctrine, and all are instructed in the way of righteousness.

But what do we say of those who perish in unbelief? What do we say of the thousands of Israelites who fell in the wilderness? What do we say of those who are baptized and catechized but are not saved? This is the same great theological dilemma regarding Israel according to the flesh that the apostle begins to solve in Romans by saying, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect” (9:6), and that the apostle solves in 1 Corinthians 10:5: “But with many of them God was not well pleased.” That is the great theological lesson of Old Testament history.

This is the great issue of our time, as it has in some form or another been the issue for the church in her controversies regarding God’s gracious salvation. It was also the issue in the life-and-death struggle of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1950s. The minimization of the theological controversy of 1953, either by minimizing its significance, ignoring it, or making that controversy a matter of personalities, is an abject and inexplicable failure to grapple with and to understand the great theological issue—greatness in the sense of universal, eternal, and salvific—that was dealt with in that controversy.

The controversy was an issue of the covenant—the nature of the covenant, the promise of the covenant, and salvation in the covenant. Specifically, the controversy concerned the questions of whether the covenant depends for its fulfillment on men, God and men, or God alone, and whether the promise in the covenant is conditioned on some response from man or is unconditional and dependent on God alone.

In answering these questions it is necessary to understand that different answers are not due to an unclear scripture. In crystal-clear language that a child can understand, the apostle makes this fundamental point about the Old Testament, a point that one must believe in order to understand the Old Testament: “With many of them [many who were delivered by the Red Sea, baptized,

made members of the church of Israel, and who ate manna from heaven and drank water from the rock] God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown [perished] in the wilderness” (v. 5).

This is the theological lesson of the apostle and the theological lesson that must be the theology of the old covenant and of the new covenant. To teach this lesson to the church of all ages was the Holy Spirit’s purpose in ordaining, carrying out, and recording this history. All the Israelites were united to Moses by the Red Sea; they all were joined to the Old Testament church and participated in the word and sacraments as they were presented to them in spiritual meat and drink. They all received the law from the mountain and had no less a teacher and lawgiver than the great Moses. They all walked under the cloud in the wilderness and were sheltered by it from the searing heat. But not all of them entered Canaan, for many perished in unbelief in the wilderness. In harmony with the typical language, the failure to enter Canaan because of unbelief is the failure to enter heaven and to be saved.

How is this to be explained? Did the promise of God fail? Did the word of God at the Israelites’ baptism that he would be a God unto them and to their seed take no effect? Were they incorporated into God’s eternal covenant of grace and later fell away through unbelief? Did they participate in a grace of God in the bread and water that was unable to save them? How are their overthrow and the utter failure of many thousands in Israel to enter Canaan to be explained?

The apostle says that with many of the Israelites “God was not well pleased.” The proof is their overthrow. Understand, when the apostle says “overthrown in the wilderness” (v. 5), he does not refer to all those who failed to enter Canaan, but specifically to those who failed to enter Canaan and perished in the wilderness in unbelief. Some who failed to enter Canaan did not fit the description of being “overthrown in the wilderness.” For example, Zelophehad was a believer, about whom his daughters said, “Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them

that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons” (Num. 27:3). To be “overthrown in the wilderness” means to die under the judgment of God in unbelief in the wilderness. In 1 Corinthians 10:6–10 the apostle refers to the overthrown ones as those who lusted after evil things and were idolaters, fornicators, tempters of Christ, and murmurers who died in their sins in the wilderness.

Now with application to the New Testament, what is the explanation of apostasy, abandonment of the church, denial of the truth, and perishing in sin of one who has been baptized, catechized, and brought up and instructed in the doctrines of the truth? Why do many who were baptized leave the church? How do you explain the reality that not every baptized child is saved, whether that is manifested in this life or not? These questions are vital and very personal. You cannot ask them without touching the very hearts of parents and virtually every family in the church and the church herself.

The proper answer and wrong answer to these questions are the contemporary issues of the day because of the heresy of the federal vision. This heresy has taken over—not merely is present in but is regnant in—the majority of Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the United States. It is the federal vision heresy that has taken over almost all of the member denominations of NAPARC.⁵ Especially the leading denominations of that group

5 The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is an ecumenical organization consisting of thirteen member churches: Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Canadian Reformed Churches, Reformed Church of Quebec, Free Reformed Churches of North America, Heritage Reformed Congregations, Korean American Presbyterian Church, Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin), Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, Presbyterian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in the United States, Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and United Reformed Churches in North America. “Local Congregation Finder,” North American Presbyterian & Reformed Council, <http://www.naparc.org/member-churches/directories-2/>, accessed November 13, 2017.

have failed to settle the issue, failed to condemn the heresy, or are currently comfortable homes to teachers of the heresy.

What is this loathsome disease called federal vision? *Federal* is another word for covenant. This heresy is about the covenant of grace. The men of the federal vision teach that God's covenant of grace is conditional. They answer that vital question about the unmistakable and sobering trail of dead bodies in the wilderness, then as well as now, that the Israelites did not live out their baptism, did not avail themselves of God's grace and the means of grace, and did not ratify the promise by their righteous life and faithfulness.

Part and parcel of this heresy is the teaching that all who were baptized were incorporated into the visible church, which is the real and only body of Jesus Christ, with a real and vital connection of faith. Federal vision equates incorporation into the visible church with incorporation into the body of Christ and into Christ himself and considers all those incorporated into the church to be partakers of God's grace and Holy Spirit. Federal vision attributes the falling away of many who are incorporated into Christ solely to their own failures to avail themselves of the grace of God, which he gave to all Israelites in their baptism in the Red Sea, in the manna from heaven, and in the water from the rock, and which he gives to everyone today in baptism, preaching, and the Lord's supper.

Federal vision theology hides a smug and wicked Pharisaical pride, for if many Israelites were overthrown because they did not use the grace of God that was given to them, then in those people the grace of God failed because of their failure to use it. For the rest of them the grace of God was made effectual by their use of it. Therefore, the Israelites' entrance into Canaan and our entrance into heaven are the results of the grace of God *and* the work of man. The men of the federal vision would write about the Israelites, "Many fell away in the wilderness, so that with them God was not well pleased, and many persevered to Canaan, so that with them God was well pleased."

This is not the Holy Spirit's explanation of the overthrow of many Israelites in the wilderness. He explains their overthrow as God's displeasure with them. They were overthrown. They did not merely fall, stumble, or resist God, all of which were true, but they were also overthrown. God did it. God is the ultimate explanation of the perishing of many in Israel. Their falling away, their apostatizing, and their perishing was God's overthrowing of them.

The source and explanation of that overthrow is that "God was not well pleased" (1 Cor. 10:5), which refers to God's eternal decree. He did not elect them; therefore, he reprobated them. Reprobation is God's eternal appointment of certain persons, also those born to believing parents and into the church, to damnation. The apostle describes the apostasy of many in Israel who were baptized and received all the means of grace as being rooted in God's reprobation of those individuals, appointing them to that overthrow, which God carried out by all sorts of means, so that they perished and did not reach Canaan.

In bringing up God's displeasure with those who were overthrown, the apostle implies that God was well pleased with the rest. That good pleasure of God was his eternal good pleasure to save them and their seed in Christ Jesus, to bless them with his fellowship and friendship, and to plant them in the land of Canaan in time and in the heavenly Canaan for eternity. God appointed them to that salvation. He did that because he delighted in them, not for any work of righteousness that they performed but out of his own sovereign good pleasure. He did that eternally. Their preservation was the result of his election. He loved them with an eternal and unchangeable love and with divine desire willed to take them to himself. That many Israelites were not overthrown in the wilderness, even though some of them lusted, fornicated, murmured, and died in the wilderness, and that their children received the land was because God was well pleased with them.

Since the overthrow of many who were baptized and partook of the outward ordinances of Israel had its source in God's eternal decree, what do we say of their baptism and their use of the ordinances of the Old Testament? If those with whom God was eternally displeased—so that his purpose with them was their overthrow and all his dealings with them were directed to that end—were given a promise from God in their baptism, were incorporated into his covenant by baptism, and were offered the grace of God in the bread and water, then God's word means nothing, his covenant is worthless, his grace is vain, and he is not God. That, or there never was a word of God to them in their baptism; they never were incorporated into his covenant of friendship, grace, and reconciliation; there never was grace to them in the bread and the water. Baptism does not make one a member of God's covenant and a partaker of its benefits and grace. To be incorporated into the visible church by baptism is not synonymous with being brought into the covenant and fellowship of the triune God. Rather, the election of God controls who is a member of God's covenant and determines who receives grace from God.

The issue regarding the overthrow of the covenantal apostate is not only whether a man saves himself by some work of his or whether he forfeits eternal salvation by his failure to fulfill covenantal conditions, which is a wretched and wicked doctrine that exalts man. But the issue is also whether Jehovah is God, a God who saves according to his eternal decree, in a gracious covenant, by an unconditional promise, unto eternal life, all those and those only whom he loves and has appointed to salvation, and who with equal right hates others and does not appoint them to salvation and never incorporates them into his covenant or gives them grace and a promise.

Note that this distinction is between Israelites. It is a distinction between those who outwardly belonged to the nation, who outwardly appeared to belong to the covenant and participated in

the covenantal ordinances, and those who really were members of God's covenant.

The apostle lays out this fundamental lesson from the Old Testament and God's covenantal dealings with Israel in the Old Testament because apart from understanding God's election and reprobation and their determination of covenantal membership and the blessings of the covenant of grace, one cannot understand God's covenant. Then the Old Testament has nothing to say to that individual and church; indeed, everything they learn from it will be tainted and corrupted by crooked theology. This is the reason that the Old Testament remains a closed book to many. They do not see in it the election and reprobation of God as they relate to and control membership in the covenant of grace. They see in the Old Testament a conditional promise of God given to all Israel that individual Israelites had to ratify, a promise of God that depended on the faithfulness of individual Israelites, and a conditional promise—a word of God—that failed in the case of many.

Knowing the Truth of Election and Reprobation

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:1 concerning the truth that election and reprobation control membership in and the blessings of the covenant grace: "Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant." If we are ignorant of this truth, we will go wrong in many ways. Ignorance leads one wickedly to charge God with impotence. When Joshua and Caleb brought a good report, they grounded it in this truth: "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us" (Num. 14:8). Regarding the perishing of many in the wilderness, Moses said that the wicked would charge that it was "because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness" (v. 16). On the ground of the perishing of many, they charged God with impotence to bring about his promise. So also everyone who ascribes to God a conditional promise dependent on man that fails in the case of many

charges God that he is unable “to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them.”

God gives as the ground for the perishing of many in the wilderness, and therefore for the salvation of many, the eternal good pleasure of a just, merciful, and sovereign God who has power to make of one lump one vessel to honor and another to dishonor. He loved Jacob and hated Esau. God raised up Pharaoh and cast him down in order to show God’s power. God likewise distinguished in eternity between the sons of Israel, some of whom he plants as his heritage and others whom he plucks up. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy and whom he will he hardens (Rom. 9).

Ignorance of this truth is ignorance of the triune God.

Ignorance of this truth is ignorance of salvation.

Ignorance of this truth leads to crushing despair, rash impudence, or abominable pride.

You cannot be ignorant of it so that you say, “Because of my working or willing, I stand,” and so fall. You cannot be ignorant of it and thus fall into despair over sin. You cannot be ignorant of it, so that you would explain the falling away of some as the impotence of God, failure of his word, or worthlessness of his grace, and thus charge God with sin.

It is ignorance of election and reprobation, not the confession of election and reprobation, that leads to carelessness and unholiness and thus failure to walk in the way of love. It is carelessness and unholiness that also exposes a man’s ignorance—unbelief—of election and reprobation, although he speaks of it ever so eloquently. Ignorance of this truth leads to worldliness, wickedness, carelessness, and especially to one’s saying, “I stand.” That is raw, devilish pride that follows from a confession of a conditional covenant. It makes a man say, “He fell because he did not stand. I succeed because I stand.” Ignorance makes a man carnally secure in his merely formal possession of membership in a church where the truth is preached, although he himself does not believe any of it.

Where this truth is denied, unholiness of life sets in. Especially prevalent is the unholiness of supposing that one's salvation is dependent on his work or his faithfulness, of being carnally secure in one's natural and outward attachment to the church and giving no heed to the truth of the gospel and holiness of life. Such pride is not walking in the way of love, since love "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4). The humble confession that it is "not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16) leads to a walk in the way of love.

Ignorance of this truth is fatal in every respect for an individual and a church.

I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, of this fundamental truth of Israel's salvation and of your salvation. You cannot be ignorant of this truth, beloved brethren. You must know it. Knowing it is believing and embracing it with all your heart. The church where this truth is believed and confessed will walk in the way of love. Let us learn it, confess it, and give all the glory to God, in both the salvation and damnation of sinners.