

La Rochelle: In the beginning

The French Confession: Commentary and study questions by Dr. Chuck Baynard

The French Confession is also known as the Gallican Confession or the Confession of Rochelle, was prepared by John Calvin (1509-1564) and his pupil Antoine de la Roche Chandieu (1534-1591). The confession was approved by a synod in Paris in 1559 and adopted (and revised) by the Synod of La Rochelle, held in 1571.

The French Confession doesn't predate some of her sisters by more than a couple of years at most; especially if we accept the dates their original constituents approved the confessions. The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, and The Second Helvetic all make their appearances within seven years. If we accept the date of its acceptance by the French churches this confession actually follows her sisters in time. However it was in circulation and use prior to the others and it cannot be denied that its form and sequence of doctrine are the same as her younger sisters. Since Calvin was the founder as such of the Reformed churches and his Institutes were widely read, this is no surprise.

The French Confession follows more or less the same sequence of treatment of various doctrines as the Institutes and the hand of Calvin can be seen in the phraseology of the confession. In this treatment the confession will be presented with Scripture references as footnotes followed by a brief commentary and then each article will end with questions to help draw attention to key points in the article under consideration. Answers to the questions are not provided but can be found or clearly inferred from the text and commentary preceding them. For those desiring further study each doctrine will be cross-referenced to other Reformed confessions and the Institutes in the footnotes.

The French Confession, Article I¹

We believe and confess that there is but one God, who is one sole and simple essence,[1] spiritual,[2] eternal,[3] invisible,[4] immutable,[5] infinite,[6] incomprehensible,[7] ineffable, omnipotent; who is all-wise,[8] all-good,[9] all-just,[10] and all-merciful.[11]²

The attributes (characteristics) of God are how God has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind in His revealed word, the Bible. God has never explained Himself or His existence to anyone and this will not change.

When God says there are no other gods before Him it is not as if there are other gods and the God of the Bible is chief, it means there is no other God and to try and form one from any substance or within the mind of man is pure foolishness. However from the beginning only the Jewish peoples were monotheistic, that is they had one God. As we can know something about God from His revealed attributes, God without debate declares I am ONE. This means the only one, though we will see as we progress God is Three, the unity or oneness of God never changes.

The Bible says the fool has said in his heart there is no God. In the heart or in the intelligence or knowledge of the person is meant by this term. That is the fool has of his own wisdom declared there is no god. Why the fool? Because God has so clearly revealed Himself in nature alone none can deny the God of creation or the power, as it exists in the invisible Godhead. Paul deals with this extensively in Romans chapter one.

Jesus when He asked His disciples who men said He was responded to Peter's answer that He was the Son of God with the response that flesh and blood had not revealed this to Peter, but the Holy

¹ Belgic Confession 1; 2nd Helvetic 3; Westminster Confession II; Calvin's Institutes 1.1

² 1. Deut. 4:35, 39; I Cor. 8:4, 6 2. Gen. 1:3; John 4:24; II Cor. 3:17 3. Exod. 3:15-16, 18 4. Rom. 1:20; I Tim. 1:47 5. Mal. 3:6 6. Rom. 11:33; Acts 7:48 7. Jer. 10:7, 10; Luke 1:37 8. Rom. 16:27 9. Matt. 19:17 10. Jer. 12:1 11. Exod. 34:6-7

Spirit. Likewise, though nature reveals God, none will accept there is only one God and one plan for life now and eternally apart from the revelation of the Holy Spirit which is reserved for God's elect.

What is the only information God clearly reveals about Himself in the Bible?

Why can all mankind not admit there is only one God?

God's attributes have been divided into two classes, those God included in mankind in the creation in His own image (communicable) and those God has reserved for Himself. From the attributes revealed in this article create a list divided into these two classes. Of those you list as communicable mark them as completely transferred or partially transferred to man. Write a short explanation of how the communicable attributes are transferred and how they are visible in man.

The French Confession, Article II³

II. As such this God reveals himself to men;[1] firstly, in his works, in their creation, as well as in their preservation and control. Secondly, and more clearly, in his Word,[2] which was in the beginning revealed through oracles,[3] and which was afterward committed to writing[4] in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures.[5]⁴

We mentioned the revelation of God in and through creation (nature) in article 1 above. The confession here adds the control and preservation of nature in general, and is not a reference to mankind alone. It continues that God more clearly reveals Himself in His word. This word was by the oracles, which Peter equates with being the Scripture and to which Paul makes reference in the book of Romans as being a particular benefit to the Jews. Due note is made here that the Scripture existed by oral tradition first in the words afterward committed to writing. The Scriptures were no more or less the very word of God in the oral tradition than when they were committed to writing for preservation through the generations of man.

Unlike some of her sisters, the French does not list the sixty-six accepted books of the canon at this point but reserves a whole article just for this purpose. This is why when dealing with confessions this early in the history of the reformation of the 16th century care must be used to read the whole. For example in the later Westminster Confession the term is chapter and several articles are thus logically tied together in a chapter dealing with a particular doctrine. Catechisms and early confessions are not divided in this manner and you must make sure you have taken all articles dealing with a particular doctrine under study before reaching conclusions.

Many claim the later confessions are superior when a better term is they are more mature and reflect the experience of the church in arranging her theology in more usable formats or adding further understanding or clarity in some places. A comparison of all the reformed confessions reveals they have much more in common than differing from each other.

The Bible promises these words will not pass away but accomplish God's purpose on earth. This is the answer to those who would cast doubt on what we have today being the same Scriptures that existed in the first century church. The Bible is the only book of any religion that claims to be the exact word of its divine author and thereby without error and that cannot fail. This is known as the doctrine of inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible.

God exists, God has spoken, and this word is the Bible. This is without question or debate though among men it will only be embraced and believed through the gift of faith from God.

What are the two means God uses to reveal himself to mankind?

What in addition to the creation and the Bible does it take to know God?

What is the Scripture referred to prior to its written form?

What two writers in the New Testament in the English Bible use oracles of God to refer to the Old Testament?

³ Calvin – Institutes 1.5; Belgic Confession 2

⁴ 1. Rom. 1:20 2. Heb. 1:4 3. Gen. 15:1 4. Exod. 24:3-4 5. Rom. 1:2

The French Confession, Article III⁵

III. These Holy Scriptures are comprised in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, as follows: the five books of Moses, namely: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; then Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the first and second books of Samuel, the first and second books of the Kings, the first and second books of the Chronicles, otherwise called Paralipomenon, the first book of Ezra; then Nehemiah, the book of Esther, Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs or Maxims of Solomon; the book of Ecclesiastes, called the Preacher, the Song of Solomon; then the book of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; then the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, according to St. Mark, according to St. Luke, and according to St. John; then the second book of St. Luke, otherwise called the Acts of the Apostles; then the Epistles of St. Paul: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon; then the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of St. James, the first and second Epistles of St. Peter, the first, second, and third Epistles of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude; and then the Apocalypse, or Revelation of St. John.

The same books are listed as early as the third century as being recognized by the church as Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church added the Apocrypha and holds the word of the Pope to be equal to the Scriptures. The reformed churches declared the canon to be closed and listed the 66 books accepted by the church as being of God.

The Apocrypha⁶ is divided into several segments according to the period of history from where it originates. Some books existed from the period between the Testaments and various people and groups created other books in the first few centuries of the church for their own purposes. The church having been granted the power to bind and loose directly by Christ had the authority to make the declaration concerning the closing of the canon. The question then is can God make a future revelation that is equal to what has been received by the church as a closed canon? Obviously man cannot limit God. However, God will honor His word and the church has thus sealed the Bible from subtraction or addition among men, and God will not of His own holiness change His word. The Bible exists by God of its own testimony and authority and derives no power or efficiency from the church as Rome has always taught. Rather the church must turn to the Bible as the source of all truth and the only true guide of faith and practice.

Name two general periods of history when Apocryphal books were written.

Where did the church get the authority to close the canon?

On what does the Bible depend for its authority and power?

Of what value are the Apocrypha today?

⁵ Belgic 3; 2nd Helvetic 1; Westminster 1; Dort Head 1; Calvin Institutes 1.6.4

⁶ Belgic Confession 6; 2nd Helvetic 1.9

The French Confession, Article IV

IV. We know these books to be canonical, and the sure rule of our faith,[1] not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however useful, we can not found any articles of faith.⁷

In other words, we may not bind the conscience of anyone other than by the Bible. Furthermore, in practice we do not make doctrine from one isolated verse but by the context and understanding of the whole of God's revealed word. The context of any Scripture passage is not just the immediately surrounding text it is the whole Bible. The very first principle of reformed hermeneutics is that Scripture will interpret Scripture.

The development of a canon was made necessary very early in church history to have answer to those who were teaching another gospel and bringing into the church damnable heresies. Thus we have the lists of which books are authoritative by the early church fathers and as we have see in this confession the completion of this canon during the 16th century reformation.

Different criteria were applied to books before they were declared to be canonical. While use in the church as being authoritative was one of these criterion (church tradition) and the person whom God used to record the Scripture another, the primary test is more subjective and has defied the scholars within and without the church from the beginning of the church. The primary test is that of the Holy Spirit speaking from within the Scripture providing the final testimony of truth. A biblical principle that in the mouth of two or more witnesses to be sure, but a test those outside of the covenant cannot falsify nor understand. Thus the so-called age of enlightenment which led the church down a wide path toward destruction could not in the final analysis place into the church one book not intended by God to be in the canon or to establish one doctrine that was not clearly taught in the Bible. The Bible is a divine or spiritual word and so it requires the enablement of the Holy Spirit within man to give the illumination to not only understand, but also testify to the authority of the books we hold as canon.

Some of the works of the fathers of the church from the first century until today are valuable and help us understand the development of theology through the generations. However no work of man is on a level with the Bible and no matter how lofty it may appear, all doctrine must be from the Bible alone.

Why did the church have need to have a set of literature it would call its canon?

Name two criteria used to test a book to see if it was of God and to be held before the church as scripture.

What is the first rule to interpret Scripture?

Why is the subjective test of the Holy Spirit working in a book not capable of being falsified by man?

⁷ 1. Psa. 12:7; 19:9

The French Confession, Article V⁸

V. We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God,[1] and receives its authority[2] from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth,[3] containing all, that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it.[4] Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures,[5] but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.[6] And therefore we confess the three creeds, to wit: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, because they are in accordance with the Word of God.⁹

The Scriptures are all the light needed by man to have access and to understand all that is needed to be known concerning, God, life, and salvation. The only absolute truth in existence among men is the word of God. The Bible has its beginning and end in God and as such needs no external support whatsoever. The Bible is the authority of the church and never can the reverse be understood.

The reformers did not rewrite all of church history and theology from their perspective but carefully searching and testing all things of the church against the Scriptures attempted to return the church to her foundation in the Bible. In this process the reformers kept that which the earlier church had properly extracted from the Bible and declared the remainder as error or heresy. We might note here the difference between error and heresy is of degree. That is that an error while not the truth as God would have us embrace it is not of such a grievous nature it distorts the Gospel and most often will be in an area where the scriptures are less clear and a variant understanding cannot be disowned from the Bible alone. Heresy affects essential doctrines and can be proven from the Bible to be wide of the doctrine as taught in the Bible alone.

Why did the church affirm some of the ancient creeds and pass by others?

What is the difference between an error of doctrine and a heresy?

Who may add to, subtract from, or change what the Bible contains?

⁸ Calvin – Institutes 1.7.1; Belgic Confession 4

⁹ 1. II Tim. 3:15-16; II Peter 1:21 2. John 3:31, 34; I Tim. 1:15 3. John 15:11; Acts 20:27 4. Deut. 4:1, 12:32; Gal. 1:8; Rev. 22:18-19 5. Matt. 15:9; Acts 5:28-29 6. I Cor. 11:1-2, 23

The French Confession, Article VI¹⁰

These Holy Scriptures teach us that in this one sole and simple divine essence, whom we have confessed, there are three Persons: the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.[1] The Father, first cause, principle, and origin of all things. The Son, his Word and eternal wisdom. The Holy Spirit, his virtue, power, and efficacy. The Son begotten from eternity by the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeding eternally from them both; the three persons not confused, but distinct, and yet not separate, but of the same essence, equal in eternity and power. And in this we confess that which has been established by the ancient councils, and we detest all sects and heresies which were rejected by the holy doctors, such as St. Hilary, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, and St. Cyril.¹¹

All heresies originate in the person, life, resurrection, ascension, present position in heaven, return for the church, and deity of Jesus Christ. In other words poor Christology as clearly taught in the Bible lies at the heart of all heresy. How can man know the truth apart from the Bible? Thus we see the first attempt of the devil to tempt man begins with casting doubt on God's word.

As we move into the New Testament we see the lie begin its attack on the person of Jesus Christ. Remove the divinity of Christ and there is no atonement, remove the Son-ship from Christ and the Holy Spirit also loses his place in the Godhead and as some ancients taught is merely the power of God. The wording of the French confession at this point borders on error because of the lack of this clarity in the person of Christ and the Holy Spirit as fully God. While a fantastic document for its time, this lack of precision in places is one of the reasons this is not a widely accepted confession in the over all reformed churches. Having Calvin as its co-author was not enough to hold the approaching world of the enlightened age at bay and more mature understanding and wording of confessions were needed.

At the same time none have done better in explaining the Trinity than it is proper for the Son to be eternally begotten of the Father and for the Holy Spirit to proceed from father and Son eternally, yet all three are fully God, yet one person. In the institutes Calvin speaks of the substance of God and the subsistence of the three persons. That is one God, but three persons completely self-existent within the One. This is a metaphysical fact that defies analogy and human logic. The Bible teaches it and the church receives it by faith.

Common errors deny the divinity of either the Son or Spirit, try to divide the Godhead according to their personality or function within the Godhead, or try to explain the Godhead by personality denying the distinction of persons. Likewise, we see the same errors when dealing with the person of Christ fully God and fully man.

Name three fathers of the church that this confession uphold as having the truth and presenting this doctrine correctly.

Modalism makes which of the errors addressed above?

Why is it dangerous to try and explain the Godhead by each person's place and action within the Trinity?

¹⁰ Calvin – Institutes 1.13.1-6; Belgic Confession 8; Heidelberg Catechism 24-25; 2nd Helvetic 3; Westminster Confession 2.3

¹¹ 1. Deut. 4:12; Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; I John 5:7; John 1:1, 17, 32

The French Confession, Article VII¹²

We believe that God, in three co-working persons, by his power, wisdom, and incomprehensible goodness, created all things, not only the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, but also invisible spirits,[1] some of whom have fallen away and gone into perdition,[2] while others have continued in obedience.[3] That the first, being corrupted by evil, are enemies of all good, consequently of the whole Church.[4] The second, having been preserved by the grace of God, are ministers to glorify God's name, and to promote the salvation of his elect.[5]¹³

As will be developed later it is important to hold all three persons present as the Bible does in the creation. Some teach Christ did not exist prior to His incarnation. This is a grave error and denies the equality of person in the Godhead. The confession here uses the phrase "in three co-working persons" which is not the best wording to maintain clarity. The Bible says that "in the beginning God " and this is where we should leave it. It is easy at this late date with the New Testament in hand to prove Christ was present in the creation and the following verse in the creation account places the Holy Spirit in the creation. It is understood the term God includes all three persons while using any other term denotes one of the Godhead. Their unity makes the presence of all a necessity but to try and word it differently than Scripture can cause confusion where none should exist.

We could use some clarity here regarding the creation of spirits too. While it is clear with the context within which it is presented the confession is speaking of angels, this needs to be stated, not implied by context. It is also important to silence detractors that it be specifically mentioned all was created from nothing, that is by the word of God alone and not the reconstruction or modification of any existing matter whatsoever.

While not addressed here another very important concept is the creation of all things in six literal 24-hour days. This was not even on the horizon as such for the reformers, but is a problem in the modern church. This is not a measure of orthodoxy as such because it wasn't part of the controversy that surrounded the reformation however the time has come for such a test of orthodoxy to be attached to the creation of all by God in six days with god resting on the seventh day.

Why is it important to show all three persons were present in the creation?

What did God create?

From what did God create all things except man and woman?

Why is it important to maintain all was created by the power of the word of God alone and not from pre-existing matter?

¹² Belgic Confession 12; Heidelberg Catechism 6, 2nd Helvetic 7.1; Westminster Confession 4.1-2

¹³ 1. Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; Jude 1:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2 2. II Peter 2:4 3. Psa. 103:20-21 4. John 8:44
5. Heb. 1:7, 14

The French Confession, Article VIII¹⁴

VIII. We believe that he not only created all things, but that he governs and directs them,[1] disposing and ordaining by his sovereign will all that happens in the world;[2] not that he is the author of evil, or that the guilt of it can imputed to him,[3] as his will is the sovereign and infallible rule of all right and justice;[4] but he has wonderful means of so making use of devils and sinners that he can turn to good the evil which they do, and of which they are guilty.[5] And thus, confessing that the providence of God orders all things, we humbly bow before the secrets which are hidden to us, without questioning what is above our understanding; but rather making use of what is revealed to us in Holy Scripture for our peace and safety,[6] inasmuch as God, who has all things in subjection to him, watches over us with a Father's care, so that not a hair of our heads shall fall without his will.[7] And Yet he restrains the devils and all our enemies, so that they can not harm us without his leave.[8]¹⁵

If we were to reduce the reformed faith to one doctrine, that doctrine would have to be the sovereignty of God, whereby for His glory alone God orders all things to work for His glory and the good of His elect.

The confession at this point puts the emphasis on God's presence in and with His creation in this providential ordering of all things. This is in contrast to the deist who admits a God in heaven but denies God is presently involved in and with His creation. In other words God created all things and retired to heaven to let creation find its own way.

Care is also taken here not to make God the author of sin, but that God uses even that which is evil to work His own glory. The Bible is clear that God created all things for His own glory and that God is able to do all of His holy will. This of necessity has God involved in and with His creation. In having God present in the temporal life of man, care is needed to not to make God to be the first cause of sin as if man had no choice nor power over sin.

This can be a hard concept for man to grasp, and few ever fully understand that in their present pain God is working out their future good and present blessing. Because the created doesn't understand however has no bearing on the clear teaching of the Bible. Some speak of the permissive will of God in that even Satan can do nothing without the permission of God (Compare the story of Job). While this is a truth a clearer understanding might be seen in most circumstances if we see the rebellion in man bringing about sin and the action of God as more passive than deliberately granting permission for each sin as such. However, it amounts to the same thing and the care is so that we do not make God the author of sin though it is true god could have prevented the fall and the birth of sin if He desired.

Sin is a necessity for the glory of God however in that without the created having the ability to sin and enabled by the Holy Spirit freely choosing to obey God there would be no glory to god. God could stop sin as He did for the holy angels, however while angels glorify God they are not God's glory, redeemed man is.

Why is God not the author of sin?

What proof do we have of God's continuing providence?

May man penetrate the mysteries of God?

¹⁴ Belgic Confession 13; Heidelberg Catechism 26; 2nd Helvetic 6; Westminster Confession 5; Calvin Institutes 1.16

¹⁵ 1. Psa. ch. 104 2. Prov. 16:4; Matt. 10:29; Rom. 9:11; Acts 17:24, 26, 28 3. I John 2:16; Hosea 13:9; I John 3:8 4. Psa. 5:5, ch. 119; Job 1:22 5. Acts 2: 23-24, 27 6. Rom. 9:19-20; 11:33 7. Matt. 10:30; Luke 21:18 8. Job 1:12; Gen. 3:15

The French Confession, Article IX¹⁶

We believe that man was created pure and perfect in the image of God, and that by his own guilt he fell from the grace which he received,[1] and is thus alienated from God, the fountain of justice and of all good, so that his nature is totally corrupt. And being blinded in mind, and depraved in heart, he has lost all integrity, and there is no good in him.[2] And although he can still discern good and evil,[3] we say, notwithstanding, that the light he has becomes darkness when he seeks for God, so that he can in nowise approach him by his intelligence and reason.[4] And although he has a will that incites him to do this or that, yet it is altogether captive to sin, so that he has no other liberty to do right than that which God gives him.[5]¹⁷

God looked at all He had created to include man and declared it good. The inference then that man was created in purity and perfection is a necessity. To which we can rapidly add the close communion man (Adam) had with God in the beginning. Man of his own choice alone sinned and fell from this state of perfection he had in the creation. We can affirm man had the choice because man is created in the image of God which means man at this time had some autonomy and was a reasoning creature. God said to Cain that sin stood in his door (Cain's door) and desired Cain, but that Cain had power over sin. This is an important concept in that mankind has already fallen; Cain has sinned already but retains the power to resist sin. The wording in the Bible to Cain whom will in time be cast from the presence of God was that Cain should rule over sin. Cain is not the federal representative of man and this is not of necessity a reference to end times when believers shall rule with Jesus Christ.

In the fall every part and faculty of man is fallen or depraved. This includes the ability of reason to the point that mankind can no longer look at his own fallen nature and the holiness of God and make the decision for godliness. In other words man cannot save himself and even if man were able will because of his fallen nature would not choosing darkness over light. Total depravity doesn't mean man is as bad as he can be but that man's corruption is complete and man cannot save himself.

With the testimony of nature so bright why cannot mankind see the light and choose to do good?

Where does the random flicker of good within fallen mankind come from: being in the image of God or as a gift from God?

Can a non-regenerate human being not commit actual sin?

¹⁶ Belgic Confession 14; Heidelberg Catechism 5,7-9; 2nd Helvetic Confession 8; Dort Head 1.1, Head 2.1-2; Westminster Confession 6; Calvin – Institutes 2.1

¹⁷ 1. Gen. 1:26; Eccl. 7:10; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:2-3 2. Gen. 6:5, 8:21 3. Rom. 1:21; 2:18-20 4. I Cor. 2:14 5. John 1:4-5, 7; 8:36; Rom. 8:6-7

The French Confession, Article X¹⁸

X. We believe that all the posterity of Adam is in bondage to original sin, which is an hereditary evil, and not an imitation merely, as was declared by the Pelagians, whom we detest in their errors. And we consider that it is not necessary to inquire how sin was conveyed from one man to another, for what God had given Adam was not for him alone, but for all his posterity; and thus in his person we have been deprived of all good things, and have fallen with him into a state of sin and misery.[1]¹⁹

Some correctly say sin came upon all by natural propagation of the species. Others as here point to the representative nature of Adam of all of his posterity and the imputation of sin to all. This last is known as the federal system of imputation of sin. The federal theory fits better than that of natural generation as we later deal with the sinlessness of Christ. However either can find biblical support and are not error.

If we choose natural generation theory, that the law of the Jews that all inheritances were through the male side of the family only, we can defend Christ's sinless condition since Christ has no earthly father. Adam as the first man and Christ as the last were both created especially by God and differently than all before or after these two respectively. Each is a unique creation of God for God's eternal glory alone.

The end result of either method is that all of mankind is conceived and born in sin. Because of the presence of this guilt in original sin not one person has ever sought God. This is known as the sin nature of mankind and predates even his physical birth for which cause the very conception is used in this formulation.

This sinful nature places all mankind in bondage to sin. A bondage man cannot see much less break because man has been joined to the darkness of the natural creation which is cursed also because of the sin of mankind in Adam. By his very nature then man will seek the darkness and shun the light of God.

Why is man's sinful nature considered to be a bondage to sin?

Can mankind of his own will and ability break this bondage?

Why would the federal representative theory be preferred over the theory of natural generation for the passing of Adam's sin upon all mankind?

Why is man unable to see the light of God in goodness and respond?

¹⁸ Belgic Confession 15; Heidelberg Catechism 8; Dort Head 3&4 1-2; Westminster Shorter 26, 19; Calvin – Institutes 2.2

¹⁹ Gen. 8:21; Rom. 5:12; Job 14:4

The French Confession, Article XI²⁰

XI We believe, also, that this evil is truly sin, sufficient for the condemnation of the whole human race, even of little children in the mother's womb, and that God considers it as such;[1] even after baptism it is still of the nature of sin, but the condemnation of it is abolished for the children of God, out of his mere free grace and love.[2] And further, that it is a perversity always producing fruits of malice and of rebellion,[3] so that the most holy men, although they resist it, are still stained with many weaknesses and imperfections while they are in this life.[4]²¹

We cannot over emphasize the depth and breadth of corruption brought upon mankind in this sinful nature. That this affects even unborn children is crucial for a proper understanding of how all are condemned already and the place of children within the covenant families.

Baptism in and of itself does not save even the infant for there is no such thing as an innocent human being at any age. God alone in the application of the Holy Spirit to the heart of humankind in grace can save. Nothing, even sacraments have any power of salvation in themselves. All is of God by grace through faith. Above all other doctrines clearly revealed in the Bible stands the election of God to salvation in Jesus Christ as the sole entrance into the presence of God.

This sinful nature is so much a part of mankind that even the elect will carry the stain and struggle against it all the days of their natural life. A personal piety (right relation with Christ) is the only hope mankind has for not only breaking the bondage of sin, but of living in the newness of life granted in Christ. Even then sin will at times appear to have the upper hand so to speak and even the very elect will sin against God. Sanctification will not be complete in the flesh because in the flesh the will of mankind exists and it is by nature inclined to all evil.

In grace by faith God saves the elect from the condemnation of sin. Whereas we read, now there is no condemnation for those in Christ. The constant mediation of Christ alone maintains the elect believer before the throne of God. Thus in this life wherever man goes sin is present, but the condemnation because of sin has been lifted. We thus wait for that glorious day of the Lord when our sanctification will be complete in the new body and new life in that city not made with hands to come. In the words of the apostle Paul, we now see darkly through a mirror, but then face to face. We know in part now, but then we shall know even as we are known.

Why can we say that even the babe still in the mother's womb is sinful?

What is the advantage for the believer if this natural sin nature remains?

How are all the elect saved and when?

²⁰ Calvin – Institutes 2.3

²¹ 1. Psa 51:7; Rom. 3:9-13; 5:12 2. Rom. ch. 7 3. Rom. 7:5 4. Rom. 7:18-19; II Cor. 12:7

The French Confession, Article XII²²

XII. We believe that from this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calls those whom he has chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works,[1] to display in them the riches of his mercy; leaving the rest in this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice.[2] For the ones are no better than the others, until God discerns them according to his immutable purpose which he has determined in Jesus Christ before the creation of the world. Neither can any man gain such a reward by his own virtue, as by nature we can not have a single good feeling, affection, or thought, except God has first put it into our hearts.[3]²³

The election in grace alone stands despite all the ravings of the created it is the only way of salvation for any person. You are saved by grace through faith and that the gift of God is clearly presented in Eph. 2:8 and stands as the only way of salvation. In other words man left to himself will not even believe there is a God in heaven.

God's election was before the creation and cannot change. In other words the election is immutable. It is important to note the wording here as this is the only way of election not laying sin at the feet of God so to speak. "Leaving the rest" is a passive action as such and no double predestination as some are prone to teach is in sight here. That is God did not "elect" some to reprobation. Because of sin mankind has doomed itself to the wrath of God eternally. God did not have to condemn mankind; man did that by his own action and of his own will. If God elected some to reprobation then such a person could say thus God created me and I have no choice. As we have seen in the creation account this is not true and all mankind is doomed already. Because there is no other way of salvation than election the end result is as if there was an actual election to perdition, but there is no such election found in the pages of the Bible.

Note well that in the election to eternal salvation God glorifies Himself as well as in the eternal condemnation of those God did not elect. All of creation from the beginning in the eternal counsel of God was for the glory of God alone. There is no merit whatsoever in any human being to bring about salvation other than by the grace of God in election. It is by the merit of the completed work of Jesus Christ any are saved. God is therefore glorified in the salvation of some and glorified in the just condemnation of the rest.

How is God just in not electing all?

How is God just in eternally condemning the reprobate?

Why is double-predestination unacceptable?

²² Calvin – Institutes 3.21.1; Westminster Larger 30; Westminster Confession 10; Belgic Confession 16; Dort Head 1.6

²³ 1. Rom. 3:2, 9:23; II Tim. 1:9; 2:20; Titus 3:5, 7; Eph. 1:4 2. Exod. 9:16; Rom. 9:22 3. Jer. 10:23; Eph. 1:4-5

The French Confession, Article XIII²⁴

XIII. We believe that all that is necessary for our salvation was offered and communicated to us in Jesus Christ. He is given to us for our salvation, and 'is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:' so that if we refuse him, we renounce the mercy of the Father, in which alone we can find a refuge.[1]²⁵

There is no entry into heaven other than the person of Jesus Christ. God presented the truth of the Gospel light to all mankind, man of his own will rejected Christ. This rejection is complete and final. All are dead in sin and under penalty of eternal condemnation to hell. It takes the active gift of Jesus Christ by God to work salvation in any person and this effective only to those whom God in grace gives the gift of faith.

There are those who argue this is not a sincere offer of Christ by God to the entire world. These do err in that Christ is clearly presented, even in nature (Romans 1) as well as in the Scriptures that all stand condemned already (John 3:17). Everything necessary for salvation is in Christ alone, but man apart from the grace of God in the gift of faith will not believe the truth but embrace darkness and the lie of Satan. This seems to be a simple and straightforward statement however among men the exact order of things has caused much controversy through the years. While there is logically an order to all things from the perspective of man, in regeneration, faith, justification, and sanctification it is true that all are present at once in Christ. Nonetheless there is a sequence that must be accepted or the works of man, though it only be the idea of acceptance of a gift are included in salvation. This must be rejected at all costs, for salvation is of the Lord alone.

In the Scripture we find several formulations concerning salvation. For example believe on the name of Jesus Christ and be baptized. If we ended the development of our complete theology with the one passage we would wrongly conclude that baptism has something to do with salvation. Belief in Jesus Christ or faith is the only thing needed and that is not of man but the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). It is a truth because the Bible commands baptism the true believer will be baptized though baptism in no way washes away the stain of sin. Likewise we read believe in your heart and confess with your mouth and you will be saved. This makes evangelism (public confession) a necessity for salvation, which it is not. The whole then must be considered and the proper perspective maintained. The great sola or alone statements of the Reformed faith attempt to present this concept but in truth none of these actually stand alone as they flow one from the other of necessity. Thus Grace alone is a truth, but grace will always be accompanied by faith. Faith alone is true, but faith is ever accompanied with the good works that are part of sanctification. Scripture alone is also a truth the Reformed have long accepted, but Scripture isn't alone in that the light will not be understood apart from the gift of faith by grace. The formulation of Ephesians 2:8-10 is the best wording and the most clear verse of what actually happens in the salvation of the elect.

1. In what sense is it that all that is needed for salvation is in Christ?
2. How can we have five statements that state salvation is of one thing alone, yet in actuality all are required?
3. Why is there a need to create a sequence to these events in the salvation of the elect?

²⁴ Calvin – Institutes 2.6; Belgic Confession 17; Heidelberg Catechism 12, 18; 2nd Helvetic 5; Westminster Confession 8

²⁵ I Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6-7; Col. 1:13-14; Titus 2:14

The French Confession, Article XIV²⁶

XIV. We believe that Jesus Christ, being the wisdom of God and his eternal Son, has put on our flesh, so as to be God and man in one person;[1] man, like unto us, capable of suffering in body and soul, yet free from all stain of sin.[2] And as to his humanity, he was the true seed of Abraham and of David,[3] although he was conceived by the secret power of the Holy Spirit.[4] In this we detest all the heresies that have of old troubled the Church, and especially the diabolical conceits of Servetus, which attribute a fantastical divinity to the Lord Jesus, calling him the idea and pattern of all things, and the personal or figurative Son of God, and, finally, attribute to him a body of three uncreated elements, thus confusing and destroying the two natures.²⁷

Jesus Christ had to be fully man in order to satisfy the justice of God. It is written then that Christ suffered all temptations even as man does, yet without sin. This in no way whatsoever diminishes Christ's claim to be equal with God. The necessity of Christ in fulfilling the Aaronic priesthood and bringing to be manifest the order of Melchizedek to offer the perfect sacrifice (His own body) can only be if Christ is fully God. The hypostatic union of the nature of man with all the natural elements of man to include a rational soul with the divine essence of the Son of God Jesus Christ defies human explanation. The Bible says it is true and the believer accepts this in faith leaving the details where God left them within the mystery of God.²⁸

Only Christ could say that no man takes my life from me I lay it down willingly and I will also take it up again. Christ died and was buried in the flesh. An historical fact or there is no atonement. Christ took up His life and on the third day arose from the dead or there is no atonement. A correct Christology is mandatory. Every heresy from the beginning has revolved around the person and works of Jesus Christ. There are places that the Bible is silent or does not explicitly spell out to the letter the will of God. In such areas we can have a thing indifferent and tolerate views that differ significantly. However all connected with the conception, birth, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ fully man and fully God is an essential and leaves no wiggle room.

1. What was the error of Servetus?
2. Hypostatic union refers to a union or oneness of essential existence. Why is it necessary to apply this term to Jesus Christ as both man and God?
3. What error do all heresies revolve around?

²⁶ Calvin – Institutes 2.12; Belgic Confession 19; Heidelberg Catechism 15-17; 2nd Helvetic 11; Westminster Confession 8

²⁷ 1. John 1:14; Phil. 2:6 2. Heb. 2:17; II Cor. 5:21 3. Acts 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; 9:5; Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14-16, ch. 5 4. Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35

²⁸ Ps 110:4

The French Confession, Article XV²⁹

XV. We believe that in one person, that is, Jesus Christ, the two natures are actually and inseparably joined and united, and yet each remains in its proper character:[1] so that in this union the divine nature, retaining its attributes, remained uncreated, infinite, and all-pervading; and the human nature remained finite, having its form, measure, and attributes:[2] and although Jesus Christ, in rising from the dead, bestowed immortality upon his body, yet he did not take from it the truth of its nature, and we so consider him in his divinity that we do not despoil him of his humanity.³⁰

The two natures of Christ, man and God cannot be separated anymore than the three persons of the Trinity may. As noted in article 14 above, this is an absolute necessity because it is what the Bible clearly teaches. God, understanding in this word God we mean the whole Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, gives to none His authority or glory. Yet man will in the end be glorified because redeemed man is in Christ. You can begin at any point of the theological string so to speak and you will come full circle that the only way for the mercy of God be reconciled with the justice of God is by Jesus Christ being both God and man and each nature quite distinct, though united eternally. No other scheme fits the Bible or in the end can fully justify even the logic of man. The perfections of God are without debate or change and all explanations must fully reconcile grace with justice.

1. One of the best creeds concerning Christ is the so-called Apostle's Creed. Can you recite the Apostle's Creed?
2. Did Christ arise from the grave with the same body with which He descended with?
3. What did Christ bestow upon this resurrected body?
4. What did death and resurrection not take from Jesus Christ as man or God?

²⁹ Calvin – Institutes 1.13; 2nd Helvetic 11; Belgic Confession 18

³⁰ 1. Matt. ch. 1; Luke ch. 1; John 1:14; I Tim. 2:5; 3:16; Heb. 5:8 2. Luke 24:38-39; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:6-

The French Confession, Article XVI³¹

XVI. We believe that God, in sending his Son, intended to show his love and inestimable goodness towards us, giving him up to die to accomplish all righteousness, and raising him from the dead to secure for us the heavenly life.[1]³²

The revealed will of God in the Bible is unchanging and consistent. Thus death entered by one man also life was granted by one man. In the first Adam death entered the world and in the second Adam life overcame death. The sin of the first Adam was imputed to all of his posterity. The righteousness of Christ was imputed to all whom God the father gave to Christ. The doctrine of imputation is solidly taught in the Bible and is consistent in grace and justice.

The resurrection secured heavenly life for the believer, not of itself but in that it indicated the acceptance of God of the completed work of Jesus Christ on behalf of the elect of God whom Christ represented in the covenant of grace from the beginning. In other words Jesus Christ as the perfect high priest after the order of Melchizedek offered the perfect sacrifice once for all. His resurrection is proof the atonement was accepted and perfect.

1. What does the resurrection obtain for the believer and why?
2. What does it mean that in giving Christ to die to accomplish all righteousness?
3. Define Righteous.
4. The confession in this article says God raised Christ from the dead. In the Bible it says Christ was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet in another place Christ said that He would take up His own life again. How can it be all three?

³¹ Calvin – Institutes 2.16.13

³² 1. John 3:16; 15:8

The French Confession, Article XVII³³

XVII. We believe that by the perfect sacrifice that the Lord Jesus offered on the cross,[1] we are reconciled to God, and justified before; for we can not be acceptable to him, nor become partakers of the grace of adoption, except as he pardons [all] our sins, and blots them out.[2] Thus we declare that through Jesus Christ we are cleansed and made perfect; by his death we are fully justified, and through him only can we be delivered from our iniquities and transgressions.[4]³⁴

Romans five begins, "Therefore being justified by faith." Ephesians 2:8 states that faith is a gift of God and the verses following state that all good works that result from justification were prepared before the foundation of the earth for the justified to walk in. There is a clear teaching in Scripture that salvation (Justification) is by grace through faith alone. In this article and the article immediately following this first confession of the Reformed churches says the same thing. This is in direct conflict with the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church of the sixteenth century and today. Many so-called evangelicals have tried various wordings to somehow insert into this sequence of events the merits of man. They have misinterpreted James and misapplied Paul speaking in Ephesians concerning faith working in love to obtain this heretical doctrine.

As this is being written (January 2003) this debate once more has reared its ugly head and many would lead the church into apostasy and a return to Rome in complete darkness and denial of the all-sufficient work of Jesus Christ.

To this we can add the heresy of those who speak of a people of faith and imply if not explicitly state there is another way of salvation than by grace through faith alone. Heresy is the correct term and all such formulations are to be resisted by the true church to the fullness of her ability.

1. How are believers justified? Carefully look at your answer, is there anyway that any merit no matter how intangible is required of man in justification?
2. The Bible speaks of receiving Christ, why is this not a work on the part of man?
3. The Bible says to call upon the name of Christ and you will be saved. Why is this not work by man that is tied to salvation?

³³ Calvin – Institutes 3.11; Belgic Confession 22; 2nd Helvetic 16; Westminster Confession 11

³⁴ 1. II Cor. 5:19; Heb. 5:7-9 2. I Peter 2:24-25 3. Heb. 9:14; Eph. 5:26; I Peter 1:18-19

The French Confession, Article XVIII³⁵

XVIII. We believe that all our justification rests upon the remission of our sins, in which also is our only blessedness, as says David (Psa. 32:2).[1] We therefore reject all other means of justification before God,[2] and without claiming any virtue or merit, we rest simply in the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us as much to blot out all our sins as to make us find grace and favor in the sight of God. And, in fact, we believe that in falling away from this foundation, however slightly, we could not find rest elsewhere, but should always be troubled. For as much as we are never at peace with God till we resolve to be loved in Jesus Christ, for of ourselves we are worthy of hatred.³⁶

This is the truth of the whole matter of justification (see article 17 this commentary). It is crucial and no variance from the biblical standard is to be tolerated. Why Reformed scholars cannot uniformly see this and try to make much ado over good works being present in the regeneration and justification of man passes human logic.

To the question are works present with regeneration the answer is a resounding yes. To the question are good works present with justification the answer is a resounding yes. Nonetheless these works being present in seminal form so to speak has nothing to do with either regeneration or justification. The concept of something being present but of no consequence isn't that hard to understand. For example if I said God died on Calvary the whole Christian world would rise up against such heresy. Yet it is a truth that god is one and there is no way Christ is present and the other two persons of the Godhead absent. In the election the whole package is a given, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification and good works. Yet as the father, Son, and Holy Spirit are individually made manifest as appropriate to each person so these are made manifest in sequence. It might be worded that they flow one from the other of necessity, but this would appear to deny their presence together so bound the one cannot exist without the other. Yet for clarity and to avoid the contemptuous error of man having any merit perhaps this less clear wording of works flowing of necessity from is the best phrase to use.

In understanding justification care must be used that never in any way whatsoever is man given the slightest measures of merit as having anything to do with his justification. Regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, good works are co-existent a product of the eternal election as such. They will be made manifest in time and sequence less any doubt that faith is the gift of God.

This may seem to be belaboring a point, it is but such attention to detail is essential. The French Confession here says any falling away from this foundation no matter how slight will remove our rest and comfort in Christ. Even at this early point in the Reformed churches the essential nature of a proper understanding of justification was admitted and by all major theologians of the day, so treated at length. For example Calvin in the Institutes devotes several chapters scattered throughout all four books to this topic.

1. According to this article what does a believer lose when they waver on this point of theology?
2. What is man worthy of apart from the gift of God in regeneration and faith in Jesus Christ?
3. When did Rome change her teaching concerning this issue? (Trick question, research it)

³⁵ Calvin- Institutes 3.12

³⁶ 1. John 17:23; Rom. 4:7-8; 8:1-3; II Cor. 5:19-20 2. I Tim. 2:5; I John 2:1; Rom. 5:19; Acts 4:12

The French Confession, Article XIX³⁷

XIX. We believe that by this means we have the liberty and privilege of calling upon God, in full confidence that he will show himself a Father to us.[1] For we should have no access to the Father except through this Mediator. And to be heard in his name, we must hold our life from him as from our chief.³⁸

Job says man needs a days man (mediator) to speak with God. The Roman Church from the beginning lifted up saints to intercede for mankind because of the unworthiness of man to appear directly before God. This inherent belief in the need of a mediator comes from the knowledge of God in nature by the very holiness that sets God apart as the only living God. No man has ever been able to stand in the glory of God. Isaiah fell down in total dismay crying I am completely undone because I am a man of unclean lips. John in revelations falls down as if dead at the appearance of Christ. Paul in Acts falls down and is blind from the glory of God. The Bible promises this “man” or mediator from the time of the curse until the last word of revelation. Throughout the Old Testament we find Christ as the promised mediator between man and God. For example in Psalm 50:15 we read, “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me.” When we compare John 16:23; Matthew 11:28; Romans 10:14; 1 Timothy 2:5; and 1 John 2:1 we see both the promise of a Mediator and the provision of a Mediator by God.

God’s perfect justice cannot allow sin in God’s presence, thus a Mediator is a necessity. We touched on this briefly in connection with the necessity of Christ being fully human. So it is in Christ alone, as our Mediator that we may boldly approach the throne of God.

Calvin in the Institutes uses the word Mediator in almost every passage and context where he makes mention of the promise and Jesus Christ. Calvin goes to great length to show that Jesus was present and the Mediator in the Old Testament before devoting a whole section to listing New Testament verses that show Christ alone as the Mediator.

1. Through whom is all prayer to God to be directed?
2. Why does man have no access to god except through Christ?
3. Why is it foolishness to think another human saint can be used as the Mediator required by a perfect and holy God?

³⁷ Calvin – Institutes 2.10-11

³⁸ 1. Rom. 5:12; 8:15; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 2:13-15

The French Confession, Article XX³⁹

XX. We believe that we are made partakers of this justification by faith alone, as it is written: He suffered for our salvation, that whosoever believes on him should not perish.[1] And this is done inasmuch as we appropriate to our use the promises of life which are given to us through him, and feel their effect when we accept them, being assured that we are established by the Word of God and shall not be deceived.[2] Thus our justification through faith depends upon the free promises by which God declares and testifies his love to us.[3]⁴⁰

As noted in the two articles dealing specifically with Justification (17-18) the reformed have from the beginning placed great emphasis on justification (which can be seen as another word for salvation) by faith alone. Faith is the gift of God and apart from faith by grace man will not believe. Works or sanctification begins after the fact so to speak and is indicated here in the phrase, “as we appropriate to our use the promises of life.” Faith is active; faith is alive. This truth James testifies to saying faith without works is dead or in other words to say you have faith and that faith not produce works of righteousness is to have no faith at all.

1. When are works made manifest in justification?
2. Some deny the formulation faith alone is of the reformation. Why can it not be any other way whatsoever?
3. Why can it be said that justification is another word or may be used as a synonym for salvation?
4. How is justification a manifestation of God's love for us?

³⁹ Calvin - Institutes 3.11; Belgic Confession 22; Heidelberg Catechism 20; 2nd Helvetic 16; Westminster Confession 14

⁴⁰ 1. Rom. ch. 3; Gal. ch. 2; 3:24; John 3:15 2. Matt. 17:20; John 3:16-17; 10:4 3. Rom. 1:17; 3:24-25, 27, 30; 4:1-3; Gal. 2:20-21

The French Confession, Article XXI⁴¹

XXI. We believe that we are enlightened in faith by the secret power of the Holy Spirit, that it is a gratuitous and special gift which God grants to whom he will, so that the elect have no cause to glory, but are bound to be doubly thankful that they have been preferred to others.[1] We believe also that faith is not given to the elect only to introduce them into the right way, but also to make them continue in it to the end.[2] For as it is God who has begun the work, he will also perfect it.[3]⁴²

God is able to do all of His holy will. God's purpose in the creation was to glorify Himself, which God accomplished in the election. Man's salvation, sustaining that salvation, and bringing it to final fruit are of God's will and will be accomplished.

It is all of grace lest the elect boast of their salvation as if of merit from themselves. The fact of the election should cause the elect ever more diligence in obeying God and making sure the election. However, despite the feeble efforts of man, the elect will persevere by the power and working of the Holy Spirit.

1. How is man enlightened?
2. What does gratuitous gift mean in this article?
3. To whom does God give this gift?

⁴¹ Calvin – Institutes 2.3.11

⁴² 1. Eph. 2:8; I Thess. 1:5; I Cor. 2:12; II Peter 1:3-4 2. I Cor. 1:8-9 3. Phil. 1:6; 2:13

The French Confession, Article XXII⁴³

XXII. We believe that by this faith we are regenerated in newness of life, being by nature subject to sin.[1] Now we receive by faith grace to live holily and in the fear of God, in accepting the promise which is given to us by the Gospel, namely: that God will give us his Holy Spirit. This faith not only does not hinder us from holy living, or turn us from the love of righteousness, but of necessity begets in us all good works.[2] Moreover, although God works in us for our salvation, and renews our hearts, determining us to that which is good,[3] yet we confess that the good works which we do proceed from his Spirit, and can not be accounted to us for justification, neither do they entitle us to the adoption of sons, for we should always be doubting and restless in our hearts, if we did not rest upon the atonement by which Jesus Christ has acquitted us.[4]⁴⁴

This is yet another mention of justification by faith alone. The order of salvation appears to change from one theologian to another and often within the same works of a particular theologian. Here we read that faith would appear to precede regeneration. Many would argue that it would be unjust of God to grant faith to the sinner and have regeneration, justification and then faith as the proper sequence. The truth is such haggling as long as we remain clear all is of grace by faith alone is foolishness. Salvation by definition must be all of these things or it would be an incomplete salvation. Likewise without justification none of the other can be true before a holy and just God. All of these things are present in the election before the foundation of the earth. In actual time among men, I dare say we could not measure the passing of time from regeneration to faith, to justification, to sanctification. In the same sense even glorification is present though it awaits God's timing and the return of the Lord to be made manifest. The sequence here is where I would place the logical truth. Another's sequence is as valid, the care is that works not even appear to be required in justification or there is merit of man and it nullifies grace.

Note here the terminology of works being a necessity of faith. Cannot we also assert that works are a necessity of justification? Absolutely! Does this create a sequence of the events involved in salvation? It does not of necessity except for works, which must proceed from salvation, not precede because it is impossible for man to even conceive of a good work that isn't of the gift of God. An order of salvation is needed lest the whole be confounded by the work of the devil and work precede or be co-joined to faith for justification whereby man can in any way merit salvation.

1. Why can works not be counted toward justification according to this article?
2. How do we rest in the atonement acquired for us by Christ?
3. Considering all that has passed so far in this confession is an order of salvation necessary? Why or why not?

⁴³ Calvin – Institutes 1.14.13

⁴⁴ 1. Rom. 6:1-2; 7:1-2; Col. 1:13; 3:10; I Peter 1:3 2. James ch. 2; Gal. 5:6; I John 2:3-4; 5:18 3. Deut. 30:6; John 3:5 4. Luke 17:10; Psa. 16:2; Rom. ch. 3-4; Titus 3:5

The French Confession, Article XXIII⁴⁵

XXIII. We believe that the ordinances of the law came to an end at the advent of Jesus Christ;^[1] but although the ceremonies are no more in use, yet their substance and truth remain in the person of him in whom they are fulfilled.^[2] And, moreover, we must seek aid from the law and the prophets for the ruling of our lives, as well as for our confirmation in the promises of the gospel.⁴⁶

The Old Testament is God's word and as a divine word cannot pass away. When Christ declared that not the smallest mark would pass away before the end of time, Christ was speaking of the Old Testament as well as prophetically of the yet unwritten New Testament.

Paul in writing to Timothy in declaring all Scripture is good for ... was definitely speaking of the Old testament as well as the New testament as by this time in history some of the works of the apostles were in circulation and looked upon by the church as Scripture as attested by Peter.

This leaves to the church then the task of finding the equity of the Law (Old Testament) and bringing it forward to the New Testament church. The church has seen as proper the application the Ten Commandments without change to all generations. The Ten Commandments have correctly been called the summary of the whole of the Law and Prophets. To hold that the Old Testament law is till the rule of faith and obedience is not then an error.

At the same time it is clear from context that some of the Law was for the nation of Israel and has been abrogated. Even so, there are applications of the equity of this law. For example there is in the Law a requirement to fence the rooftops of houses. This was a needed rule in its day because the rooftops were used as part of the dwelling space of a home. Safety and prudence required a fence. We can see this at least faintly in the law within the USA that swimming pools be fenced so none can accidentally fall into them and drown. There is need to extract the equity from the Law in total such as this example. The ceremonies were fulfilled as shadow and replaced with the sacraments of the church.

1. Why can the Old Testament not just be discarded and called of no effect in the New Testament church?
2. What does bringing the equity of the Law forward to the modern church mean?
3. What other use for today does the Law serve? How?

⁴⁵ Calvin – Institutes 1.8.10; 2.11.10

⁴⁶ 1. Rom. 10:4; Gal. ch. 3-4; Col. 2:17 2. II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:19; 3:2

The French Confession, Article XXIV⁴⁷

XXIV. We believe, as Jesus Christ is our only advocate,[1] and as he commands us to ask of the Father in his name,[2] and as it is not lawful for us to pray except in accordance with the model God has taught us by his Word,[3] that all imaginations of men concerning the intercession of dead saints are an abuse and a device of Satan to lead men from the right way of worship.[4] We reject, also, all other means by which men hope to redeem themselves before God, as derogating from the sacrifice and passion of Jesus Christ.

Finally, we consider purgatory as an illusion proceeding from the same shop, from which have also sprung monastic vows, pilgrimages, the prohibition of marriage, and of eating meat, the ceremonial observance of days, auricular confession, indulgences, and all such things by which they hope to merit forgiveness and salvation.[5] These things we reject, not only for the false idea of merit which is attached to them, but also because they are human inventions imposing a yoke upon the conscience.⁴⁸

The references in the footnote deal with worship because prayer is worship, though in formal worship we look more to word and sacrament. If we corrupt our prayer life and enter into the vanity of the imagination in our personal worship, the same corruption will follow all into the house of the Lord and the gathered or formal worship of God. This is the correct place to begin creating the correct attitude and proper methods for worship of God alone.

Christ alone is again set before the world as the only way to reach God and it is important to again show this in personal prayer time. Satan would have a difficult time attacking the gathered church, but can and does attempt to lead individual members down the proverbial primrose path into perdition. Believers then must be constantly on guard in their private lives that they not hinder the gathered church by being the entry into this sacred gathering of the devil.

There is no biblical ground whatsoever for purgatory, much less all of the ritual Rome has placed around this imaginary domain between heaven and hell. Only the Bible may be used to bind the conscience of any person, and never the creation of man.

1. Since the model prayer in the New Testament (The Lord's prayer – Mt. 6:9) is the only lawful model, name the elements of this model prayer. (See Westminster Larger Catechism questions 178-196)
2. Why is prayer to or through one of the saints prohibited?
3. Can man ever in any way obtain merit in the eyes of God for himself?

⁴⁷ 2nd Helvetic 5; Belgic 29; Westminster Confession 21; Calvin – Institutes 1.12.1; 2.8.17; 4.10.24; 4.10.29

⁴⁸ 1. I Tim. 2:5; Acts 4:12; I John 2:1-2 2. John 16:23-24 3. Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:1 4. Acts 10:25-26; 14:14; Rev. 19:10 5. Matt. 15:11; Acts 10:14-15; Rom. 4:1-4; Gal. 4:9-10; Col. 2:18-23; I Tim. 4:2-5

4. The French Confession, Article XXV⁴⁹

XXV. Now as we enjoy Christ only through the gospel,[1] we believe that the order of the Church, established by his authority, ought to be sacred and inviolable, and that, therefore, the Church can not exist without pastors for instruction,[2] whom we should respect and reverently listen to, when they are properly called and exercise their office faithfully.[3] Not that God is bound to such aid and subordinate means, but because it pleases him to govern us by such restraints. In this we detest all visionaries who would like, so far as lies in their power, to destroy the ministry and preaching of the Word and sacraments.⁵⁰

In the foundation of the reformation we find pastors affirmed to be a necessity because it pleased God to so call men into this office. The most popular movement in the church today is the cell group or house church. These non-churches do not have officers and deny the necessity of trained clergy. These are also into the manifestation of the signs and gifts of the New Testament and place more importance on the signs than any other portion of Scripture. They tend to be legalistic in the application of Scripture thought extremely liberal in the interpretation of Scripture. This denies the Lord in that it was Christ who said He founded His church upon His deity. It rips from the Bible its authority and deletes the gifts of the church in Ephesians chapter four.

A person might think that this far into the history of the church we would have learned something from the error and failure of the church in the past. The one who thinks this is true has not looked at the world around them. There is no new heresy, just the old heresies of the beginning given new names and ran up the proverbial flag pole to see who will salute this new thing.

Pastors are called of God. This is important and in the reformed church has always been a three-stage event. First is the man will have a personal call of God. This personal call is confirmed by his peers in the church calling him to office in the church and finally by the church setting him aside and ordaining him to the office of minister of word and sacrament. The reformed have also always demanded the person be prepared in accordance with the Scripture and tested men appearing before them in several areas before ordaining them to office. While a professional education such as seminary was not mandatory, it was and is the normal route to ministry in the Reformed churches. Most denominations have left open means for lesser-educated men to be called of God into the ministry, but these are also tested as the ones who are graduates of theological schools. In earlier times of the Reformed churches the education was most often as an apprentice to a pastor who taught the candidate in all of the necessary subjects to be used of God as a pastor.

1. Why does the church call and ordain pastors?
2. Are pastors a necessity to the church?
3. Who may be called as a pastor? (Hint see 1 Timothy regarding elders)

⁴⁹ Calvin – Institutes 4.3; Belgic 31; 2nd Helvetic 28

⁵⁰ 1. Rom. 1:16-17; 10:3 2. Matt. 18:20; Eph. 1:22-23 3. Matt. 10:40; John 13:20; Rom. 10:15

4. The French Confession, Article XXVI⁵¹

XXVI. We believe that no one ought to seclude himself and be contented to be alone; but that all jointly should keep and maintain the union of the Church, and submit to the public teaching, and to the yoke of Jesus Christ,[1] wherever God shall have established a true order of the Church, even if the magistrates and their edicts are contrary to it. For if they do not take part in it, or if they separate themselves from it, they do contrary to the Word of God.[2]⁵²

We have covered this in the previous questions in several places. The very name church indicates a gathering in the original languages. There is no power given to any person alone at any time. Christ said where two or more are gathered in my name and where two or more are in agreement... The only place we find being alone in the proper worship of God is in personal prayer. Even here however we see the real power is in the gathered saints, not alone.

To enter into solitary worship is the ultimate rebellion against Christ, it denies Christ, as surely as any verbal denial of the Lord ever will. Faith without works is dead and unless you love the brethren you are not of God. If you love the brethren you will not depart from them to be alone. This does not deny the need at times to be alone before God. Christ often went aside to spend time in prayer alone with God the father. It is however not the way to worship God as God has commanded.

1. What does the word church mean?
2. When and how may a person worship God in solitary?
3. Where did the church originate?

⁵¹ Calvin Institutes Book 4 is primarily about the church. 4.1 would be considered mandatory reading by this author.

⁵² 1. Psa. 5:8; 22:23; 42:5; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 2:12 2. Acts 4:19-20; Heb. 10:25

The French Confession, Article XXVII⁵³

XXVII. Nevertheless we believe that it is important to discern with care and prudence which is the true Church, for this title has been much abused.[1] We say, then, according to the Word of God, that it is the company of the faithful who agree to follow his Word, and the pure religion which it teaches; who advance in it all their lives, growing and becoming more confirmed in the fear of God according as they feel the want of growing and pressing onward.[2] Even although they strive continually, they can have no hope save in the remission of their sins.[3] Nevertheless we do not deny that among the faithful there may be hypocrites and reprobates, but their wickedness can not destroy the title of the Church.[4]⁵⁴

The marks of the church have been discussed earlier. There are three marks of the true church:

1. The true church will engage in faithful preaching of the Scriptures in all of their simplicity and integrity.
2. The true church will practice of the sacraments properly.
3. The true church will practice Christian discipline.

None of these marks is a thing indifferent and the church that misses one of the marks is no church of Christ.

The church wears a human face and as noted by Christ there are tares within the church. Likewise in the ancient church we see not all of Israel were Israelites. We are also warned about the many false teachers who have gone into the world already by the holy apostles.

1. What are the marks of the true church?
2. Why does the church have hypocrites and reprobates in her midst?
3. Where do we find this true church?

⁵³ Calvin – Institutes 4.2

⁵⁴ 1. Jer. 7:4, 8, 11-12; Matt. 3:9; 7:22; 24:5 2. Eph. 2:20; 4:11-12; I Tim. 3:15; Deut. 31:12 3. Rom. 3:3
4. Matt. 13:30; I Tim. 1:18-20

The French Confession, Article XXVIII⁵⁵

XXVIII. In this belief we declare that, properly speaking, there can be no Church where the Word of God is not received, nor profession made of subjection to it, nor use of the sacraments.[1] Therefore we condemn the papal assemblies, as the pure Word of God is banished from them, their sacraments are corrupted, or falsified, or destroyed, and all superstitions and idolatries are in them. We hold, then, that all who take part in those acts, and commune in that Church, separate and cut themselves off from the body of Christ.[2] Nevertheless, as some trace of the Church is left in the papacy, and the virtue and substance of baptism remain, and as the efficacy of baptism does not depend upon the person who administers it, we confess that those baptized in it do not need a second baptism.[3] But, on account of its corruptions, we can not present children to be baptized in it without incurring pollution.⁵⁶

The Roman Church at the time this confession was written is persecuting the fledgling Reformed church most bitterly. The Roman Church has excommunicated the reformed people, seized or caused the seizure of their property and in places taken their children away from them. In France, the origin of this confession over 25 percent of the population has been killed or exiled at the order of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, her members need not be baptized a second time. Because baptism is not salvation in itself, its power does not come from the person or institution performing the baptism but of the operation of the Holy Spirit in sealing the elect to Christ.

It is interesting that the confession only mentions not presenting children for baptism and not adults. Though interesting I hesitate to try and explain this sentence. I sense it means that to present a child a true believer would have to enter into profane worship which is prohibited by Scripture. Also a thought as to the child coming of age not understanding why the Roman Church was corrupt, and yet their parents had presented them for baptism in the corrupt church. I hold to this because of the phrase "incurring pollution."

1. Who may administer the sacrament of Baptism
2. Where and when should baptism take place?
3. Why does the Reformed church baptize?

⁵⁵ Calvin – Institutes 4.15.1,16,17; 4.16.21; 4.19.10; Westminster Confession 28; Belgic 34; 2nd Helvetic 20

⁵⁶ 1. Matt. 10:14-15; John 10:1; I Cor. 3:12-13 2. II Cor. 6:14-16; I Cor. 6:15 3. Matt. 3:11; 28:19; Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17; 19:4-6

The French Confession, Article XXIX⁵⁷

XXIX. As to the true Church, we believe that it should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ.[1] That there should be pastors, overseers, and deacons, so that true doctrine may have its course, that errors may be corrected and suppressed, and the poor who are in affliction may be helped in their necessities; and that assemblies may be held in the name of God, so that great and small may edified.⁵⁸

The three-office form as opposed to the more recent two-office view is set forth here and pointed to as the biblical model. Notice the pastor is set apart as Eph. 4 would indicate should be and elders are listed as overseers. The polity of the Presbyterian and Reformed has blurred the distinction between pastor's and elders and some bodies have gone so far as to indicate that deacon is not truly an officer of the church. Beyond the intent of this work, but I believe this was an attempt by some to lessen the resistance within the church to female deacons. We can note that even the churches that make such a claim continue to ordain deacons.

The real harm done in a position less than the three-office view is the degradation of the role of pastor in the church. Pastors have not stood their ground and demanded the position of pastor be maintained apart from that of elders in general. Pastors have quietly allowed the lines of distinction to be blurred and the church to have Teaching Elders (clergy) and Ruling Elders (laymen). Perhaps humility and peace in the church justifies the pastors standing by while this was accomplished. I find it unbiblical however and note there is a distinct difference in calling, gifting, and duty within the church as the titles in this article indicate.

Too often the modern pastor labors more as the CEO of a company than as the spokesman for God's word. Deacons have been reduced to janitors and moneychangers, and the Lord only knows what the office of ruling elder accomplishes other than being an aggravation to all. Thankfully this is not true in all Reformed churches and some maintain the three-office distinction and duty of the various offices as here given in submission to the word of God. Some incorrectly point to Calvin's Institutes 4.9.3-4 as teaching a lesser place for pastors in the church and see the division within one office of elder as a way to assist the maintenance of the purity of the eldership.

1. Why is there a difference in elder and pastor?
2. How may the office of pastor and elder be viewed as the same except for duty?
3. If all elders are the same and there is in fact no hierarchy in calling, why do we demand theological education for pastors since all elders should be apt to teach?
4. Where in the Bible do we find that the deacons are responsible for stewardship and the accounting of church funds under the ruling court of the church? (Hint it isn't in the "distributions" found in Acts)

⁵⁷ Belgic Confession 31; 2nd Helvetic 28; Calvin Institutes —4.3.6; 4.9.3; 4.9.4

⁵⁸ Acts 6:3-5; Eph. 4:11-13; I Tim. ch. 3; Titus ch. 1-2; Matt. 18:17

The French Confession, Article XXX

XXX. We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have the same authority and equal power under one head, one only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ;⁵⁹ and that consequently no Church shall claim any authority or dominion over any other.

While there is a position within each church, pastor, elders, and deacons, that form a hierarchy as such within the church, the authority of a pastor ends with the church where God has placed him to labor. While specifically dealing with pastors here the same is true for all officers of the church. The only corporate head as such is Jesus Christ. This denies then that an office of bishop or another title that places one minister over another, or claims any authority over the members of a church where the pastor is not the pastor called by that congregation is biblical.

This also has a direct application regarding presbyteries or other “courts” of the church that exist within Reformed and Presbyterian circles. Such “higher” courts are voluntary associations as such and are not the church and have no authority over the local church than the local church agrees to submit to by reason of order and supervision.

The only form of government that can begin to meet this understanding of a biblical church government is Reformed or Presbyterian which denies the Roman Catholic Church as well as Lutheran and Anglican churches or churches that adopt these systems of church government.

Nonetheless the system of church government has never been a mark of orthodoxy and all true churches are recognized as part of the body of Christ despite system of government. We need to also note that this doesn't allow a recognized pastor to be held in less esteem because he is not of a particular church. All pastors are called of God and serve as equals in the church at large under Jesus Christ. They are to be honored and respected for their place in the church and the comments above about authority over is to be understood in a judicial sense. All are ministers of Jesus Christ.

Study Questions

1. Who is the only head of the church?
2. Why would the system of Government in a Methodist church be considered unbiblical in this article?
3. Do you agree Acts 15 gives reason to call presbyteries biblical in the connectional system between individual churches such a form of government creates?
4. Where would a congregational system of government fit under this chapter?

⁵⁹ . Matt. 18:2-4; 20:26-27; I Cor. 3:1-6; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18-19

The French Confession, Article XXXI

XXXI. We believe that no person should undertake to govern the Church upon his own authority, but that this should be derived from election, as far as it is possible, and as God will permit.[1] And we make this exception especially, because sometimes, and even in our own days, when the state of the Church has been interrupted, it has been necessary for God to raise men in an extraordinary manner to restore the Church which was in ruin and desolation. But, notwithstanding, we believe that this rule must always be binding: that all pastors, overseers, and deacons should have evidence of being called to their office.[2]⁶⁰

The Reformed have always held to a three point calling to office as such. The first point is the inner sense of call to ministry as an officer of the church in various capacities. Second is the acceptance of the congregation of the person as being called of God to office by the works of ministry by that person within the context of the local church. Third is the election and installation in office by the governing body of the local church.

The election referred to in this chapter is the election of the local congregation. The extraordinary circumstance referred to here is such as the reformation when for due reasons no church exists to call (elect) or existing governing body exists to ordain and install the officers as would have been the case during the reformation where the corrupt Roman Church was considered the church and thus the only body authorized to call and ordain officers.

The Presbyterian system misses this mark somewhat in that local churches call ministers but ordination and installation are from presbyteries that in the biblical sense are not churches at all. Most Presbyterian denominations also hold the membership of their pastors, who are not members of the local church where they labor. The Presbytery not being a church should not then have members as if they were a church. This is also a bit twisted in that the local churches elect commissioners to these courts (presbyteries, synods, assemblies) who are also members of the higher court, but must hold membership in a local church and be elected by that church.

The variations on these general schemes are many and each body can put forth good reasons why such is needed for the purity and order of the church. Nonetheless all authority is from Christ and the local church is the only “court” of the church to whom Christ has given any authority over His sheep.

Study Questions

1. Why do the reformers hold a standard they have just broken to exist as churches? (Hint – think biblical)
2. Why can churches that differ on government all be of the body of Christ?
3. Should the form of government cause divisions within the body of Christ? Why or why not?

⁶⁰ 1. Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15; John 15:16; Acts 1:21-26; 6:1-2; Rom. 10:15; Titus 1:5-7 2. Gal. 1:15; I Tim. 3:7-10, 15

The French Confession, Article XXXII

We believe, also, that it is desirable and useful that those elected to be superintendents devise among themselves what means should be adopted for the government of the whole body,[1] and yet that they should never depart from that which was ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ.[2] Which does not prevent there being some special ordinances in each place, as convenience may require.⁶¹

This chapter gives permission for the differences of detail in government we find within Presbyterian or Reformed church groups. It is a truth that some order in the broader church is needed and to remain within biblical guidelines should not set one pastor above another. Thus we find synods and assemblies with various rules for membership in the body and what authority such a “higher” court has over local churches.

Acts fifteen and the counsel at Jerusalem is the biblical background for the elders as a whole being consulted and there existing some “court” of higher jurisdiction to rule upon controversies in the church. First Corinthians fourteen commands that all things be done decently and in order. These higher courts then serve as courts for the proper order within the church or courts of judicial matters more so than spiritual. However each collection of local churches coming together under such rules also have the responsibility for the spiritual purity of those who have agreed to submit to their authority to speak for Christ.

Two things need considered here. First the authority is first that of order in the churches and is these courts have been granted by the churches they oversee this authority. Second these courts only have jurisdiction over the churches that are part of their group (denomination). Thus we see a power of order and a power of jurisdiction have been granted to the courts of the church in this process.

Study Questions

1. What laws may higher courts place over the churches in their care?
2. What limits such rules?
3. What is the purpose of giving the power of order to a church or assembly?
4. To whom does the power of order apply?

⁶¹ 1. Acts 15:2, 6-7, 25, 28; Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 14:12; II Cor. 12:7-8 2. I Peter ch. 5; I Cor. 14:40

The French Confession, Article XXXIII

XXXIII. However, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which men may introduce under the pretense of serving God, by which they wish to bind consciences;^[1] and we receive only that which conduces to concord and holds all in obedience, from the greatest to the least. In this we must follow that which the Lord Jesus Christ declared as to excommunication,^[2] which we approve and confess to be necessary with all its antecedents and consequences.⁶²

The only rule by which any man may bind the conscience of another is the Bible. Discipline is a necessity both for the purity of the church by and in calling the sinner to repentance. These two do not stand in opposition but as fellow laborers in the vineyard of the Lord.

We find then that officers of all Reformed and Presbyterian denominations subscribe to the confessions of their particular part of the body of Christ. Such creeds must be clearly derived from the Bible, and while the creed may teach the doctrine of the Bible it is not the creed but the Bible that binds the conscience of the individual. Some churches also require all members to subscribe to the chosen confessional documents of the particular church.

The purpose of confessions is to set the standards for the church and establish boundaries outside which members of the church should not stand. All confessional documents are then secondary to the Bible and the only lawful charges allowed in the church are not for violation of the creeds but for the sin against God for the trampling of the Scripture that stands above and supports the doctrines of the creeds.

Discipline is the calling a sinner to repentance and upon failure to repent to shut such a person out of the kingdom of God until such time as they do show proper repentance. All discipline is pedagogical in nature and intended to reclaim the errant brother. Even excommunication is seen in this light where the loss of fellowship will prayerfully cause the errant brother to consider the loss of temporal fellowship that his spirit might be broken and humbled before God.

Study Questions

1. What is the goal of all discipline?
2. What is the purpose of confessions?
3. Who or what may bind the conscience of a man?
4. How is the Scripture seen in relation to the creeds of the church?

⁶² 1. Rom. 16:17-18; I Cor. 3:11; Col. 2:6-8; Gal. 5:1 2. Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:5; I Tim. 1:9-10

The French Confession, Article XXXIV

XXXIV. We believe that the sacraments are added to the Word for more ample confirmation, that they may be to us pledges and seals of the grace of God, and by this means aid and comfort our faith, because of the infirmity which is in us,[1] and that they are outward signs through which God operates by his Spirit, so that he may not signify any thing to us in vain.[2] Yet we hold that their substance and truth is in Jesus Christ,[3] and that of themselves they are only smoke and shadow.⁶³

Word and sacrament are co-joined that while the two cannot be separated, the word will stand-alone whereas the sacrament must always be with the word as a visible representation of that word. The Reformed have always held the sacraments as signs and seals of our engrafting into the covenant of grace.

The first table of the moral law forbids any representation of God. However, God here shows His grace in granting to the church a continuation of visible means of grace in that by nature being held in the bondage of the flesh in his temporal state man needs such visible confirmation. We see this at Sinai when the people demanded a visible object to worship. It was not so much establishing another god than the One that they saw and heard on Sinai as this inner need of finite man to have a tangible representation of God. This is the infirmity the confession makes reference to at this point.

Not only then as outward signs but the reality of the promise we have in Christ, though the actual sacrament is mere shadow as here stated. This appears to be mystical and some sort of contradiction. It is not for the Holy Spirit works God's grace through the sacrament to the heart of the believer. That is we actually receive the substance of Christ in the sacraments, though the sacramental elements water, wine, and bread are mere symbols of the promise, the Holy Spirit makes the sacraments the reality of Christ in our lives.

1. Why would the confession call the sacraments only smoke and shadow?
2. Why does man need sacraments and why did God give the church sacraments?
3. In what sense are the sacraments the reality of Christ?

⁶³ 1. I Cor. ch. 10; 11:23-34; Exod. 12:12; Matt. 26:26-27; Rom. 4:11; Acts 22:16 2. Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26 3. John 3:12; 6:50-57

The French Confession, Article XXXV

XXXV. We confess only two sacraments common to the whole Church, of which the first, baptism, is given as a pledge of our adoption; for by it we are grafted into the body of Christ, so as to be washed and cleansed by his blood, and then renewed in purity of life by his Holy Spirit.[1] We hold, also, that although we are baptized only once, yet the gain that it symbolizes to us reaches over our whole lives and to our death, so that we have a lasting witness that Jesus Christ will always be our justification and sanctification.[2] Nevertheless, although it is a sacrament of faith and penitence, yet as God receives little children into the Church with their fathers, we say, upon the authority of Jesus Christ, that the children of believing parents should be baptized.[3]⁶⁴

The Reformed have always held to one baptism and that valid for the entire lifetime of the convert because to be baptized a second would be symbolic at least of a second sacrifice of Christ. Such a second baptism would also indicate that the first baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit therein is in some way flawed requiring another application of the outward sign and a repeating of the inward work of the Holy Spirit.

The covenant connection of baptism is perhaps the most misunderstood in the entire Christian world. To forbid children the baptism is to deny their place within the covenant family. There is a place hard to understand here in that while the child is in the covenant, should receive baptism as a birthright they are forbidden the table of the Lord. Children are baptized they are in covenant with God as much as their parents. They are forbidden the table because this is a communion with God that first of all requires self-examination the child cannot fulfill. This in no way lessens their position in the covenant and godly parents may be assured their children are of the family by promise and not of mere assumption.

The debate concerning the reality of the salvation of children is frivolous in that true salvation is bound to the election which is not made visible in all the elect at all times at all ages. God in His time alone will make the election of the child manifest. The believer has no reason to presume there is more needed until the so-called age of accountability which God alone has knowledge of. Teaching human responsibility to the word of God and discipline is brought before the child in restraining them from the table until such time as they can make a credible profession of faith. It is not shutting the child out of covenant family graces, it is teaching the child to respect the church as God's ordained assembly of His people living in covenant. Submission one to another (discipline) is a mark of the church taught in the sacraments.

1. Why may the church not deny baptism to children of believers?
2. Why is the giving of baptism not contradictory to withholding the table until an age of accountability is reached?
3. How should believers view the salvation (election) of their children?

⁶⁴ 1. Rom. 6:3; Titus 3:5-6; Acts 22:16 2. Matt. 3:11-12; Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:1-4 3. Matt. 19:14; I Cor. 7:14

The French Confession, Article XXXVI

XXXVI. We confess that the Lord's Supper, which is the second sacrament, is a witness of the union which we have with Christ,[1] inasmuch as he not only died and rose again for us once, but also feeds and nourishes us truly with his flesh and blood, so that we may be one in him, and that our life may be in common.[2] Although he is in heaven until he comes to judge all the earth,[3] still we believe that by the secret and incomprehensible power of his Spirit he feeds and strengthens us with the substance of his body and of his blood.[4] We hold that this is done spiritually, not because we put imagination and fancy in the place of fact and truth, but because the greatness of this mystery exceeds the measure of our senses and the laws of nature. In short, because it is heavenly, it can only be apprehended by faith.⁶⁵

Apprehended by faith is a crucial term in understanding the sacrament of the Lord's table. The controversy through the ages concerning the elements and their reality in being what they signify physically or in some mystical way actually "being under" the elements seems most foolish. From the beginning the church has realized the importance of this means of grace and the reality and necessity of the believer continually feeding upon Christ. From this desire to hold the sacrament in its proper place of respect and reverence such foolish notions were born. The motivation of the saint putting forward the explanation or their sincerity to honor God does not make such gross error any more acceptable.

The Reformed as can be seen here hold the mystery of the sacrament, but also acknowledge the dichotomy of physical elements not being what they signify in the temporal sense. Yet fully maintain it is the actual feeding on the body and blood of the Lord, though spiritually by faith. The people of Christ's day did not understand this and many turned away when Christ introduce the concept of eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood (John 6). Such an actual partaking of flesh is abhorrent to man and God. The spiritual truth is taught and becomes a reality in the Reformed teaching concerning the Lord's table.

1. Why do we need to partake of the body and blood of Christ more than once as in we only have one baptism?
2. Why is it foolish to see the actual blood and flesh of Christ being on the table?
3. Why can a sign or symbol not become what they symbolize? (Consider promise and hope and their fulfillment according to Paul as you answer this)
4. Do the reformed see the sacrament in any sense as being real or the actual body and blood of Christ? How?

⁶⁵ 1. I Cor. 10:16-17; 11:24 2. John 6:57-57; 17:11, 22 3. Mark 16:19; Acts 3:21 4. I Cor. 10:16; John ch. 6

The French Confession, Article XXXVII

XXXVII. We believe, as has been said, that in the Lord's Supper, as well in baptism, God gives us really and in fact that which he there sets forth to us; and that consequently with these signs is given the true possession and enjoyment of that which they present to us. And thus all who bring a pure faith, like a vessel, to the sacred table of Christ, receive truly that of which it is a sign; for the body and the blood of Jesus Christ give food and drink to the soul, no less than bread and wine nourish the body.⁶⁶

This article is in defense against the Church of Rome and the elements being the actual body and blood of the Lord. This article also denies there is no reality of partaking of Christ in the Lord's Supper. The emphasis here shifts to the spiritual nature of what takes place by calling it the feeding of spirit or soul. The argument being that the feeding of the soul is no less nourishing than the feeding of the temporal body with the elements.

1. How do we actually receive from God what is offered in the sacraments?
2. How does a believer insure they are bringing a pure faith as a vessel to receive these things of Christ? (1Cor. 11)

⁶⁶ 1. I Cor. ch. 11; John ch. 6

The French Confession, Article XXXVIII

XXXVIII. Thus we hold water, being a feeble element, still testifies to us in truth the inward cleansing of our souls in the blood of Jesus Christ by the efficacy of his Spirit,[1] and that the bread and wine given to us in the sacrament serve to our spiritual nourishment, inasmuch as they show, as to our sight, that the body of Christ is our meat, and his blood our drink.[2] And we reject the Enthusiasts and Sacramentarians who will not receive such signs and marks, although our Savior said: This is my body, and this cup is my blood.[3]⁶⁷

Another attempt to show that the biblical teaching concerning the sacraments are signs and seals or symbolic rather than a literal eating of Christ. The confession begins with water and its “feeble” nature compared to the blood of Christ because there has never been controversy concerning the necessity of baptism or of the element used to perform the sacrament. There has been some considerable controversy concerning the mode of baptism. If a beggarly element like water can be said to truly represent the cleansing power of the blood of Christ in baptism, this must also be true of the Lord’s Supper. The biblical support for the Reformed understanding of the Lord’s Supper is as strong as that for baptism. Both sacraments obtain their power not from the elements, but from the thing which they signify by the inward working of the Holy Spirit alone.

1. Where does the power or substance of the sacraments come from?
2. How does “water” testify to us the truth of its inward cleansing?
3. How do the elements of the Lord’s Supper give to us the things which it signifies?

⁶⁷ 1. Rom. 6:3 2. John ch. 6; I Cor. ch. 11 3. Matt. 26:26; I Cor. ch. 11

The French Confession, Article XXXIX

XXXIX. We believe that God wishes to have the world governed by laws and magistrates,[1] so that some restraint may be put upon its disordered appetites. And as he has established kingdoms, republics, and all sorts of principalities, either hereditary or otherwise, and all that belongs to a just government, and wishes to be considered as their Author, so he has put the sword into the hands of magistrates to suppress crimes against the first as well as against the second table of the Commandments of God. We must therefore, on his account, not only submit to them as superiors,[2] but honor and hold them in all reverence as his lieutenants and officers, whom he has commissioned to exercise a legitimate and holy authority.⁶⁸

The early reformers saw a connection or partnership within the government of the church and of the secular world. God providentially placed both civil and church governors for order in their respective economies, which were often overlapping in administration. Thus in the early church civil authorities could call assemblies to deal with church problems. It wasn't until the eighteenth century we see the authority of the civil government limited and more and more separated from church government. The Church of England still has as its head the monarch on the throne of England.

Romans 13 was taken seriously and the reformers saw all civil government as being established by God for order among the peoples and nations and the same because they were appointed by God were to be honored and respected. American Presbyterianism created an even wider gap between government and church until today the government like the tail wagging the dog attempts to remove any reference to God from the civil realm altogether.

1. Why should a Christian submit to civil government, even if they think the government is corrupt or wrong?
2. Under what circumstance may a Christian attempt to overthrow civil authority?
3. Given the proper circumstance exists for Christians to disobey civil government, what tools and methods may they employ?

⁶⁸ 1. Exod. 18:20-21; Matt. 17:24-27; Rom. ch. 13 2. I Peter 2:13-14; I Tim. 2:2

The French Confession, Article XL

XL. We hold, then, that we must obey their laws and statutes,[1] pay customs, taxes, and other dues, and bear the yoke of subjection with a good and free will, even if they are unbelievers, provided that the sovereign empire of God remain intact.[2] Therefore we detest all those who would like to reject authority, to establish community and confusion of property, and overthrow the order of justice.⁶⁹

The only reason the reformers saw for disobedience of civil authority was when that authority attempted to prohibit the existence or prosperity of God's kingdom on earth, the church. Notice the terminology here of "bear the yoke of subjection." This is a concept that doesn't appeal to or is it given any countenance by the modern churches.

Not only did the reformers teach such subjection but laid the biblical requirement of such subjection being voluntary (free will) and with a good will toward these governments, no matter their status in the kingdom of God or of individual members of the governments within the church.

The last sentence deals with those who would enter into a communist system and mix or confuse properties and boundaries between the two jurisdictions of church and state. The first church apparently operated under such a communal system holding all things in common. Some would that the kingdom of God likewise create its own communities, nation, and governments holding all in common for the good of all. The system didn't work for the first church and we see soon in the biblical account strife arising about how the material goods were distributed and Paul having to issue a command that the one who did not work (contribute to common pot) should not eat from the common pot. The biblical record sees Paul exhorting the churches to help each other, but that from a free will and giving in joy unto the Lord voluntarily.

1. Where does the idea the church should be a common community in its government come from?
2. What is the only reason given for a believer to disobey civil government?
3. Rather than the overthrow of a nation what did the reformers view such disobedience as overthrowing?

⁶⁹ 1. Matt. 17:24 2. Acts 4:17-20; 18:9