

Historical-redemptive perspectives on being reformed

At the roots with diversity in the fruits

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Introduction

The following topics will reveal reformed roots with diverse fruits through historical-redemptive analysis: remembering Christ in a distinct way, the salvation of infants who die, and union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

I. Remembering Christ in a distinct way

Systematic theology has been handicapped in grasping the *practical* meaning of communion by neglect (at key points at least) of biblical theology. The debates of the Reformation grounded themselves in exegetical considerations that led the way to divergent systems of thinking about the Lord's Table: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed. Within the Reformed tradition, differences emerged that range in varying degrees from bare memorialism (it is an ordinance not a sacrament, a sign not a seal) through strong sacramentalism (it is also a seal through which God speaks and confirms our faith) to divergent views on the presence of Christ at the Table and in the elements (He is not only present by the Spirit at the Table, but also in the elements but not in the way that Rome or the Lutherans understand it).

It seems to me that these discussions need to take place but in a slimmer way and after they get a good shave with Ockham's razor. The way for these discussions to lose weight and get a good shave is by a conscientious effort to work from exegesis *through biblical theology* to arrive at a better systematic theology for practical application in the church's practical theology.¹ Even exegesis, as the crucial foundation for sound biblical systematic theology, can be led away captive by misleading presuppositions (philosophical-Rome's use of Aristotle; hermeneutical-Luther's hyper literalism; mystical-seeds in Calvin that blossom in the Nevin tradition).

Therefore, exegesis needs the control of principles that a conscientious study of the history of redemption provides.² Furthermore, it should be apparent that a huge amount of communion polemics, though well intended and productive to some degree, has been straining at a gnat on a wild goose chase. This is particularly the case in the attempts to answer this question: "how is Christ present *in the elements*?" This debate spends too much time on the essence of the elements and too little on the practice of remembering. Thus, we need to vigorously transition from thinking *about* communion to a disciplined *practice of* remembering during communion observance. This diverges from the Westminster Directory of Worship that calls for communion

¹ This may be oversimplification, but it does so in a broad and helpful way that needs refinement as more details of particular issues come into view.

²For example, the "Biblical Pattern View" lacks accuracy regarding the biblical pattern because it flattens redemptive history and loses nuances. This is evident in its identification of communion with all the meals of Jesus with unbelievers. Therefore, on this view, we are to welcome unbelievers to the Table. The claim here is that a better way of viewing the relationship is to understand all the meals of Jesus with sinners as historical-redemptive anticipations of the Table, which in turn anticipates now the great feast of the acceptance of sinners in glory yet to come.

after the morning sermon, while it avoids overreactive anti-Zwinglian aversion to “bare memorialism.” The claim is that we tend toward a bare memorialism when we place communion *after* the sermon and give little time for recollection in the context of preaching the Spirit’s reminders of the Lord Jesus. We must remember the Lord Jesus in a full and focused way or we will be guilty of attending a banquet and dwelling on the nature of the food without eating, and of dwelling on the mode of eating rather than partaking of the feast.³

In this context, the following definition reveals diversity within reformed thought on the sacraments as signs and seals.⁴ Communion is covenant remembering in which covenant heads of the households of faith (pastors) explain the meaning of the Christian Passover meal by preaching the Holy Spirit’s reminders of Christ to enable the church to remember *Him (not only His death)* in a distinct way from the record of His life, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation.⁵

The argument for this way of observing communion is based on the command of Jesus to observe communion in remembrance of Him (Lk 22.19; 1 Cor 11.24) and it is based on His example of teaching at meals and at the meal of transition to new covenant remembering.⁶ Simply put, since we remember Him in every facet of church life, He is telling us that He

³The practical distinction between preaching *about* communion remembering and *truly remembering* argues for preaching communion remembrances, otherwise, we will be guilty of “dwelling at a feast on the proper mode of eating rather than concentrating on the feast” (C. Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, 338).

⁴Calling it a sacrament means that it is not only a sign but also a seal to be received by faith for the strengthening of faith. Thus, the unity of word and sacrament means that the sacrament includes both preaching and partaking: it includes preaching Christ in a distinct way and partaking of the bread and wine in a focused way. This way of seeing and practicing communion (which we might call preaching communion remembrances) is a view on which the adherents to all the traditional reformed views can build; most incorporate the essence of PCR already to some degree. Hopefully, ongoing discussion will lead to a fuller and richer practice of communion along these lines.

⁵Thus, remembering Him does not only expound on texts about the cross. This may be done to good effect, say, by preaching each communion Sunday on one of the sayings of Jesus from the cross. However, the cross is best understood in the context of the coming, life, and teaching of Jesus. Expository sermons on texts from the Gospels that give us particular remembrances of Him open a rich storehouse of communion treasures for the church’s meditation. The key is that the entire sermon in all its main points focus on the Lord Jesus. We must keep in mind the fact that communion is about Him in the fulness of His work and not just about His sacrificial death. A help in doing this is to reflect on the implications of the fact that when we remember as people in the time between, we do not simply remember the death of Christ; indeed, we remember *the resurrected and ascended Lord* who died. Accordingly, expounding on Paul’s mystery of godliness text is a large historical-redemptive way of remembering Jesus who was manifested in the flesh and received up to glory (1 Tim 3.16).

⁶(1) The reference to “this Passover” (Lk 22.15) helps us see that at the table of institution, Jesus was in the process of transforming Passover into the new covenant meal. (2) “Doing” Passover includes covenant explanation (Ex 12.26; Ex. 24.1-11). If we emphasize the important point of symbolic action as is done by Peter J. Leithart (CTJ 40, 2005), then we know what Jesus was doing when He transformed Passover into Christian Passover. He was giving the Upper Room Discourse. Knowing what Jesus did presents us with His example to follow. (3) The Gospel of John (13-17; cf. Ridderbos, John, 486-487) indicates that the covenant explanation that Jesus gave at the Passover of transition focused on His coming humiliation. (4) Another HR argument (based on the example of Christ) traces the communion meal back to all the meals recorded in the Gospels that Jesus attended and used for teaching. All of these meals, as historical precedents of the new covenant meal, involved teaching and preaching on the coming of the kingdom in the coming of Christ. In both the concentration on Him in a distinct way, and by doing so through covenant explanation, (preaching-teaching), we are following His example in the full dimensions of what He did in giving us the new covenant communion meal. Consequently, “This do in remembrance of me” must be understood in its larger context as more than a reference to the action of eating and drinking. It refers to eating and drinking by faith of the benefits of His body and blood by a new covenant focus on the Lord Jesus by explanatory preaching.

instituted communion as a time for remembering Him with special focus.⁷ The trigger for this approach is the fact that Passover observance is the context in which communion arose.⁸ Therefore, *we must understand His command in a historical-redemptive way*, which leads to the conclusion that *pastors should preach sermons that focus on Christ distinctly whenever the church gathers for communion*.⁹

In summary of this diverse fruit from Reformation roots, to do justice to covenant remembering,¹⁰ by Passover explanation, in sermon proclamation, following the example of Christ, we must observe communion by preaching communion remembrances.¹¹

II. The salvation of infants who die

⁷ This may be called preaching communion remembrances (PCR). It should not be rejected too quickly as mere Zwinglian memorialism. It is a view that seeks to give expression to the unity of word and sacrament in a way that has its roots in OT covenant remembering. This sketch follows the lines of argument of my ETS paper (Grand Rapids, 2006) and the brief book, *Preaching Communion Remembrances*. Both can be found online at westminsterreformedchurch.org: go to the studies link and there to the communion link where you will find the ebook, the ETS papers, and many examples of communion preaching available in both text and audio.

⁸ Cf. Warfield's argument for communion as the Christian Passover meal, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (ed., John E. Meeter, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), Volume I, pp. 332-38. It should be noted that the OT contribution to NT understanding of the Table is not limited to the Passover meal, but includes other meals such as that of Moses and the elders on the Mount (Ex 24).

⁹ The distinction between regular and communion preaching and especially their interrelationship is also important in rethinking corporate communion worship. In preaching communion remembrances (PCR) as part of the sacrament, the church continually sharpens its focus intermittently across the regular diet of preaching; thus whatever the concentration may be, as in a series on the book of Joshua, and though preaching on Joshua will inevitably direct us to Jesus our deliverer, the church is brought to a deepened refocus on her Lord in communion. This is necessary because we may get lost in the details of Joshua, lost in a beneficial feeding on the gospel of the old covenant, even though we must ultimately see Christ as our Joshua. We come in communion to a sharpened focus on Christ, as our Joshua and the greater Moses, the greater than Solomon, and the sacrificed Isaac. This sharpening is not just at the end of a sermon on a section in Joshua; it is the sacrament with an entire sermon (PCR) conjoined with symbols that sharpens our focus on Christ. This sharpening takes place intermittently across the preaching diet.

¹⁰ Too often, we forget the importance of remembering in anti-Zwinglian polemics, cf. Mathison, who reacts to "symbolic memorialism" by saying that the sacraments are not "mere empty signs that produce a subjective state of mental recollection." Instead, he says, "Jesus connects the bread and wine with body and blood." He seems to lose sight of remembering because of His attention on the real presence doctrine. Wright, however, makes the point that the Eucharist takes us back "in heart and mind, in sacramental time to the very life of Jesus himself," *The Lord and His Prayer*, p. 47. It should be obvious that preaching communion remembrances along the lines of God's reminding in the Gospels is hardly a bare memorial. To the contrary, we should think that whatever view we hold if we subtract PCR from it, then we *are* in danger of bare memorialism.

¹¹ It seems reasonable to conclude that remembering is more than avoiding a state of total forgetfulness. Remembering is more than simply taking some notice to mind. It means to recall to the mind, to retain in the mind, to keep someone in one's thoughts and affections. It includes a process of recollection. For example, when God remembers our sins it means that He considers them in detailed and fitting coordination with the just punishments they deserve. Furthermore, when the OT saint performed a sacrifice, it served as a remembrance (Lev. 24.7; Ps. 37.1; 69.1). However, the reminding of sin associated with the sacrifices of the OT provides a wonderful contrast to communion. Those sacrifices drove home the fact of our sin and need, but communion arises from the accomplished sacrifice so it does not focus on our sins. On the contrary, communion focuses on our Savior who did all that was necessary to deliver us from our sins. Thus, a communion service should have a sermon that *brings Christ to mind* in a distinct, focused, and concentrated way. In the OT sacrifices, there was a reminder of sin (cf. Heb. 10.3). There was a continuous reminding of sin and of the fact that God remembers sin, but per the atonement in Christ, we know that He remembers our sin no more (Heb. 10.17; 8.12). Also, important here is the analogy that exists between tracing the history of the Israelites in detail and remembering the history of the true Israelite, the Lord Jesus, presented to us in the remembrance Gospels.

The supporting premise for the “judgment” (argument) in the Canons of Dort on the salvation of the infants of believers (I, 17, CRC translation) is not as clear as the conclusion: **Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.** The premise is “that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with their parents are included.” The conclusion is that a believing parent ought not to doubt the salvation of any of his or her children that die in infancy. Texts cited are: 1 Cor. 7.14; Gen. 17.7 & Acts 2.39.

The use of Gen. 17.7 indicates that the covenant with Abraham and his offspring is virtually equivalent to a covenant with NT believers and their children, which entails the following problematic belief: that there is no historical-redemptive uniqueness to Abraham and his offspring in all their generations to the end of time. This is contrary to Paul’s insistence that they remain God’s covenant people and that He continues to fulfill His covenant to them even in their judgment (Rom 9-11). Specifically, though they are enemies of the gospel they are beloved in God’s election of their patriarchal forefathers (Rom 11.28, **As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers**).¹²

The use of Acts 2.39 fails to do justice to the historical-redemptive expansion of the promise to all families of the earth such that all children have what the Belgic Confession teaches in principle (the same promises that God gave to the children of Abraham, Art. 34) and what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in principle (that redemption is promised to them no less than to the adult, Q74), which in turn entails that all people of the earth are the “covenant children of God” because the covenant promises are for them all, for every man, woman and child!¹³

Similarly, Jesus teaches that in the coming of His kingdom all people, all parents and all children, whether wheat or weeds are in His kingdom and at the end of the age all unrepentant “covenant breakers” will be purged out of it (Mat. 13.24-43). So, now in the history of redemption, both Jews and Gentiles of all families of the earth are in the new covenant kingdom of Christ. They are there under judgment but with judgment delayed to the end of the age. Thus, the time between His comings is the time in which the nations have the promises of the new covenant gospel instead of judgment. All children are therefore children of the covenant in this sense that the gospel is for them all. The historical-redemptive shift from Jewish particularism to national universalism makes it difficult to identify the children of believers as children of the

¹² The use of Gen 17 also entails the notion of Christian identity, such that the children of Christian parentage are children of Abraham despite the fact that we identify Christian parents as children of Abraham by their faith: “those (even Gentiles) of faith...are the sons of Abraham” (Gal.3.7). Similarly, the ones that are to be *called* (reckoned, counted) the sons of God are those who are peace makers (Mat. 5.9), and the ones with the right to be *called* the sons of God are those who receive Christ being born of God (Jn. 1.12-13). How to identify the infant children of these adult children of Abraham is not clear. It does not help to state that these infants are the children of Abraham in a covenantal sense because that is simply asserting that they are the children of Abraham, and we (human onlookers) call, count, and identify the children of Abraham by their confessed faith (we identify them, but not by peering into their hearts; so, we do so by charitable consideration of the fruits of the blessed man (Mat. 5.1-12) and the confession of faith each make with their mouths (Rom 10.9-10).

¹³ It also fails to do justice to the call of children to repentance. Does not the text imply that the duty to repent applies to each category: you, your children, and those far off, and to the nature of the promise: forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit *by repentance*? Cf. *WLC*, 32: How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant? The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation.

covenant in any sense other than in the sense of the huge privilege they have as children to whom the new covenant gospel is to be preached as part of their nurture in the Lord. Also, based on having the promises to Abraham, we are not to count all people that have the promises of the gospel (as a universal offer that is for all nations) to be children of God or God's elect children. Therefore, we cannot infer from being in the covenant or children of the covenant to election and salvation without at the same time committing ourselves to soteriological universalism.

Therefore, concerning the offer of the gospel, there is only one family that has the promise **between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations** (Gen 17.7): the family of Abraham throughout redemptive history. Contrary to Jewett who states that the promise "to you and your seed" no longer has historical-redemptive significance,¹⁴ we should recognize the fact that for all time Abraham and his seed have historical-redemptive significance in that God is keeping His promises to Abraham despite his family's disobedience; He does so by saving a remnant of Israel and He does so by blessing the nations even while judging Israel.

In turn, this means that Christian families do not have a claim to the promises of the new covenant in some kind of exclusive sense: a believer cannot say something to this effect, "My children are included in the covenant of grace, and they have the promises, while the children of unbelievers do not have the promises." This cannot be said because God extends the promises of the covenant of grace to all families of the earth. This line of thought has confirmation in principle later than Dort in the Westminster standards: WLC, 32: The grace of God [in the covenant of grace] is manifested...in that he freely provides and offers to sinners [of all nations, Q 35] a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, [He] promises and gives his Holy Spirit.

Does this mean that the children of believers in the new covenant have something less than the children of believers in the OT? It cannot be less because the promises are greater and they belong to all families of the earth. Christian families have no *exclusive* claim to the promises (that belongs only to Abraham and his family), but they do *have* a claim to all the promises of the new covenant.

Of course, it is a great opportunity and privilege to be raised in a Christian home in the context of the covenant promises embodied in the lives of believing parents and thus in the air a child breathes from infancy until he leaves home. This privilege is something that is much greater than what occurs in families where children are not surrounded by faith.¹⁵

Returning to the question of the salvation of infants of believing parentage that die, consider the following observations.

¹⁴Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 115.

¹⁵This "greater grace" may be inferred from 1 Cor. 7.14 when we read it in parallel with the winning of those who are disobedient to the word by an embodied gospel in 1 Pet. 3.1, and when we couple this with the promises of the covenant to all families of the earth. In 7.14, Paul assumes the holiness of the children and reasons from it to the conclusion that the unbelieving partner is sanctified by the believing partner. Thus, the unbelieving spouse is sanctified, the readers may be assured, just as the children are sanctified. With Peter in mind, we may reasonably conclude that the easy point to believe (the point granted), namely, that children are set apart under the umbrella of the believer's faith embodied before them, likewise, the difficult point to believe (the point being argued), namely, that the unbelieving spouse (adult, hardened, autonomous, unbelieving) is also set apart under the umbrella of the believer's faith embodied before him or her. The hope cultivated by 7.14 and 1 Pet 3.1 is that God saves through means; He saves through the lived faith of a believing spouse (especially emphasized by Peter). Paul tells the Corinthians that they can take what they know about how this works in the lives of children and apply it in a parallel way to the unbelieving spouse, even if the main point of the text is, as Jewett suggests, the legitimacy of the marriage bond. In the end, the gospel promises to all families of the earth confirm the sanctifying means of grace.

1) Analysis of the reference to the covenant in I.17 of Dort reveals that the premise is flawed. Therefore, the conclusion that rests on this premise is flawed. Nevertheless, historical-redemptive reflection will help us move from reformed roots to diversity in the fruits.

2) If the idea of being comprehended in the covenant does not suffice for the conclusion, then how do we approach the death of infant children of believers and nonbelievers? Where do we find our comfort and confidence?

We find our comfort *in God* who is just and will do what is right and loving regarding all infants who die in infancy. We trust *Him* even if we do not have a decisive and final word from Him on this subject.

However, we do have *some* basis from His word for confidence regarding the salvation of *all* who die in infancy. It comes from reflection on the history of redemption. God intends that His call in history reach all families of the earth. In old times, His call went to all through the creation (Ps. 19; Rom.1). Now, additionally, redemptive history has progressed to the present time of universal proclamation in which the gospel belongs to all families of the earth as an overture (Mat 28). Nonetheless, there are people not reached by this call in history, those who die in infancy. Therefore, we can reasonably infer that the Lord will give this call to them too, according to His purpose for them that they hear His call to salvation. But that call must come in the only way possible for infants who die with no understanding, namely, in a saving way because for them to hear His call, they must be given understanding to know Him who calls and thus to have eternal life.

III. Union with Christ in His death and resurrection.¹⁶

By union with Christ in His death and resurrection, sinners (dead bond slaves in sin) are made alive and set free from sin. This is a historical-redemptive truth *par excellence* and it takes some work to see how it leads from reformed roots to diverse fruits. Some questions will guide our path.

When does the death and resurrection of sinners in union with Christ occur? It occurs in the historical past when Christ died and arose from the dead, it occurs in the experience of these sinners in their transition from wrath to grace in their histories, and it will occur in the resurrection of their bodies at Christ's return because His resurrection is the firstfruits of the same harvest (1 Cor 15.22-23: **22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ**). The resurrection of Christ and the future bodily resurrection of those who belong to Him "form the beginning and end of the same harvest."¹⁷ The resurrection life of believers is both now and not yet. Our future resurrection has already begun in the resurrection of Christ with whom we were united when He died and arose from the dead.

How does resurrection from death in sin occur *in the lives of the dead in sin who are bound for physical and eternal death*? It is through baptism and through faith. We were buried

¹⁶The key texts are Rom 6.3-4: **Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life** and Col 2.11-13: **In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.**

¹⁷Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 61

with Him through baptism into Christ's death to walk in newness of (resurrection) life (Rom 6.3-4). We were raised with Him through faith (Col 2.12). Faith and baptism are instrumental in being united with Christ in His death and resurrection *in our experience* of bondage transformed to freedom, and *in our experience* of being once dead but now raised to newness of life (Col 2.13; Rom 6.4).

This does not mean that we are raised by baptism as if baptism saves. Nor are we raised by faith as if faith saves. It is not that baptism joins us to Christ in His resurrection or that faith makes us alive from the dead. Rather, it means that *God* raises us through baptism as His instrument (Rom 6.4: **We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life**) and that *God* makes us alive through faith as His instrument (Col 2.13: **you were also raised with him through faith ...you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him**). Accordingly, God made dead sinners alive in union with Christ (**together with him**) through faith. In other words, historical-redemptive union with Christ is the basis that causes the experience of union with Christ in the transition of sinners from death to life (Gaffin, *Centrality*, 51). The dead are in bondage and cannot believe (Rom 6.6: **crucified with him ... so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin**; 8.7: **For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot**; Jn 6.44a: **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.**). Thus, Jesus' death and resurrection secured the bodily resurrection and the resurrection from death in sin for all who were united with Him in His death and resurrection, the pinnacle event in the history of redemption.

The following observations are pertinent here.

1) We have a fresh look at efficacious redemption

This perspective on union with Christ in His death and resurrection in the history of redemption gives a fresh look at particular, or better, efficacious redemption (Heb 9.12). No doubt, questions will continue to be raised. However, the principle of the now and not yet of NT eschatology applies equally and inseparably to our bodily resurrection and our spiritual resurrection. *Both were secured and guaranteed for all who were united with Christ historically in His saving conquest of death by resurrection.*

2) We have a fresh look at the relation of circumcision to baptism

The direction of thought from the perspective of the history of redemption is that circumcision is not the counterpart of baptism. Instead, the point (in Col 2) is that circumcision as a divine act in the death of Christ frees sinners from slavery to sin by applying to them what Christ secured for them in His death and resurrection. In other words, it is not a counterpart to baptism because it produces baptism. Baptism as an act of obedience is a free act of a bond slave to sin *set free*. Faith is an act of life of a dead person who has been *made alive*.

Therefore, the historical-redemptive insights into Romans 6 and especially Colossians 2 affirm the root doctrine of efficacious redemption. Thus, Jesus secured and guaranteed the complete salvation of all for whom He died; He secured their release from sin's bondage and their deliverance from sin's wage of death. At the same time, these insights close the door to the notion that Colossians 2 teaches the replacement of circumcision by baptism. In turn, the door for a different reformed direction on the subjects of baptism swings wide open in the history of redemption oriented definition furnished of baptism, namely, that baptism is a free act of obedience associated with a living faith.

3) We have a fresh look at the sign and seal of baptism

Baptism is a sign of efficacious grace by which people dead in sin and unable to believe are enabled to believe. In its sealing function, it is a visible gospel word that is received by faith for the strengthening of faith. By drinking deeply from the well of sovereign grace, the gospel word of baptism points us to our historical-redemptive union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and to how God in grace applies our union with Christ through faith and baptism. It informs us that He set us free and enabled us to obey Him in baptism. It also informs us that He made us alive from death in sin enabling us to trust in the powerful working of God, who raised Jesus from the dead (Col 2.12).

Conclusion

The three topics selected for this sample of historical-redemptive study (remembering Christ in a distinct way, the salvation of infants who die, and union with Christ in His death and resurrection) are representative of how we can be reformed at the roots with diversity in the fruits.¹⁸ Unity without unanimity is not a bad thing. The dialogue that occurs between the various trends of reformed thinkers (and among Christians generally) is healthy in principle and ought to be engaged wholeheartedly since disciples, who are disciples indeed (truly and in their deeds), are continually in the process of transcending remnant blindness by the grace of God and for the glory of God.

¹⁸Here is a rough and ready list of more topics about which (and through which) we gain new, fresh, and sometimes diverse perspectives by approaching them with a history of redemption mindset. (1) Limited atonement is defended best by understanding texts like Jn 12.32 from the angle of the history of redemption and the movement from OT Jewish particularism to NT national universalism. (2) The trinity is revealed by historical-redemptive unfolding, not by redemptive word but *by redemptive deed*; cf. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” (Philadelphia: P & R, 1952) 22-59. (3) NT canon is best understood in a historical-redemptive way; cf. Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1988). (4) Cessationism of the word gifts of the Spirit is best defended from the historical-redemptive perspective; so, Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). (5) Christian baptism should be pondered as the new covenant form of OT washings, rather than a NT form of circumcision. (6) Historical-redemptive study leads to the conclusion that John’s Baptism is of a piece with the baptism Jesus practiced through His disciples and Christian baptism inaugurated by them. (7) If we read Mat 10 in a historical-redemptive way, we will understand preaching by pastors today to be a continuance of the preaching of Jesus through His apostles *across the cities of Israel and the nations to the end of the age*. (8) Historical-redemptive trajectories (within the 66 books of the canon) help us understand the laying on of hands and other things mentioned in Heb 6.1-2; cf. sermons on this text by R. Ostella, westminsterreformedchurch.org. (9) History of salvation models such as “now and not yet,” “the time between,” and “the New Israel” enrich our understanding of the church and NT times.