

## 5th. Reformed subculture in the United States (Page 8 for discussion 11-14 -10)

c) We follow Calvin's root to its fruit on how Scripture counts sonship (C, Rom 9.26, 372f).

Calvin's comments on the "not my people" language harmonize in principle with our emphasis on Israel's covenant standing under judgment for they are "put on a level with the Gentiles"; then, "having equalized the Jews and the Gentiles, he would gather a Church for himself from aliens, so that they who were not a people would begin to be so" (372).

How do we relate eternal election to childship to recognition of it in the Church? To this point he says, "Though they indeed, whom God in his eternal counsel has destined as sons to himself, are perpetually his sons, yet Scripture in many parts counts none to be God's children but those, the election of whom has been proved by their calling: and hence he teaches us not to judge, much less to decide, respecting God's election, except as far as it manifests itself by its own evidences" (373; i.e. there must be a transition from wrath to grace in history).

Connecting eternal election to the counting of childship to God in history, Calvin's orbit of thought includes the visible church and human judgment. What we do with this, contrary to Calvin, is conclude that we are to identify covenant children, not by birth (as is typical in reformed theology), but by how "it manifests itself by its own evidences," which we take to be repentance, and in turn, the seeing the evidences of repentance leads to the administration of repentance-baptism (on credible confession of faith).

Granted, in his comments on Romans 9.26, Calvin is connecting eternal sonship (per the *pactum salutis*) to counting someone to be a child of God in the judgment of the church. He is not addressing the notion of covenant standing within history (per the covenant with Abraham). Thus, he draws on the covenant with Abraham and his seed to arrive at the conclusion of covenant standing and identification (counting as children of God) by birth to covenant parentage. Our assessment is that these are contradictory or at least stand in tension with each other: counting as children of God by birth and counting as children of God by evidences that manifest calling (and calling results in faith and repentance as two sides of the same coin). Note that on Romans 9.26, Calvin says that *we* are "not to judge" and "decide" regarding "God's election" (that makes people "perpetually his sons") or "count [them]...to be God's children" "*except as far as it manifests itself by its own evidences*" (italics mine).

Therefore, we think it is true to Calvin and in harmony with reformed theology to resolve contradictions or confusing lines of thought in Calvin. Many within the reformed communities have done this. Recall Gaffin's critique of Calvin on the Sabbath (Gaffin per Vos also evaluates the Westminster Confession as missing the main point of the fourth commandment). Many differences have emerged regarding Calvin's "real presence" teaching about communion. Effort is made in at least two ways (Nevin versus Hodge) to follow Calvin's root to a different fruit. Doing so surely does not make one non-reformed. Still, some, like Mathison think that if you do not have weekly communion you are not reformed (we have evaluated his view and found it wanting) or like Kelly Clark think that if you do not have a Sunday evening service your church is not reformed.

Accordingly, we think that the connection between being perpetually covenant children and being identified as such per the evidences of repentance is clearly biblical and, contrary to Calvin, that it leads away from infant baptism because it leads away from identifying covenant children by natural birth. This being true, it still leaves the door open (somewhat anyway) to work from the Abrahamic covenant to covenant identification by birth. Addressing that point, we follow Calvin regarding the fact that the Jews are put on a level with the Gentiles (Rom 9.26) so that the church is gathered from aliens (of both Jews and Gentiles). However, we think he fails to

go far enough because he does not see the historical-redemptive implication that now the covenant promises belong to all people and he does not see the further implications that this has regarding the arguments for infant baptism. For example, he claims that we must baptize infants since otherwise we exclude our children from the new covenant, and it becomes a matter of lesser grace than the old. However, the implication of the covenant people remaining such, but under judgment and blended with the nations as not my people, is that all people are covenant people but under judgment. Thus, all people are “not my people,” the covenant belongs to all, all are covenant breakers, and some are to be identified as covenant keepers *if they show the evidences* of God’s effectual calling, which are repentance and faith, and in turn, the *obedience* of baptism.

To say this central point again: we take the identification of covenant children by birth per the promise to Abraham and his seed to be a historical-redemptive mistake because the promise to Abraham and his offspring refers to his descendants to the end of time in a unique way that does not apply to Christians and their children. Now in the new covenant, God is fulfilling His unique promise to Abraham and his children’s children by keeping His word to them even though they are under judgment. He does so by calling Gentiles (not my people) to be His people and through provoking Israel to jealousy, He does so by calling a remnant of Israelites (not my people under judgment) to be His people.

Finally, to not miss the point we are making here we need to return to the discussion of where we stand relative to the reformed subculture in the United States. Bottom line: we are claiming that we stand within that tradition even though we do not embrace infant baptism because we believe (with Calvin as a rough and ready marker of being reformed) that we move from the root of what he teaches to what we understand to be a more consistent fruit regarding a) the identification of covenant sons and daughters by the life evidences, and b) the identification of Jews and Gentiles as the people who are not God’s people (they are all His people, His covenant people under judgment as covenant breakers) and from whom He is calling out a new people in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and his descendants in all their generations.