

The Geneva Papers



No. 24

1984, Geneva Divinity School

January, 1984

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

No. 27: Is the Church Calendar Desirable?

The purpose of this series of studies is not to explore every facet of the calendar of the Old Covenant. A whole book could easily be written on the cycle of feasts God appointed for His people at Mt. Sinai. Our purpose from the beginning has rather been to develop a Biblical perspective on the calendar year, with a view to discussing the Christian calendar, its propriety, importance, and reconstruction.

At this point, after three years, it seems a good idea to review what has been asserted thus far. The first six essays in this series (originally published in "The Chalcedon Report," and available from "The Geneva Papers" for a contribution), dealt with certain general considerations which have led the Church historically to believe that an annual calendar is desirable. We pointed out that God has made both us and the rest of His creation responsive to rhythmic patterns, and that it is to our own detriment if we ignore such patterns. We argued that the rising of the sun, both in the day and in the year, 'is used in Scripture as a sign of basic rhythms, as well as a picture of the coming and increase of the Kingdom of God.

We argued that with the coming of the New Covenant, Christians are given greater liberty in flexibly dealing with times and seasons, but that this does not mean such can reasonably be ignored. We noted that in Christ, all Christians, and especially office bearers, are Sons of Man, and thus Lords of the Sabbath, and by extension Lords of the Festivals. Just as office bearers David and Abiathar made adjustments in the ceremonial (sabbath) laws in a time of emergency, so elders of the Church govern the appointment of times and ceremony. Finally, we argued that the so-called "regulative principle of Scripture," as it is often used to eliminate the Church calendar, is misapplied.

Numbers 7-17 in this series ("The Geneva Papers" Nos. 1-12) dealt with the sabbath. The festivals of the Old Testament were centered in special sabbaths, and clearly the festivals were tied to the sabbath legally and theologically. To what extent and in what way are Christians still to keep the sabbath, we asked. We argued that the sabbath was a sign that Adam would eventually complete his work and become enthroned as king of the world, which work was completed by the second Adam, the Son of Man. In Christ we are in perpetual sabbath, but since we are not yet done with our earthly work, we also have a sabbath yet to come, and thus the symbolic weekly sabbath still has relevance for us.

In the New Covenant, the sabbath comes on the Lord's Day. We have no more sabbath days, but we keep the Lord's Day as a sabbath: worshipping and resting thereon. The liturgical dimension of the Lord's Day is primary, since the worship of God is the center of human life, Time must still be set apart for this activity, and the Biblical sabbath pattern

governs us here. Engaging in any kind of inappropriate religious activity on the Lord's Day, such as worship of other gods, or holding court to pass merely human judgments, brought with it the death penalty in the Old Covenant, and should in the New Covenant as well. Men should not engage in normal profit-seeking labor on the Lord's Day either, though the Bible does permit works of necessity and mercy, and sets out the desirability of having an alternate sabbath time for persons who must work on Sunday.

The sum of all this is that though the sabbath day is gone in the New Covenant in one sense, in another very practical sense it remains with us. Since the desirability of annual festivals is attached to the desirability of sabbathing, we may, with the historic Church, draw the inference that the observance of such events is good for us.

We then began a more technical series of studies, designed to show that God has placed in creation a variety of calendrical cycles, indicated by the sun, moon, and stars, to which we should pay heed if we are not to despise His revelation. These cosmic ordinances were established on the third day of creation week. We also went to great length to demonstrate that an annual calendar was observed before Sinai, to show that the festival calendar was not something "just for Israel during the Mosaic dispensation." (Nos. 18-26, in "The Geneva Papers" #13-21.)

It is not my intention to go into detail in a study of the major feasts of the Old Covenant. I have dealt with them somewhat in my forthcoming book, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23* (May/June, 1984). I have also lectured over Exodus 23:10-19, on *Sabbaths & Festivals* (4 tapes, \$14.00, from Geneva Media, 708 Hamvasy, Tyler, TX 75701; if you just want the tape on *Festivals*, it costs \$3.50).

An Overview of the Church Calendar

The calendar of Israel was primarily theological, centered on commemorating the salvific acts of God, but also agricultural, celebrating the creation-restoring effects of those salvific acts. The feasts of the first month celebrated the reviving of the world in the Spring, and typified the cutting off of the Savior in his youth. The feasts of the seventh month celebrated the cutting off, or harvest-climax of the year, and typified the fulfillment of man's dominion task at the end of history.

During the intertestamental era, in fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel, Israel was delivered from Antiochus Epiphanes and the temple was restored at the time of the Winter Solstice. The feast of Hanukkah was established to commemorate this, and Jesus recognized the propriety of this feast in John 10:22ff. Thus, God established a feast of renewal in terms of the solar cycle as well as in terms of the agricultural one.

From what we know, the Christian Church initially recognized Easter and the springtime festivals as primary. In time, the custom grew up of recognizing the birth of Jesus Christ, the True Tabernacle (Temple) rebuilt among men, in connec-

tion with the Winter Solstice (late December). As with the Old Covenant, however, these festivals were always primarily theological in character, and only secondarily connected with **creational cycles**. It was recognized that the theological, symbolic dimension of life is primary, and that solar and agricultural renewal spring only from the renewal of the world in Jesus Christ. The feast of Christmas came to be very important to the early Church, for so many heresies centered on the incarnation, and the festival of the incarnation provided an annual affirmation of orthodoxy.

The calendar as it developed came to have three cycles. The primary one centered on the life and work of Jesus Christ. The second one centered on the observation of great days in the history of the Church, particularly saint's days (days on which various heroes of the faith had been martyred). The third cycle centered on agricultural events, times of special prayer for crops or of thanksgiving.

By the time of the reformation, the memorializing of the lives of the saints had become corrupted by superstition, and saint's days had multiplied. The Reformers by and large swept these all away, including the Marian feasts, though the Anglican reformers kept some saint's days. Calvin kept only Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, dividing his catechism into 55 sections to be read on each Sunday, and on the three festival days.

Later the Puritans went further, and under the influences of a rationalistic approach to the rhythm of time together with a baptistic hermeneutic which isolated the New Testament from the Old, swept away all religious days except the Lord's Day. The Puritans believed that other days would compete with, rather than fill out, the observance of the Lord's Day. The "extra" sabbaths and festivals of the Old Covenant, however, did not detract from the weekly sabbath, though it, as the Lord's Day in the New Covenant, had primacy.

The effect of this iconoclasm was to secularize the calendar. We still have an agricultural festival (Thanksgiving), and various saint's days (Washington's Birthday, Mother's Day, etc.) on which we celebrate our (secular) heroes. In America, the most Puritanized of all Christian societies in its early years, the Christological calendar remains, but thoroughly secularized (so that Christmas today is all about Santa Claus, not Christ). By making our primary feasts nationalistic (July 4, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, etc.) rather than ecclesiastical (Thomas Becket Day, Feast of Orthodoxy, Good Friday, etc.), we have fallen into Baalism. Baalism is the cultural pattern which subordinates the faith to nationalism.

Meanwhile, various movements in the Christian Church, in many quarters, have sought to reintroduce and reform the calendar. These essays are a continuation of that movement, seeking a Biblical foundation (the regulative principle) for all that we do in this area. We as Christians, having dominion over all the world, able to make Satan flee by resisting him, need not fear the calendar, but should use it to our own advantage. Briefly, we need not fear agricultural feasts. It is a good and proper thing to pray the Lord of the harvest to bless us, and to thank Him for His bounty at the end of the year. Why should Thanksgiving be secularized? Indeed, how dare we keep it out of the Church?

Also, we need not fear saint's days. We are only the poorer for our ignorance of the life of St. Sebastian, or of Martin of Tours, or of Patrick of Ireland, or of Thomas of Canterbury. We cut our children off from a rich heritage, a heritage which encouraged men of old in the face of threats, and which can encourage us as well in an age of increasing persecution. Just because these things are abused by some people (e.g., the fearsome alien Romanoids) is no reason for us to avoid them. We do not avoid alcohol because some are drunkards, or food because some are gluttons. To say a thing is bad in itself is Manichean, not Christian.

Most importantly, however, we need not fear the Christo-

logical cycle. It is not only excellent pedagogy, but it also gives us occasion to rejoice in the specific works of God and Christ for our redemption. We cannot do everything at once, and we cannot preach the whole Bible in one sermon. We must celebrate one thing at a time, and the calendar **marvelously** helps us to do this.

Concerning pedagogy, Peter wrote that his primary purpose was to stir up his parishioners to remember the basic things (2 Pet, 1:12-21). The purpose of the Christological calendar is just that. How many protestant preachers go for years without taking their congregations through the central facts of the history of redemption: the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Christ, and the sending of the Spirit? The historic Church calendar reminds us of these things annually.

The Christological cycle is divided into two parts. The first part, from Advent to Ascension, focuses on the life of Christ and the history of redemption. The early feasts of the Old Covenant (Passover, Pentecost) also concentrated on the events of redemption. The second part, from Pentecost to Advent, focuses on the teachings of Christ, just as in the Old Covenant the Feast of Tabernacles focused on the teaching of the Law.

We purpose in the next several installments in this series to reexamine the various segments of the Christological cycle, explaining their purpose, and suggesting how they might properly be observed.

STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray R. Sutton

No. 23: God's Name, Baptism's System (Part 4)

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Since the Name of God is applied to man at baptism, it defines the structure of the doctrine of initiation. In the first essay we saw that the Name of God is one and many, and should therefore be applied to the individual as well as the family.

The second essay developed the Members of the Godhead as they are *distinguishable, but not separable*. As this aspect was imaged in man through redemption, we learned why the sacraments are simultaneously called Christ, and yet distinguished from Him.

In the third essay, we presented the Trinity *asequally ultimate*. Thus, baptism applies to the Name of the equally ultimate Godhead, and expresses this in several ways. We noted particularly the equal ultimacy between the personal and cultural, and between the signing and sealing functions of the sacrament. Now, in this final essay on the subject, we want to develop a fourth aspect of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity has *continuity and discontinuity*. Another way to express this idea is with the words *similarity* and *dissimilarity*. However the idea is phrased, Members of the Godhead have *sameness* and *difference* about them.

What is this sameness? The sameness or continuity of God is stated in the *Shorter Catechism* of the Westminster Confession of Faith which says the persons of the Godhead are "same in substance, and equal in power and glory." In other words, the Trinity's continuity lies in attributes which are common to all three. For example, God is all-knowing or omniscient. Yet, we see in the Gospels that Jesus knew even what the devils were thinking and intending. Likewise, the Holy Spirit knows the heart of man. Therefore, all have the same attributes. Berkhof prefers the word *essence* to describe this continuity of attributes. It must also be said that there is unity of *person* in the Godhead. The mystery is that there is unity and diversity of person so that there is one per-

son and three persons. Nevertheless, man does not pray to three different persons; he prays to God, one Person,

An additional comment needs to be made about the pagan view of continuity. Pagan thought places continuity of substance, *in* creation (Realism). Some time ago, an associate of mine (James Jordan) and I talked to a well known conservative Catholic theologian, known for his defense of creationism against such liberal Catholic thinkers as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Hans Kung. And out of his support of creationism grows the belief that true science resulted from the influence of Christianity.

When he learned that Mr. Jordan and I were Calvinists, he launched a frontal attack against historic Calvinism with the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of *Substance*. He argued that although Calvinists, too, argue that true science resulted from the influence of Christianity, our theology is actually the destruction of science. The reason: Calvinism, with its emphasis on predestination, places continuity *outside* of man in the attributes and work of God. From his point of view, man cannot have science if nothing essential to creation creates a sort of commonness. If the continuity comes from without, then it is impossible to explain cause and effect. Thus, he chose to place continuity of substance in the creation.

In some sense, he was right in that he had his finger on the critical difference between orthodox Calvinism (which is the true Augustinianism) and Roman Catholicism. Calvin argued that things happen the same way in the universe, not because of some power inherent in creation, but because God causes things to happen consistently. I thought afterwards of the verse in Colossians which says "all things hold together in Christ" (Col. 1:17). Thus, the only time change appears in the creation is when the Sovereign God of Scripture ordains it.

Does this destroy cause and effect? Does it imply nominalism, as our Catholic friend implied, the belief that everything is arbitrary and chaotic until organized by the legislative action of the human mind? This might seem so, if God is unknowable. But no: We can count on regularity in cause and effect because of the *covenant*. It is the covenant which provides continuity within creation.

From this we begin to see how the correct view of continuity also effects the sacraments. In the Roman Catholic Church, the doctrine of *Substance* leads to the belief that the waters of baptism possess the being of God. When one is baptized, he is actually inserted, in some sense, into the being of God. This creates a false view of continuity and makes the sacrament *magical*.

Interestingly, the Baptist doctrine of "believer's baptism" is really no different. If one holds the conviction that only "true" believers are baptized, it is not hard for him to make the transition into believing that one is saved by baptism. He, too, with his doctrine of "believer's baptism" is placing continuity *in* creation. This distinction which I am making will prove to be important as we develop the correct view of continuity in relation to baptism. But we must proceed to the other side of the concept of continuity and discontinuity.

What is the discontinuity of the Trinity? The difference or discontinuity lies in the properties of God. The *properties* of God are that the Father eternally begets, the Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit eternally proceeds. Essential to our discussion on baptism, this eternal procession – begetting, being begotten, and spiration – images in man. These eternal *conditions* manifest themselves in terms of processes and thus man begets children and builds civilizations. Furthermore, we see in Scripture a definite progression of revelation. Finally, the Son of God comes in history and inaugurates the New Covenant.

As we saw in reference to the concept of continuity, the pagan redefines discontinuity. He places discontinuity *outside* of God. Van Til has stressed that for the pagan, discontinuity is chance or novelty-something completely new.

Unlike what we saw with the concept of continuity, however, the pagan mind does not want to place discontinuity *in* creation. Chance is neither in God, nor creation. Chance is chance, and no one knows where it comes from. Christianity, however, teaches that there is nothing different about the Members of the Trinity in the sense that there is something new. In other words we do not find development in the Trinity, and the properties referred to earlier are *eternal*. Thus, there cannot be chance because there is no change in the Trinity.

For the moment, we have developed a Biblical understanding of continuity/discontinuity in introductory fashion. Pagan views heretofore have been referred to so that the reader might have some idea as to the importance of a correct understanding of continuity/discontinuity. We will see this more clearly when we discuss the newness of the New Covenant, and its bearing on the sacrament of baptism.

The point, however, for first clarifying the meaning of continuity/discontinuity in the Trinity is the same as we have stressed in other essays. So much is bound up in the Name of the Trinitarian God! And when that name is applied to man by baptism, we should expect to see that the doctrine of baptism expresses the concepts of Trinitarianism. Thus, we want to apply what has been said about continuity/discontinuity to baptism, and show how errant views of baptism are inconsistent with the correct doctrine of the Trinity.

First, the *meaning* of baptism has continuity and discontinuity in Scripture. Care should be taken, however, not to inject unBiblical discontinuities. We must remember that baptism did not begin with the Gospels. It was practised throughout the Old Testament (Heb. 9:10; 6:2).

Going back to the Old Testament, we see that water was originally created to be a sign and means of life. The first chapter of Genesis stresses that the waters "teemed with life." Furthermore, by drinking water, Adam was renewed in strength to carry out the cultural mandate. By washing with it, man was also renewed in his cleanness, and therefore not inhibited by the dirt that would collect on his body as he tilled the ground (Gen. 2:15). Thus, water facilitated man's keeping of God's commandments.

After the fall we find that water still performs those functions, but the discontinuity of sin effected it. We note this effect in several places. One, we see that water accomplishes its function through *judgment and death*. Water killed to bring life in the Flood. Two, the same phenomenon occurred in the Exodus. Three, baptisms were applied by priests through various ceremonial cleansings. In these ceremonies, judgment was passed in that a person and/or his house were judged dead, due to some uncleanness like leprosy (Lev. 14), and declared alive at the application of baptism. Thus, water was still a source of life necessary for the carrying out of God's commandments. But it was turned into an instrument of judgment and death to accomplish its purpose.

The New Testament did not alter this continuity; rather, we see a fulfillment. Jesus's death, having been a baptism (Mk. 10:38), accomplished the ultimate cleansing of the world. Throughout the Incarnation, Jesus had referred to his body as the true water of the world (Jn. 4), and on the Cross, Jesus carried out what he had told the woman at the well. Thus, we are not surprised to see that water was used to refer to washing or cleansing by the New Testament writers who succeeded Christ (Titus 3:5). Their use of the word was in continuity with Christ's baptism.

This continuity should not be removed by the tendency of many Baptist writers to reduce the meaning of baptism to identification. Even this aspect of baptism is in continuity with the Old Testament. Water set the boundaries in Genesis 1:6 and 2:10-14 by separating, and this is precisely what New Covenant baptism does.

Another way of looking at this continuity is to see that God set apart (separated) His people through baptism. At the Flood, called a baptism by Peter (1 Pet. 3:21), God claimed

His people. At the crossing of the Red Sea, called a baptism by Paul (1 Cor. 10:1ff.), God claimed the people of the covenant. Thus, we do not have a novel idea when Paul says we are identified with Christ at baptism (Rem. 6:1ff.). Nor do we find that the doctrine of identification interferes with any of the other meanings of baptism in Scripture. Hence, any discontinuity in the meaning of baptism should not be seen to violate the continuity of Old Covenant baptism.

Second, the need to assess proper continuity/discontinuity is even clearer in the *mode* of baptism. I shall speak more extensively on the subject of mode in forthcoming essays and the book that will be the outgrowth of these writings. But one observation pertaining to the issue of *mode* can be made at this point.

If anything is certain about mode in the Old Testament, it is that unbelievers were immersed, and believers were ceremonially sprinkled. Some have tried to argue that this was not the case at the parting of the Red Sea. The Psalms clarify, however, that the nation was sprinkled (Ps. 77:17), and we see a definite pattern running throughout Scripture. How then, does Baptist theology insert a discontinuity in mode?

Most often, classical Greek is appealed to, since the Greek word for "baptize" is often used to mean "to dip." But this is dangerous methodology. The word does not always mean "to dip," and if Baptists could prove that *secular* Greek uniformly used a word one way, that would not necessarily mean the Bible borrowed the secular definition. The Word of God is a self-contained Book. It submits to no other book. Thus, regardless of these efforts to import the meaning of classical or common Greek into Scripture, or to interpret New Testament baptism with the noncanonical practice of Jewish proselyte baptism, it must be demonstrated that the Bible internally teaches that believers are to be immersed.

In all fairness to some Baptist scholars, however, often the case for immersion is built on the use of the Greek preposition "into." The argument says that this word implies *under* the water. One must examine, however, the Greek preposition that describes the parallel action to "into." It is the preposition which can mean "away from," or "out of." Significantly, the Greek language has two prepositions which can be used to translate "out of," but only one of these can also refer to "away from." Thus, important to determining the sense of "into," the Gospel of Matthew (Mart. 3:16) describes the classic scene appealed to by most Baptists, the baptism of Jesus, by using the preposition which can mean "away from." In view of this, a possible translation would be that Jesus was baptized "in" the water, meaning He stood in the water, and was sprinkled. Then He went "away from" the water.

If anything, the flexibility of this preposition proves that the question of mode cannot be solved only by prepositions. We are therefore forced to examine the continuity of Scripture, and this returns our line of thought to where we began on this point. Throughout Scripture, unbelievers are immersed, and believers are sprinkled. Any notion of discontinuity in the New Testament must be generated from some other source than prepositions.

A third and final area, where we discover the importance of placing correct continuities and discontinuities, is the *recipients* of baptism. The issue here is whether infants should be baptized. Up to this point, we have stressed the continuity of baptism in Old and New Testaments. Does this mean that there is no discontinuity? And if so, where should we place

this discontinuity?

Baptists such as Kingdon see a discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants. He believes that since the New Covenant is written on the heart, the principle of "thee and thy seed" is abrogated (page 34 of his book *Children of Abraham*). Thus, everyone in the New Covenant is a "true" believer.

The problem with Kingdon's position is that it precludes the possibility of apostasy. No church anywhere, not even the strictest Calvinistic Baptist Church, could consistently maintain such a view. Furthermore, any cursory reading of the New Testament shows that the writers were concerned with the problem of apostasy. If Kingdon is right, then the present Church is not part of the New Covenant Church.

Kingdon fails to see that there are "now" and "not yet" aspects to the New Covenant. Does this, however, mean that "thee and thy seed" is abrogated? Again, one must examine Scripture to see if the promises of God extend to the children of believers. Peter makes this point clear in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:39). Therefore, Kingdon has injected a false discontinuity. Nowhere are we told in the New Testament that the children of believers are excluded from the covenant. Nevertheless, there remains a major discontinuity in New Covenant Baptism.

The major discontinuity is that Paul says there is *one* baptism (Eph. 4:5). In the Old Covenant there were "various baptisms" (Heb. 6:1ff), but the New Covenant contains *one*. This is the baptism of Jesus Christ on the Cross (Mk. 10:22) of which ecclesiastical baptism is an application. Thus, Paul says that we are buried with Christ in baptism (Rem. 6:1ff) establishing a new unity in baptism. This raises an important issue.

The oneness of baptism strikes at the heart of Anabaptist theology. *Ana* comes from Greek and means "again." Historically, therefore, the Anabaptists advocated re-baptism of anyone who had been baptized as an infant because they were not "true" believers. Hence, they were given the name *Anabaptists*. The problem: Their theology allows for *mu/tip/e* baptisms, and therefore mitigates the unity of the covenant. Again we find that Baptist theology breaks down even the legitimate discontinuity of Scripture. In this instance, a discontinuity that establishes a very important *unity*.

A second discontinuity is the *c/can water* of the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant the water contained ashes (Nu. 19). These ashes represented death. With the first advent of Christ, however, the water is purified in that His work is *finished*.

Third, we find that another discontinuity falls in the replacement of circumcision with baptism. Since we have spent time in other essays referring to the discontinuities created by this replacement, we will not say more than to refer to the fact that females now come under the sign of the covenant.

In conclusion, we have stressed that the doctrine of the Trinity effects the doctrine of baptism. The continuity/discontinuity of the Trinity forces baptism to have the same dynamic. Of course the issue at stake is the correct placement of the continuities and discontinuities. Often, however, this is not done, and baptism becomes an empty doctrine that appears on the pages of the New Testament with no Old Testament background. When this happens, the wrong understanding and emphases result. The sure protection against this tendency is to interpret Scripture's system of baptism through the grid of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

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