

our time and effort, for we are dealing with the great “mystery” of Scripture: “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). The brother’s arguments concerning this great truth must be answered.

I take issue with the questioner, however, when he charges me with using human logic instead of Scripture. It would be terrible if I did this, for I would be slandering our only Lord and Saviour if I used only logic to explain the mystery of His incarnation. The charge is doubly serious given that I have been preaching and teaching for over 60 years, and have always preached and maintained that our Saviour was like us in all things, sin excepted. That includes our sicknesses and diseases.

I will limit my answer in this issue of the *News* to underscoring and developing parts of two statements in our Reformed confessions. *Belgic Confession* 18, entitled “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ,” declares that God’s “only-begotten and eternal Son ... took upon Him the form of a servant, and became like unto man, really assuming the true human nature, with all its infirmities, sin excepted.” Notice the word “all,” in the phrase “all [our] infirmities.” That must include sicknesses for it is one of our infirmities.

The texts referred to in *Belgic Confession* 18 include Hebrews 2:14-15: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 14, in explaining part of the *Apostles’ Creed*, says, “That God’s eternal Son, who is and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, *like unto His brethren in all things*, sin excepted.” One verse quoted is Philippians 2:7: “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” The next text Lord’s Day 14 cites is Hebrews 4:15: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

What I have explained in the *News* has been the teaching of the churches of the Reformation for the last 500 years. It is not my idea, but part of the heritage of the truth.

The truth of Christ’s federal headship and organic headship brings up the question of how our Lord could be like us in all things, except sin, but remain free from the guilt of sin and the pollution of sin. An explanation of this would take up more space than is available in this issue of the *News*, so I intend to deal with this next time, God willing.

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Covenant Reformed News

November 2016 • Volume XVI, Issue 7

Could Christ Be Sick?

This is a reader’s response to my last article: “Jesus would have had to have sinned in order to become ill and to know sickness by experience, because the weakness of the body is through sin.

First, Matthew 26:38 and Romans 8:10 make clear that sin makes the body weak, in fact, dead. But Christ’s body was neither dead nor weak.

Second, Jesus did not defeat, and did not know illness; He only commanded illness in others to depart. What sense would it make for Him to be sick, if He needed only say a word in order to be healed?

Third, the lamb for the sacrifices in Israel had to be without blemish. This pointed to Jesus (1 Pet. 1:19). If He had His own weaknesses and sickness, then it would have been good for Him to take care of His own blemishes.

Roman 8:3 states, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” The body of Jesus was not weak, and that was true until God left Him and burdened Him with our sins. He was even then able to bear the punishment and say, “It is finished.” Then He gave up His soul.

I understand that the article’s point was that Christ was tempted in all things but did not sin, yet I find the approach rather objectionable. He was sick so that He could heal! With the same logic, was it true that He was possessed so that He could exorcise demons? In addition, He must have first sinned, if He could be sick, yet He was not sinful!

The article is not based on God’s glory but on a human approach.

Finally, Jesus bore our weaknesses and our sicknesses. If He had His own, He could have bore only His own weaknesses and sicknesses.”

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I have provided the lengthy question above because its author was kind enough to give the reasons for his disagreement with what I wrote in a recent article, namely, that, although we do not read in Scripture that the Lord was ever sick, He could have been sick because He was like us in all things, except sin.

The questioner is from Hungary and I have summarized his arguments. I have also improved the English translation to make it clearer for readers of the *News*. I hope that I have accurately represented his ideas. If I have not, he can let me know.

I appreciate the fact that the questioner took the time to argue his case in some detail and, therefore, it will take a few issues to answer the brother adequately. This is worth

(continued on p. 4)

God's Longsuffering and the History of Sin

In the last four issues of the *News*, we surveyed all the references to God's longsuffering in both the Old and the New Testaments, emphasizing that the exercise of this divine attribute is particular, for the elect alone. But what about how this works out in the history of sin?

Let us start with the beginning of the history of sin: the fall in Genesis 3. Why did the Most High not cast Adam and Eve into hell immediately after their eating the forbidden fruit? Surely, this is what their sin deserved? However, in God's eternal decree, He had a wonderful plan to glorify His great name through the salvation of an elect church in Jesus Christ. The immediate death and damnation of the first two human beings would have stopped the propagation of mankind! What then of the history of the world? What about the coming of the Messiah?

Moving forward many centuries, we come to the flood. Why did God tell Noah that 120 years would pass before the global deluge (Gen. 6:3)? It was not because the Almighty was longsuffering to the reprobate in that age. Rather, time was needed to build the ark and for Noah to preach about God's coming judgment (II Pet. 2:5). Also within these twelve decades, other elect saints, like Methuselah, died. They could not perish in the flood because it was a picture of Jehovah's avenging wrath against the ungodly! The longsuffering of God saved the eight souls in the ark; it was not trying to save the impenitent reprobate who drowned under the judgment of the Most High (I Pet. 3:20).

Why did the Lord not destroy Sodom earlier? It was not that God loves, and is longsuffering towards, everybody head for head. Instead, the Sodomites had to fill up the cup of their iniquity. The development of their wickedness even reached to their attempted, homosexual gang rape of two strangers (Gen. 19:1-11). Until the departure of believing Lot, the only elect person in Sodom, the Almighty could not burn up the city, as Abraham well understood: "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25). After all, the fire and brimstone are a picture of the "eternal fire" of hell (Jude 7; II Pet. 2:6)!

What about the Egyptians in the book of Exodus? Was the Almighty longsuffering towards them? No. Through the words and miracles of Moses, God hardened the hearts of Pharaoh (Ex. 4:21; 7:3, 13; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8), his servants (10:1) and his people (14:17). Jehovah's hardening of the Egyptians issued from His eternal reprobation and holy hatred of them (Rom. 9:10-24; 11:7-10). Moreover, the Egyptians were destroyed *for the sake of His beloved Israel*: "For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life" (Isa. 43:3-4).

Why did God not destroy the inhabitants of Canaan earlier? Was this because they

were the objects of His longsuffering? No. In the days recorded in Genesis 12-50, there simply were not enough descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to possess the promised land. Besides, the people in Canaan had not yet sufficiently developed in their sin. As Jehovah told Abraham centuries before the conquest of the holy land, "But in the fourth generation they [i.e., Abraham's descendants] shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). Then the Most High would use the sword of Joshua and the nation of Israel to inflict His judgment upon the wicked inhabitants of Canaan (cf. Lev. 18).

After the Jews crucified His Son, why did Jehovah not devastate Jerusalem and its temple sooner? Why did He wait four decades until AD 70? Christ explains that the Jews must commit other sins, especially persecuting His followers, so as to be fully ripe for their inescapable judgment: "*Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar*" (Matt. 23:32-35). Furthermore, elect Jews in and around Jerusalem needed to be saved first, as we read in the early chapters of Acts (e.g., 2:41; 4:4; 6:1, 7).

Does the sparing of the Gentile world for many hundreds of years before the Holy One of Israel began to gather a catholic or universal church (cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30) prove that He was longsuffering to these reprobate people? Of course not! How could the Triune God save elect Gentiles in the New Testament age, if He had wiped out their ancestors centuries before? The Lord had His elect among the subsequent generations and numerous descendants of ancient idolaters, including the (largely Gentile) readers of the *Covenant Reformed News*!

Finally, does the "delay" of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for the final judgment indicate that God is longsuffering to the reprobate? No. Revelation 6:9-11 records "the fifth seal." John "saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." This is the loud cry he heard: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" John beheld that "white robes were given unto every one of them." Then we read of the answer to their earnest cry: "it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

In short, the scriptural explanation of the delay of the great judgment day is that more saints must be martyred and the ungodly world must fully manifest its wickedness. Only then will all things be ready for the glorified Christ to return to deliver His beloved people and punish those who rebel against Him. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32)! *Rev. Stewart*