



# Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,  
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

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## *Inside This Issue:*

Atonement involves a covering of our sins, an effective dealing with them, which leads to reconciliation with the true God.

The sinner appropriates the substitute's death by faith. We cannot hide our sins, but God can cover them through a blood substitute.

What we find in the Bible, then, is the story of blood running in torrents throughout, "religious blood," blood by which God's people are reconciled and re-bound to himself. But the rivers terminate at Christ's sacrifice.

## All I Really Need to Know I Learn in the Bible (Part 1)

By

Steve M. Schlissel

We have been trying to prove that thinking of our one Bible as if it were really twain—an "Old Testament" bound with a very different "New Testament"—is not at all helpful, nor is it true to the Bible's own testimony concerning it-self. The Bible is a unified revelation diagnosing the universal problem of man, setting forth God's unique solution, variously administered.

Unfortunately, the bipolar view of Scripture has come nearly to dominate even the believing ecclesiastical

landscape. In America, at least, it has swallowed up virtually all evangelicals and a good deal more of the Reformed than one would have expected in view of our confessions to the contrary. It is our fervent hope that all may be brought to appreciate what Adolph Saphir, a Jewish Christian minister of the last century, called the divine unity of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Sooner or later someone must address the latent and patent dispensationalism operating today under the Reformed banner.<sup>2</sup>

But for now I will deal with but two implications of the

last two letters. I suspect all Reformed professors would agree with these:

**Implication #1:-** There is essentially just one covenant;

**Implication #2:-** That covenant is and has always been in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Saphir was a brilliant and pious man. He was converted under the ministry of the famous Scotsman, "Rabbi" John Duncan. Mr. Saphir, I think, might disagree with some of my views.

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Jew and ordained a Baptist, today I am neither. Nevertheless, my soul is bound with the Baptists who recognize the need for the appropriation of the real blood atonement found in Christ. But my heart is genuinely knit to my Jewish kin who— isn't it a marvel?—still recognize that God redeems a real people, not merely a pile of persons. Tragically, though, both Jews and Baptists break the unity of the Bible, albeit in different ways.

Allow me to treat the propositions in reverse order. First, that the covenant has always been in Christ. I will attempt to prove this by following a single thread in Scripture: the covenant requirement of blood.

#### At-One-Ment

Religion, to be worth anything, must be obsessed with the idea of atonement. For the word *religion* means “a binding together again.” Since it is our sin which has separated us from God, a religion, to be of value, must reveal the way past our sins back to God. If it cannot reveal a way back to the true God, it shouldn't have the name *religion*. It might as well be called sport or pastime or hobby. Religion, properly spoken of, is the means whereby we who are separated from God are brought back to him, *re-covenanted* with him unto life and fruitfulness.

This way to be bound once again to the true God, maker of heaven and earth, the Bible alone discloses. Its message is one throughout: the way back is not by self-effort or self-atonement, but by God-provided atonement, a provision so perfectly gracious that it demands our very lives in service in return.

The need for atonement is as basic to fallen man as the need for food is to

created man. And just as man must find his food outside himself, so true atonement comes only from outside man. Devouring one's self is no act of nourishment, nor is the quest for self-atonement ever successful. Food and atonement come from outside.

Most men willingly move toward a source of food, but our spiritual problem is such that we, by (fallen) nature, want no part of a God-provided atonement. God must compel us to accept his gracious provision. And his gracious provision is the only one the Scripture offers. The idea of self-atonement is an invention of man fleeing the true God (Gen. 3:7, 8).

Atonement involves a covering of our sins, an effective dealing with them, which leads to reconciliation with the true God. Atonement removes God's wrath against sin and satisfies his demand for justice. Since sin requires death as its penalty (Gen. 2:17), an atonement must somehow involve death.

God has revealed that the way back to himself, the means of atonement, is by a substitute which he himself must provide (Gen. 3:21). There must be a death: the sinner's or the substitute's. The sinner appropriates the substitute's death by faith. We cannot hide our sins, but God can cover them through a blood substitute.

This truth has not gone altogether unnoticed by Jews. Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, writing on “Atonement” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, expresses this powerfully, while making an astonishing admission: “... the blood, which to the ancients was the life-power of the soul, forms the essential part of the sacrificial Atonement

Because of their continued rejection of proposition #2, my “brethren according to the flesh” (unsaved Jews) must be viewed as covenant-breakers. No Bible-believer is surprised by such an assertion.

But because of their disagreement with proposition #1, my Baptist brothers, I'm sorry to say, would not be included under the heading of “Reformed professors,” however Calvinistic they might be in their soteriology. For the Reformed Faith, to this writer at least, is heart and soul a matter of covenant.

Now speaking of heart and soul, though I was raised a “practicing”

<sup>2</sup> One thinks of the fabled conversation, variously attributed, but which I first heard alleged to have been between Van Til and Machen. Walking on the Westminster Seminary grounds, Machen whispers to Van Til, “You know, Case, you and I are the only truly Reformed people on campus. And I'm not so sure about you.”

[Rabbi Kohler here references Leviticus 17:11, which we shall get to]. This is the interpretation given by all Jewish commentators, ancient and modern, on the passage....The life of the victim was offered... as a typical ransom of 'life by life'; the blood sprinkled by the priest upon the altar serving as the means of a renewal of man's covenant of life with God."

Precisely. From the beginning God has made it plain that atonement will be had only *his* way, and that way is through blood. The Bible is a bloody, bloody book.

Review: We have sinned. Our first parents sinned. Their first instinct was to "atone," or "cover" themselves at the point of sin's manifestation (*i.e.*, their shame), by their own fabrication. God, from the beginning (it cannot be emphasized too strongly, since the Bible *never* speaks of any other way as efficacious), sets forth the only means of atonement, of covering: a God-provided substitute who must die in the sinner's place.

The gracious God, therefore, rejected Adam and Eve's self-covering and himself provided garments of skin for them, coverings which cost the life of another (Gen. 3:21). Along with that covering he gave them a promise of the Messiah-to-come (*v.*, 3:15). Word and "sacrament," promise and picture, from the beginning.

### Watch the River Flow

At the creation a river flowed from the Garden (Gen. 2:10). After the fall another river flowed: this one of blood.

In the first acts of religious worship, we find that Abel, who brought a bloody offering, was accepted, while Cain, who brought a bloodless offering, was rejected. We understand full well that offerings other than bloody ones were/are acceptable to God, but only *after* the bloody offering is rendered. This is the uniform testimony of Scripture. First the sin offering in the Tabernacle/Temple, then the other offerings. First Passover by blood, then Unleavened Bread. First atonement, then acceptable service.

Thus it says, "The LORD looked with favor on Abel *and his offering*, but on Cain *and his offering* he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry." And to this day sinners are indignant when told that God does not accept their worship. But worship that does not begin at the point of death (by substitute) is not acceptable.

As mentioned, Israel's birth as a nation was in blood. They were spared the judgment which fell upon the Egyptians in virtue of the sign of blood which God instructed them to put on their houses (Ex. 12:7, 12-13, 21-27). When the covenant was ratified at Sinai, it was with sprinkling of blood, on the altar, on the people (Ex. 24:6, 8). The altar was consecrated by blood (Ex. 29:12). The priests were consecrated by blood (*v.* 20). Their garments were consecrated by blood (*v.*, 21). The service of the tabernacle was filled with blood: "bring the blood"; "sprinkle the blood"; "pour the blood"; "put the blood"; "take the blood"; "offer the blood"; over and over and over.

It would be hard to miss the fact that the central truth of life is this: we can be re-bound to God only through the

forgiveness of our sins obtained by means of a God-provided atonement in blood. But to make the fact inescapable, God told Moses to write down the single most important religious truth in the Tabernacle/Temple system: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for *it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul*" (Lev. 17:11).

The religious activity around which Israel was organized as a redeemed nation was drenched with blood: Daily blood offerings (Num. 28:10-4); Weekly blood offerings (*vv.* 9-10); Monthly blood offerings (*v.*, 11); Annual blood offerings (Lev. 16, 23; Num. 29); When the ark was brought to Jerusalem, blood (2 Sam. 6:12-13); When the ark was brought into the Temple, blood (1 Kn. 8:3-5, 62-64).

The entire Old Testament, religiously speaking, is a river of blood from Eden on. Israel's call and constitution did not negate the need for a blood-based way to God: it highlighted it. *It screamed it!*

Rightly does St. Paul say, "And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

Indeed. Now, where does all this blood lead? Christians have a ready answer.

### Blood on the Tracks

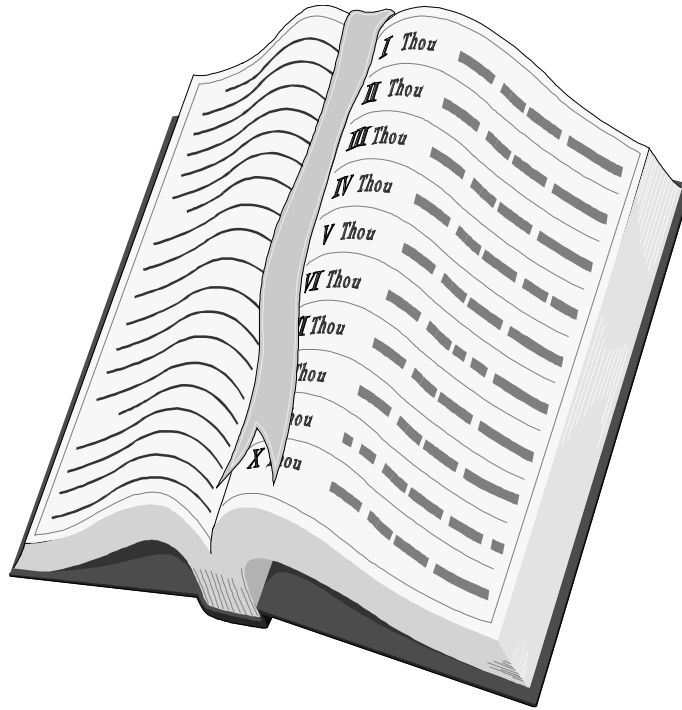
"Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and

calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ... For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that he should offer himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—he then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself... For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Now where there is remission of [sin], there is no longer an offering for sin” (Heb. 9:11-12; 24-26; 10:14, 18). One might say that the Old Testament taught Israelitish Christianity while the New teaches Universal Judaism. The system is complete in Christ. Apart from him, yes, apart from him it is altogether inexplicable. But *in him*, ah!, in him....

Atonement is had through faith in his blood (Rom. 3:25). We are bought with his blood (Acts 20:28). We are justified by his blood (Rom. 5:9). We have redemption through his blood (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19). God made peace through his blood (Col. 1:19-20). His blood speaks in and from heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). We are consecrated by his blood (Heb. 13:11-12). His blood

purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:7). We are set free by his blood (Rev. 5:9, 10). We are made into a people, a royal priesthood, by his blood (Rev. 5:9, 10).

Jesus doesn't overturn the Old Testament religion; he completely and entirely justifies it, vindicates it, gives sense and glory to it. Apart



from him a modern observer might view it as just shy of barbaric. But in him it is spectacular grace on every page, for every page speaks of him. Abraham told Isaac, “God himself will provide the lamb” (Gen. 22:8). Yes, yes, yes! The theme of Scripture! And now it is done! “The Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Yes, of the world. And, as we labored to show you in the last column, here is the critical issue, here you will find what is new in the New Testament. *The Gentiles are joined to Israel*, and that not through a

blood rite (circumcision), for with the blood once for all shed, God requires no more blood in rites.<sup>3</sup> No, the Gentiles are joined through faith in *his* blood, and they enter via water.

### United By His Blood

It is important to get this straight. With the coming of Jesus—his birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement—the Jewish people are *commanded*, with all signs and authority, to believe in him. The penalty for unbelief is excommunication from the covenant.

“Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed. ‘When God raised up His servant, He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways’... Moses said...’Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among his people’” (Acts 3:23-26).

Unbelievers in Israel would be cut off. But Israel wouldn't get smaller: it would get incomparably *larger*. Because added to Israel would be all Gentiles who recognize in Jesus the Author of forgiveness (Lk. 24:47).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember that, for all their talk of blood in the Mass, Romanists don't have any in their service. They have wine which they *make believe* turns to blood, an act of imagination altogether unnecessary, vain and culpable.

That Gentiles are becoming Israelites is made plain in Ephesians 2. Speaking to Gentiles, Paul says, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise,<sup>4</sup> without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.<sup>5</sup> His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross... He came and preached peace to you who were far away [Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [Jews]. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, *you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household*, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone."

And Peter, after applying titles to the church which had originally been given to distinguish Israel (chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation), says, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

What we find in the Bible, then, is the story of blood running in torrents throughout, "religious blood," blood by which God's people are reconciled and re-bound to himself. But the rivers terminate at Christ's sacrifice. Within that very generation they disappeared altogether when God in Christ ordered the destruction of the Temple.

### No Exit

What would unbelieving Israel do now? Without Christ and without a Temple, they fabricated—one might say they formalized or refined—a religion whereby man may be reconciled to God without blood.

At first, the strain showed. Rabbi Kohler writes: "The cessation of sacrifice, in consequence of the destruction of the Temple,<sup>6</sup> came, therefore, as a shock to the people.... It was then that Johanan ben Zakkai declared works of benevolence to have atoning powers as great as those of sacrifice... This view, however, did not solve satisfactorily for all the problem of sin ... Hence a large number of Jews accepted the Christian faith in the Atonement by the blood 'shed for many for the remission of sins'."

Rabbi Kohler admits that it may have been in response to this movement by Jews to "Universal Judaism" that "Jewish teachers strove to develop and deepen the Atonement idea."

What was added may have deepened Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai's formula, but it bankrupted the Biblical formula. To works of benevolence was added the invention that God does not require blood: His fatherly disposition and forgiving mercy, they said, is enough to bridge the gap. (That would come as a huge surprise to Adam, Abel, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, and a few million other, more faithful covenant keepers of old.) And as if to completely displace God's revealed religion with that of man's, to good works were added repentance, prayer, the study of Torah and your own suffering.

How well Paul explains all this! "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away [only] in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart" (2 Cor. 3:14-15).

But there is hope!<sup>7</sup> "Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (v., 16). Paul sums up unbelieving Judaism, indeed, *all forms of unbelief*, in Romans 10:3: "For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."

### God's Witness to Messiah in the Talmud

God has not left himself without a witness, even in this systematic un-

<sup>4</sup> Paul could just as easily have said, "promises of the covenant."

<sup>5</sup> Obviously those laws which required or reinforced separation between Jew and Gentile, *per se*.

<sup>6</sup> Just in case you are not clear on this, sacrifice had to cease with the Temple's destruction for God had explicitly restricted sacrifice to that altar. See Deuteronomy 12.

<sup>7</sup> I attempt in a sermon on Romans 11 to prove that this hope remains alive. This sermon may be ordered from Covenant Media Foundation: 1-800-553-3938. [This tape is available in Australia from Reformation Ministries.]

belief. In the tractate of the Talmud called Rosh Hashana, at section 31b, a most remarkable discussion is found.<sup>8</sup> They are talking about a thread of scarlet which, they say, used to be fastened on the outside of the door of the Temple court, after the High Priest had performed the service on the Day of Atonement. If the scarlet cord turned white the people would rejoice, taking this as a sign that their sins had been forgiven through the atoning blood. If it remained red, they were sad.

To prevent mood swings among the people, a rule was made that it be fastened to the inside of the door. The people still peeked in to see it, however, and still had their mood determined by its color. A rule was therefore made that half the cord be fastened to the rock (used in the ceremony) and half between the horns of the scapegoat (the *azazel*) which was sent into the wilderness.

In the discussion which follows, recorded in the Talmud, you can read, “and it has been further taught: ‘For forty years before the destruction of the Temple the thread of scarlet never turned white but it remained red.’”

Forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple brings us to the crucifixion of the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus said, “It is finished.” And when he had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two.

God “testifies” through the Talmud that the efficacy of *all* offerings find their source in Messiah Jesus. His blood had flowed backward, in type, throughout the Old Testament, and that flow met its source at Golgotha. There the sacrificial system met its purpose and was overtaken.

And from there the people of God would be redefined. They would not, however, be redefined as though suddenly being composed only of elect, adult individuals. No, they were a body, a group—aged, middle-aged, young, newborn—following Jesus Christ, the hope and Messiah and King of Israel. There isn’t a breath of suggestion to the contrary in all of Scripture.

The Divider at the crossroads of the Testaments is *Christ*, not covenant. Those who believed *continued in covenant*; those who did not were broken off. *It has always been Christ*. In the Old, discipleship began at circumcision; in the New it begins at bloodless baptism. In both Old and New the initiatory sign is the beginning of discipleship.

The difference from Acts 8-11 on is that Jews, as such, would no longer hold *exclusive* claim to status as God’s people. That would now be shared with a superabundance of Gentiles, Gentile believers *and their children* entering as uncircumcised equals, joined to God’s own.

The Jews violate the unity of Scripture’s testimony by fabricating a new

so-called means of atonement. But my Baptist brethren break Scripture’s unity by fabricating a new people who compose, as it were, a childless church.

### Power to the People

Needless to say, these respective errors are of an entirely different magnitude. Don’t anyone accuse me of believing otherwise. I only mention them together because they stand as a sort of yin and yang of wrong thinking about the structure of the Bible. One rejects the testimony concerning the blood, the other rejects the testimony concerning the people.

To the Jews who postulate that God no longer requires blood, I say, “Show me where he has said that.” To the Baptists who say that children of believers are no longer in covenant with God and therefore not entitled to the sign and seal of it, I say, “Show me where God has said that.” Each proposition is equally arbitrary.

For the fact of Scripture concerning this matter is as clear as light can make it: God has never—we shall repeat this for effect—God has *never* made a covenant which did not include the offspring of those with whom he made it. The idea of such is totally foreign to Scripture, an invention of man as totally at odds with his revelation (in degree, not kind) as the notion that good deeds take the place of a blood substitute. He never says, “I will be your God and you will be my person.”

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<sup>8</sup> I checked the Talmud myself after reading of this in a now out-of-print book by Dr. Henry J. Heydt, *The Chosen People Question Box II*. Dr. Heydt also referenced an article, *Azazel*, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* [no edition or date], Volume II, p. 367.

We would like to thank the Rev. Steve Schlissel for his kindness in allowing us to reprint this series of articles. Due to other publishing contracts, we ask that these article not be bound in any form for distribution or posted on any website. They may be distributed in their current form. As these articles were made freely available to us, we will gladly make extra copies available free of charge (excluding postage) to those who request them.

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## WE CONFESS:

### Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.



## Our Fathers Say:

Article 1: God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. And His justice requires (as He has revealed Himself in His Word) that our sins committed against His infinite majesty should be punished, not only with temporal but with eternal punishments, both in body and soul; which we cannot escape, unless satisfaction be made to the justice of God.

Article 2: Since, therefore, we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, He has been pleased of His infinite mercy to give His only begotten Son for our Surety, who was made sin, and became a curse for us and in our stead, that He might make satisfaction to divine justice on our behalf.

Article 3: The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.

Article 4: This death is of such infinite value and dignity because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, which qualifications were necessary to constitute Him a Savior for us; and, moreover, because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin.

Article 5: Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

Article 6: And, whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief, this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves.

Article 7: But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own.

Article 8: For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them, free from every spot and blemish, to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.

Article 9: This purpose, proceeding from everlasting love towards the elect, has from the beginning of the world to this day been powerfully accomplished, and will henceforward still continue to be accomplished, notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell; so that the elect in due time may be gathered together into one, and that there never may be wanting a Church composed of believers, the foundation of which is laid in the blood of Christ; which may steadfastly love and faithfully serve Him as its Savior (who, as a bridegroom for his bride, laid down His life for them upon the cross); and which may celebrate His praises here and through all eternity.

Second Head of Doctrine  
Canons of Dordt