



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

A Prophecy of Division

Sermon Notes

Luke 2:33-35

August 7, 2011

“³³And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.’”

- From the opening verses of Scripture, the reader beholds an important, yet often overlooked doctrine – the doctrine of separation.
- Each time God interacts with Creation, we observe separation.
- Consider in the Creation account of Genesis 1. Consider as well that the word translated “separated” in Verse 4 can also be translated “set apart.”

“¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ ⁷And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. ⁹And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:1-10

- In these view verses, we witness the separation of:
 - The heavens and the earth (Verse 1);

- Darkness and light (Verse 4);
- Evening and Morning, Night and Day (Verse 4);
- Waters of the Heavens (Clouds/Rain Clouds) from Waters of the Earth (Rivers/Lakes/Oceans) (Verse 7);
- Waters of the Earth and the Dry Land (Verses 9-10).

- **Offspring of the Serpent / Offspring of the Woman**

Genesis 3:15: “¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

- **Abram is Separated from His Country**

Genesis 12:1: “¹Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’”

- **The Jews [Israelites] are Separated from the Gentiles / Their Land is Separated from the Others**

Leviticus 20:24: “²⁴But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.”

- **Clean Animals are Separated from the Unclean**

Leviticus 20:25: “²⁵You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean.”

- **The Levites are Separated from the other Tribes**

Numbers 8:14: “¹⁴Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine.”

- We also see in Scripture the distinction and separation of **Jacob and Esau; men and women**, and multiple other examples as well.

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- Ultimately, however, one of the most significant “separations” in all of Scripture is between those who are “**in Adam**” and those who are “**in Christ**.”

- Another way these two groups are spoken of in Scripture is found in **Matthew 25:31-34**:

“³¹When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the **sheep from the goats**. ³³And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

- Within Creation, separation and distinction is absolutely essential and ultimately glorifies God. The reason is because separation and distinction points to the ultimate separation: that between the **Creator and Creation**.
- Furthermore, anything good, righteous and noble is derived from our Creator, therefore, in a fallen created order the Creator / Creation distinction also underscores our need for a Savior to reconcile us with our Creator.

- And it is in this passage, where Simeon concludes his blessing of God and Mary and Joseph that he prophetically declares that Jesus will be the “Great Divider” – the One who “is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel...”

- I. Jesus Will Divide**
- II. Jesus Will Establish a New Community**
- III. Jesus Will Reveal the Hearts of Man**

- I. Jesus Will Divide**

“³³And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed...’”

- Luke continues following Simeon’s blessing of God and prophecy regarding the work of Christ:

“²⁹Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

- It goes without saying that any parents would “marvel” if such a statement were made about their child, and so it should not surprise us that Luke writes, “And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him.”
 - One must not forget that just less than a year prior to this scene, Mary was informed by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive and bear a son, in her virginity, who would be called Jesus.
 - Since then, one event after another had occurred that not only confirmed what the angel had said, but kept her and Joseph in a state of awe.
 - Now, here in Verse 33, a man named Simeon, whom Mary and Joseph have never met, come up to them and states that their young child is the very salvation of God – the long-awaited light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.”
 - This was certainly not a serendipitous rendezvous, but rather a divinely ordained appointment.

John Gill writes, “It is not that those things which Simeon said were new and strange to Mary and Joseph; for they not only knew that the same things were predicted of the Messiah, but they had heard and known, and believed the same concerning this child; **but they wondered, that a stranger to them and the child, coming into the temple at this instant, should have such a revelation made to him, and be able to say the things he did.** Moreover, there is no need to confine this passage to what were said by Simeon, but it may reach to, and include everything; that as yet had been spoken concerning Jesus; either before, or since his birth; as by the angel to them both, to the one before his conception, to the other after; and by Zacharias and Elisabeth, and by the angel to the shepherds, who had reported the same to Joseph and Mary, and now by Simeon; and they were astonished, at the exact agreement there was between them.”

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- Luke then writes, “³⁴**And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed...’**”
 - In this statement, Simeon blessed both Mary and Joseph and made two prophecies concerning Christ:
 - First, He is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel;
 - Secondly, He is appointed for a sign that is opposed.

- In the first part of Simeon’s prophecy, he declares that Jesus “**is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.**”
 - Scholars are somewhat in disagreement as to whom Simeon is referring to here.
 - One group of scholars suggests that Simeon is referring to **one group**.
 - That is, the “many in Israel” who “fall and rise” are the same group.
 - That is, this is the group of the redeemed who “fall” in sin, yet by grace through faith, rise to life anew in Christ Jesus.
 - There are a few reasons for this perspective.
 - The first is that in several Old Testament passages, “rising and falling” is attributed to one group of people.

Micah 7:8: “⁸ Rejoice not over me, O my enemy;
 when I fall, I shall rise;
 when I sit in darkness,
 the LORD will be a light to me.”

Proverbs 24:16: “¹⁶ for the righteous falls seven times and rises again,
 but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.”

- See also Amos 5:2; Amos 8:14; and Isaiah 24:20.
 - Also, the word Luke uses for “rising” (Greek, *anastasin*) is translated in other places in the New Testament as “resurrection.” Therefore, if this perspective is correct, those who fall, yet believe in Christ will resurrected.
 - Furthermore, those who hold to this view will note that “those who fall and rise” is in direct contrast to “those who oppose the sign” of Christ.
 - However, the context of this passage is not light, but rather difficult, for Simeon speaks of Mary’s deep pain. Therefore, the majority of scholars do not believe that Simeon is referring to one group, but rather two.
- Once again, most scholars believe that Simeon’s reference to those who rise and fall to be a referring to **two groups**.

- That is, **Christ is appointed for the fall [of the reprobate] and the rising of [the redeemed].**
- This view [the one I personally take] is consistent with the testimony of Scripture that declares that Jesus’ ministry divides people into **two groups**:

Luke 18:9-14: “⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 12:50-51: “⁵⁰I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

Matthew 10:34-39: “³⁴Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

- As we examined earlier, **it is the separation of the righteous from the wicked, the sheep from the goats, and the proud from the humble that reveals the justice and holiness of God.**

- Therefore, it was indeed, Christ’s purpose to come to this earth to make such distinctions. The Father has appointed the Son of Man to be the judge of the living and that dead that the glory of God might be revealed.
- Consequently, Christ is the Judge – the “dividing line” between those who “fall” and those who “rise.”

NOTE: In the immediate context here, Simeon is referring to the rise and fall of many **in Israel**. That is, in this context, he is referring specifically to the Jews [especially the Jewish “establishment” who will reject Him]. Yet, biblically, the same principle holds true for Gentiles.

Yet, it is because of Christ's rejection by the Jews that the gospel will eventually go to the Gentiles, and many of them will "fall and rise" as well.

Norval Geldenhuys writes, "Those who imagine themselves to be strong and high, who rely on their own merit and power, will come to woeful ruin and undoing, because in their pride they do not realize their own need and doom and do not take refuge in Christ. But the humble ones, those who bend low at His feet with confession of sin and faith in Him, will be raised up by His mighty arm to eternal life."

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- Yet, the very idea of eternal punishment is impossible for most people to embrace (indeed, if any of us 'designed' our own religion it would likely be 'hell-less').
 - In fact, in the modern-day church, many have outright denied the existence of hell as an eternal and conscious place.
 - This view was summed up best by author Madeline L'Engle (author of *A Wrinkle in Time*), who stated, "All will be redeemed in God's fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones."

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- Few books have created more controversy in the evangelical church than the recent New York Times Bestseller, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, by Rob Bell.
 - In his book, Bell challenges one of the historic truths of orthodox Christianity – God's wrath, judgment, and hell. He writes, "**If there are only a select few who go to heaven, which is more terrifying to fathom: the billions who burn forever or the few who escape this fate? How does a person end up being one of the few? Chance? Luck? Random selection? Being born in the right place, family, or country? Having a youth pastor who 'relates better to the kids'? God choosing you instead of others? What kind of faith is that? Or, more important: what kind of God is that?**"
 - Now, I have not read Bell's book from cover to cover, so I will not critique him, but I will say that these are the questions most modern-day liberals (many of whom claim to be 'Christian') ask. They then conclude that "a loving God would not send anyone to a place of eternal punishment."

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- In his response to Bell's book, Michael Wittmer writes, "[The doctrine of hell] is interwoven with other, even more foundational beliefs – including the good news itself. It's impossible to reassess the subject of hell without also reevaluating our beliefs about Scripture, God, sin, Jesus, the cross, and salvation. In the Bible,

practically everything is interconnected with everything else.” *Christ Alone: An Evangelical Response to Rob Bell’s God Wins* (preface by Michael Horton)

- This is, indeed true. In fact, if hell is not a place of God’s infinite wrath, than the cross amounts to nothing more than the unfortunate, yet torturous, death of a morally good man. And *this* is unthinkable. For it was on the cross that Christ suffered *hell* on behalf of all who would believe in Him.
- Perhaps the greatest critique of modern-day liberalism and annihilationism comes from the twentieth century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr famously wrote, in his book *The Kingdom of God in America* that modern liberalism has created “A God without wrath [who] brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

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- Modern-day evangelicalism is most certainly heavily influenced by an Arminian theology, as the most important role of a Christian, it is taught, is to “be a soul-winner” and lead people to a decision for Christ.
 - Unfortunately, however, in this type of theological system, it is either taught or assumed that God is only glorified when people “accept Christ” or are “saved.”
 - Yet, again, in this passage, Simeon clearly states that Christ “**is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.**”
 - In other words, it was God’s will that Christ would be the cause of the “fall” of certain men.

NOTE: Simeon states that Christ **is appointed** for the fall and rise of many...In other words, when Christ is rejected, it does not “catch God by surprise” for this was one of the reasons He was appointed (for both the rise and **fall** of many).

- Although these words are not consistent with the teaching of most evangelical churches today, we must conclude that God is glorified even when people reject Him (although he does not – nor should we – rejoice in this). He is glorified in both His blessing and His judgment.
- **God is glorified in His judgment, revealing His righteousness and hatred of sin; and He is glorified in salvation, as His grace and mercy is magnified.**
- Philip Ryken writes concerning Jesus Christ, “He is the Great Divide. God uses his cross to reveal our true character, working out his eternal decrees of election and reprobation. There is no neutrality. Either we are with Jesus or we are against him. And if we are against him, we will fall down to spiritual death, down to physical death, down to hell itself.”

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- Luke also refers to Jesus as “**a sign that is opposed.**”
 - Viewed in light of the previous statement of Simeon (that Christ “is appointed for the rise and fall of many...”), the reason men will **fall** is because they will **oppose** the **sign** of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.
 - Again, in the original context, here, Simeon is referring to **the opposition of Jesus Christ by His fellow Jews** (although by extension, He will be rejected by many Gentiles as well).
 - The idea of Messiah being rejected and opposed is found throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Isaiah 8:14-15: “¹⁴And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

Isaiah 28:13-16: “¹³And the word of the LORD will be to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

¹⁴Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers,
who rule this people in Jerusalem!

¹⁵Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death,
and with Sheol we have an agreement,
when the overwhelming whip passes through
it will not come to us,
for we have made lies our refuge,
and in falsehood we have taken shelter’;

¹⁶therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation
in Zion,

a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”

Romans 9:33: “³³as it is written,

‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’”

Luke 20:17-18: “¹⁷But he looked directly at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written:
‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’?

¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.’”

1 Peter 2:6-8: “⁶For it stands in Scripture:

‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,’

⁸and ‘A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.’

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”

[emphasis added]

- We must remember that in the minds of most Jews in the first century, the Messiah would be a conquering Davidic King who would destroy the yoke of Roman and Gentile oppression for the Jews.
 - It was unthinkable to most Jews that the Messiah would suffer death at the hands of the Romans and hang on a tree (“cursed is the man who hangs on a tree”).
 - Consequently, the crucified (and risen) Son of Man **was the sign the was opposed.**
 - Yet, to all of us who believe, the crucified and risen Son of Man is a **sign of hope.**
- Once again, when one considers the previous words of Simeon, the present words come into full focus.
 - That is, Jesus is “appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel”, but specifically for those who “**rise**” Jesus is a **sign of hope**, precisely because **He fell (crucified) and rose (through the resurrection) on their behalf.**
 - But for those who do not believe, the cross is foolishness. Non-believers “speak against this sign of God’s love that has been offered to them, for it searches men’s hearts and some will be scandalized by a salvation which can only be achieved by way of the cross.” Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke*

II. Jesus Will Establish a New Kingdom

³⁵*(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)...*

- Next, Simeon parenthetically warns Mary of her own pain and suffering: “and a sword will pierce through your own soul also...”

- Throughout the centuries, theologians have offered at least ten different explanations of this passage, from suggesting that Mary herself was martyred (i.e., the sword piercing her) to believing that the passage speaks of her being slandered for bearing an illegitimate child.
 - One of the common interpretations is that the reference to the sword is a reference to the pain and suffering Mary herself will experience in observing the rejection and ultimate crucifixion of her firstborn son at the hands of the Jews and Romans.
 - This may, perhaps be the proper interpretation, or at least part of it.
 - Yet, given the overall message and context of the Gospel of Luke, I believe there is a better interpretation.
 - Perhaps the best explanation is that Mary will suffer pain as Jesus separates Himself from His mother in order to form a new and more significant covenantal community/family (of which Mary, it certainly appears, will belong).
 - Darrell Bock states, “The reference is to the pain that Jesus’ ministry causes Mary, as Jesus creates his own family of disciples and his own priorities...The sword in this view is seen as a sword of discrimination that Jesus wields in his ministry...”
 - This view is strongly supported by the account in Luke 2:41-52. It is here that, when Mary tells Jesus that she and Joseph had been searching for him “in great distress,” He replies, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”
- Consequently, blood relationships, ethnic ties, and family connections mean nothing when it comes to the **new community** Christ was called to establish.
 - Everyone is now required to come to Christ through the same way – through **faith** in what Christ had done for them.
 - ...And Mary was no different. She would suffer not only the “sword of separation and discrimination” but also the suffering that would, indeed come from seeing her firstborn Son despised, rejected and crucified.
 - Ultimately, it would be those who would “rise” in Israel who would form this new covenantal community.

III. Jesus Will Reveal the Hearts of Man

“...so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

- Finally, it is through His rejection and the rising and falling of many, “that the thoughts from many hearts will be revealed.”
- Ultimately, **how we respond to Jesus will reveal the true thoughts of our hearts.**
- The proud and haughty will reject Him; whereas, the humble and contrite will embrace Him.

John Calvin, “But Christ, by his light, discloses every artifice, and unmasks hypocrisy; and to him is properly ascribed the office of laying open the secrets of the heart. But when the cross is added to doctrine it tries the hearts more to the quick. For those who have embraced Christ by outward profession only, often shrink from bearing the cross, and, when they see the Church exposed to numerous calamities, easily desert their post.”

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- Indeed, when we view Simeon’s prophecy at a high-level, we see the truth of the Gospel. Jesus Christ will divide the sheep from the goats, revealing the true thoughts from many hearts. But in all of this, God is exalted.

Darrell Bock states, “When Simeon’s prophecy is viewed as a whole, one sees a prophet at peace because he knows that God’s salvation has come. Salvation’s light has come in Messiah; Simeon rejoices. But the picture is not entirely rosy. For the Promised One is variously perceived, and many in Israel will reject Him. In the path the child takes, his mother will feel pain; but his ministry will expose who is hostile to God. The messianic Son will be a light to the world, but his shining will bring division as he shines forth. Many will be raised to the Light, but tragically others will fall in judgment, having missed the promised.”