

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Solely by Grace
Solo Christo Solely by Christ
Sola Fide Solely by Faith

November 1976
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Special Issue

COVENANT (Part 1)

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Present Truth

Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

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Publishers: A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia.* God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole *ground* of our salvation.
2. *Solo Christo.* Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole *basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.
3. *Sola fide.* The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole *means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.
4. *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

Present Truth is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

Present Truth is committed to the time-honored verities of the Christian faith—such as the Trinity, deity of Christ, virgin birth, blood atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, second coming, final judgment, justification by faith alone, sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and glorification at Christ's soon return. The *Present Truth* ministry receives no denominational support. It is made possible through contributions from those who are dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith. Your support is appreciated. All gifts are tax deductible in the U.S.A.

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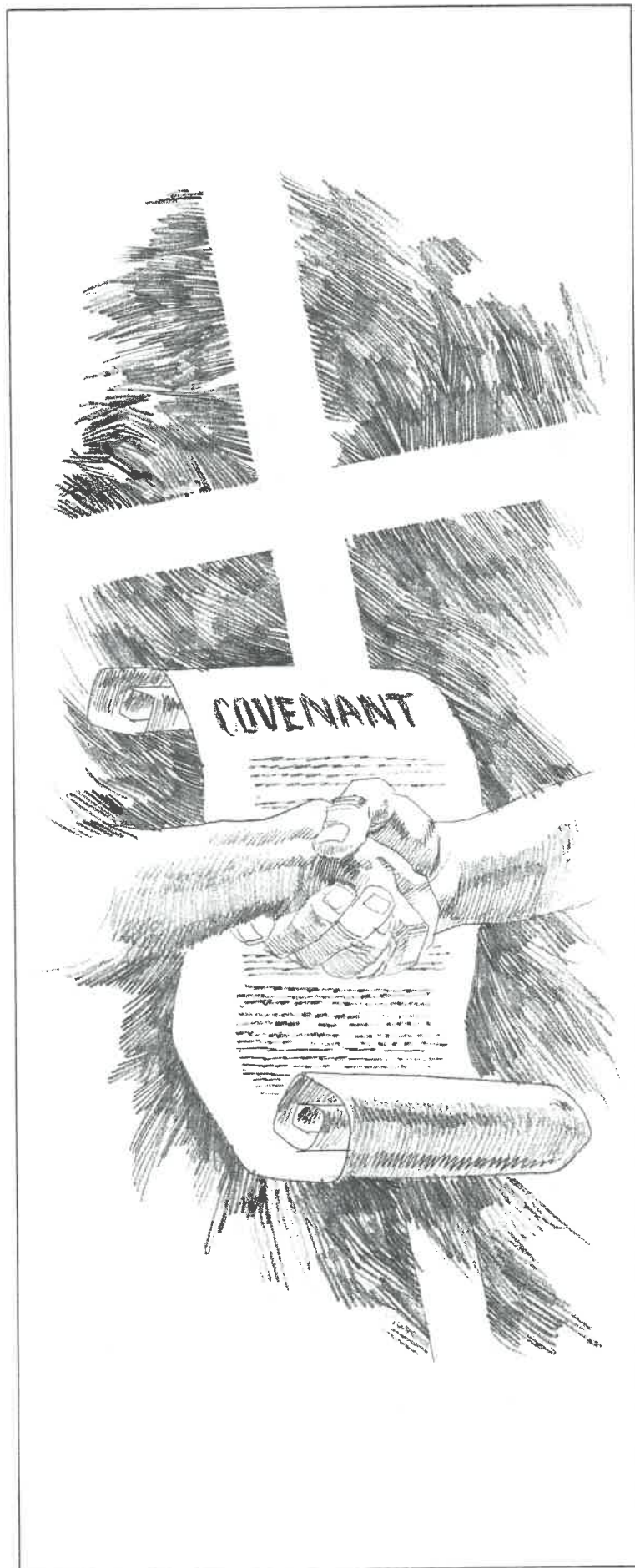
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Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
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Rocks and Bouquets

Mr. Kidman, a great Australian cattleman, was asleep. Someone was trying to arouse him, calling, "Mr. Kidman, Mr. Kidman." No response. Whereupon an acquaintance of Kidman said, "If you want to wake him up, just call out, 'Bullocks.'" That did it!

When Calvinists are asleep, just call out, "Election," and they're up and ready to fight. That's great! As we said in our September issue on "Election," our columns are open for Reformed comments—for rocks as well as bouquets. —Ed.

Yea and Nay

Sir / I have received the September issue of *Present Truth*. As always, I find your lead article ("The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation," Part 3) challenging. I have not seen a more lucid exposition of the doctrine of election properly understood than in this article. I see no point (although I may after I reread and more carefully analyze some of your statements) on which we differ, although I subscribe to the "five points" of the Synod of Dort, which you apparently do not.

I do not share your view on "regeneration." I do believe that this must be first in the *ordo salutis*, although I concur with you that this is not the born-again experience as some teach. I see regeneration as a divine work of the Holy Spirit to give seeing eyes and a believing heart by a sovereign act of grace that men might hear and believe the gospel and be justified and born anew. I see the new birth as belonging to the doctrine of sanctification (correct me if I'm wrong).

You continue to bless me by your ministry. I shall ever be grateful to God for using your publication to help in crystalizing my final deliverance from the subjective trap of the Pentecostal and holiness movement.

C. Robert Bateman
Presbyterian Pastor
California

Sir / I regret that it is necessary to write in the tone I must. I retract what I said in my last letter. I have taken time to read what you said on election in your September issue, and I must state that I totally deplore what you are now revealing your stand to be.

I will not go out of my way to "fight" you. However, in conscience I must oppose you to all who inquire of me, and I feel it my duty before the Lord to issue warning to the Reformed community of believers.

C. Robert Bateman

I hope you have not jumped out of the Pentecostal fire into the refrigerator of a closed system. The truly Reformed are not only reformed but always reforming. —Ed.

Too Far

Sir / Up until now (the September issue on "Election") I have almost unreservedly endorsed *Present Truth*. Although you have made mistakes in the past (your views of repetitious justifications, your *ordo salutis*, and your ecumenical ideas on fellowship in the church, for three examples), I have been able to justify my support by the overwhelming correctness of your views on justification, sanctification, hermeneutics and eschatology. Now, however, you have gone too far. Not only do you misunderstand election in Christ, but you attack logic, reprove Peter De Jong for saying that "God clearly foreordains evil" (cf. Isaiah, who said that "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me. . . . I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things," Isa. 45:5, 7), tout Barth and Richardson, and generally confuse the doctrine of election with something completely foreign to Scripture.

From now on when I distribute any of your literature (I will *not* be distributing the September issue), I will caution the recipients to be on their guard against certain unscriptural and illogical positions that you take. I suggest that you devote the entire

next issue of *Present Truth* to corrections of your heterodox opinions presented in the September issue.

John W. Robbins
Virginia

Heresy!

Sir / It is incomprehensible to me that the same magazine which gave us "Nothing But the Gospel" in May could give us nothing but heresy in September. I lavished praise upon your magazine only five months ago when you gave the clearest presentation of the gospel I have read in a long while, but now I am shocked at how unscholarly you are in your handling of Calvinism's doctrine of election. You are so bold as to offer *Present Truth* as an alternative to Arminianism, yet the distinguishing features you present are only cosmetic. Arminianism all decked out in your polemical and condescending style, then wrapped in a pretty pastel green cover, is still only Arminianism.

You charge that election is unpreachable and that it is not preached from Reformed pulpits, yet here in the heart of Arminian territory are four churches where not only election but all five points of TULIP are freely and unapologetically preached. Only a few years ago there was just one Calvinistic voice in this area. Calvinism is experiencing a revival.

In answer to your charge that Reformed leaders go about like an "orthodoxy patrol" searching out Arminianism and attacking it wherever it is found, let me just ask *Present Truth* this question: What are you doing with your many and frequent assaults on all that smacks of Romanism, subjectivism, neo-Pentecostalism and dispensationalism?

Throughout your issue ("secretion" would be a better word) on "Election" you criticize the Calvinist's reliance upon logic. Would you have us believe that we cannot expect Scripture to be logical? Are the mystics correct? Are the holiest doctrines those which are least logical? Try to prove the doctrine of the Trinity without applying

logic. Try formulating an eschatology without applying logic.

I could go through September's *Present Truth* and find many places where you have so totally misrepresented the Calvinism I know that I can only conclude that your Calvinistic acquaintances are imposters. The very fact that you believe Reformed preachers are not preaching election is proof that the Reformed preachers you know are Reformed in name only. When a man believes something, he will preach it.

Finally, I would be interested to know why your publication has found it expedient to lean so heavily upon Martin Luther in past issues, and yet in this issue you have attributed TULIP to only Augustine, Calvin and a few others, neglecting the fact that Luther too was highly predestinarian. To those who would affirm "free will" and deny election, Luther had this to say:

"Eventually, we will come to this: that men may be saved and damned without God's knowledge! For He will not have marked out by sure election those that should be saved and those that should be damned; He will merely have set before all men His general longsuffering, which forbears and hardens, together with His chastening and punishing mercy, and left it to them to choose whether they would be saved or damned, while He Himself, perchance, goes off, as Homer says, to an Ethiopian banquet!—*The Bondage of the Will*.

Joe Higginbotham
West Virginia

New Insight

Sir / The September issue on "Election" was excellent! My eyes have been opened, and I've been freed from the bonds of Calvinism. Robert Brinsmead's article on "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation" (Part 3) gave me a new insight into the doctrine of atonement and reopened my desire in evangelism.

David Meyers
California

Present Truth is certainly not anti-Calvin. It is the ism on the end of Calvin that has sometimes brought about a closed system which has made further progress difficult. We salute the many great Calvinist scholars and confess our indebtedness to them.—Ed.

One-sided Bungling

Sir / I have been getting *Present*

Truth magazine for a number of years now and have received a great deal of good information from it. The articles on justification and sanctification have been super.

Whenever you get off these subjects, your errors are pathetic to say the least. Your articles against dispensationalism and millennialism are something else.

One case in point is the September issue on "Election." Since my background has been somewhat in the Reformed tradition, my interest in this subject has caused me to study it in depth. I do not propose to have all the answers, but I have never read such one-sided bungling of the subject in my life. The last article by Alan Richardson is chief of the bunglers. When he must quote from Esdras and use scriptures that have nothing to do with the point, he is indeed hard up for proof of his point of view.

Since it takes "a book to answer a book," I do not have the time nor the inclination to answer all the errors in this issue. I am just writing you to let you know that here is one reader who cannot swallow all you teach. Sorry about that!

Peter Nieuwkoop
Baptist Pastor
Michigan

Candid Approach

Sir / Robert Brinsmead's series on "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation" was one of your best efforts to date. Part 3 on election was a clear presentation of a doctrine that is oftentimes most difficult. Mr. Brinsmead displayed an uncanny ability to cut across denominational lines to arrive at the truth.

I do not always agree with your material, but I do appreciate your candid approach. Do keep up the good work.

David McDougal
Baptist Pastor
Oklahoma

Stimulating

Sir / As many are saying, I too express appreciation for the stimulating nature of your magazine.

The "redemption of human nature" doctrine expounded in Brinsmead's article in the September issue of *Present Truth* is pure universalism and denies John 6:39, John 17:9, and many other scriptures which show Christ's effective and definite atonement. He died and arose to accomplish salvation for those given to Him by the Father, not to merely make it available.

The word which to me sums up all

the arguments in the "Election" issue is *initiative*. Brinsmead, Runia, Kuitert and Richardson, as all the king's men, can't put it all together. They will not swallow a holy, sovereign, *deterministic God*, but they opt, with the humanists, for a *deterministic man*.

"But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3).

"And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:35).

With all of your elegance of language, you have only managed to reproduce a refined version of free-willism. Someone has to be God. To be God is to be the Determiner. Truly Reformed men see God's unstayed hand on every page of Scripture and rejoice in it.

If genuinely Reformed scholars wanted to gather a series of articles setting forth true Lutheranism, would you be pleased if they were all drawn from a body such as the Lutheran Church in America? You have chosen writers who, at best, are on the periphery of the Reformed community.

Dale K. Dykema
Reformed Minister
Michigan

Far Short

Sir / I was not surprised to read the recent articles in your September issue on the subject of "Election." But I was disappointed to see how far short the message of your magazine falls from a "restoration of New Testament Christianity in this generation." Your Barthian view of election is not the view of the Reformation in general nor that of Luther in particular. I'm sure that many semi-Pelagians of our day will have their error fortified and continue to reject the clear teaching of the Word of God. Election is with reference to Christ, but it is still an election of individuals in Christ. Ephesians 1:4 says, ". . . according as He hath chosen us in Him. . . ." Even that text, as well as many others, points to the election of individuals.

Since you agree with Barth's view of election, it makes me even more suspicious than before whether you do not also agree with his view of universalism. Why not give us a clear answer on this?

Randy Pizzino
Baptist Pastor
Virginia

Please look again at my qualifying remarks on Barth in the "Editorial Introduction" to the September issue of Present Truth. I'm not Barthian. But often those who criticize Barth most have never really read what he said but have only read someone else who read what someone else said. Barth was not a universalist. I certainly am not. All articles in Present Truth do not necessarily reflect the view of the editor. We were simply wanting to inform our readers of different efforts to rework the doctrine of election. If we are committed to a closed system of theology, it makes it difficult to dispassionately consider any point of view which differs from our own. —Ed.

Troubled

Sir / I have appreciated your articles in *Present Truth* for quite some time. However, I am greatly troubled by Part 3 of "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation," which appeared in the September issue.

On page 14 you write, "In Christ humanity is already justified and freed (Rom. 5:18; 6:7)." If all humanity is already justified, then it must rightly follow that all humanity shall likewise be sanctified and glorified, for the Scriptures do not separate these elements one from another (see Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:30).

If all mankind are justified in Christ, why then do some fail to believe and therefore are not saved, not sanctified and not glorified? The only way that you may come to this conclusion is by redefining what it means to be justified. Justification means "to be declared legally righteous." But your position would cause you to define justification as "to provide us an opportunity to become legally righteous." Yet such doctrine is not taught in the Scriptures. Nor has it ever, to my knowledge, been adopted by the Reformers.

Donald Weilersbacher
Reformed Presbyterian Pastor
California

I did not say "all humanity" but simply "humanity." Christ assumed human nature (humanity), and in Him that human nature (humanity) is justified and glorified. All individuals are now invited to believe this and share its benefits.

The biblical expression "in Christ" is used in two ways: (1) what God did in Christ (i.e., in His Person) before we came to faith; (2) individual faith-union with Christ. —Ed.

His and Hers

Sir / Please permit me to make a comment on your magazine. I have appreciated many of your articles and gleaned many helpful ideas to balance my thinking on justification. However, a statement made in your September issue on "Election" sets very sour with your previous teaching on justification. That statement reads, "In Christ humanity is already justified and freed."

Romans 5:18 is a scripture that speaks of the *modus operandi* of justification. Its meaning is clear. All that are in Adam are condemned, and all that are in Christ are justified. Moreover, these two groups (in Adam, in Christ) are not identical. One group is spiritually dead (those in the flesh or Adam), and one is spiritually alive (those in Christ) (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1-5). These two groups coexist in the world (John 17:6, 9; 1 John 5:19; Rom. 8:7-9; 1 Cor. 2:14).

If you mean by your interpretation of Romans 5:18 that humanity now shares in Christ's nature by virtue of His incarnation and that this incarnation abrogates its previous link to Adam by nature, you are badly mistaken. If you mean that the elect share in Christ's nature by virtue of justification, then you must admit to spiritual life in all those who are justified (2 Peter 1:3, 4). This is because justification brings (is unto) a new nature (life), adoption into the family of God, and consequently the elect begin to call upon the Lord as Abba, Father. Humanity's unbelief and unholiness is symptomatic of the fact that it is not freed from its sinful nature inherited from Adam and therefore is not justified. Since you believe that justification results in rebirth and consequently freedom, you are inconsistent by teaching, "In Christ all humanity is already justified and freed." You are also inconsistent with the Reformed teaching of justification. May I remind you of your often-quoted statement from a Reformer of the past, "Christ justifies no one whom He does not at the same time sanctify" (Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 1:30).

Sir, on the one hand I am already persuaded that we should "prove all things and hold to that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21; Acts 17:11). On the other hand I am also persuaded that we should defend the faith which was once delivered to the saints.

Bennett Broadway
California

My article did not say "all humanity" as if justification and freedom

were the personal possession of each individual. What it says is this: Christ assumed the human nature common to all men. In Him that human nature or humanity is justified and freed—and glorified as well. The atonement and its individual application by the work of the Holy Spirit and Christ's intercession are separate events. —Ed.

Sir / I wish to protest against the idea of election you present in your September issue of *Present Truth*. In particular I would cite Mr. H. M. Kuitert's article. Mr. Kuitert's article, entitled "Election Means Preference," seeks to justify God's preference by the worthy objects of His choice. Mr. Kuitert says: "He [God] prefers the lost, the publicans and sinners, the sick and rejected. In a word He prefers all those in need of His saving hand."

Mr. Kuitert's attempt to explain away "the most offensive word [election] in the vocabulary of the Church" shows that he himself does not trust in the mercy of God (Rom. 9:15, 16); neither is he tolerant of God's sovereign counsel and the good pleasure or kind intention of His will (Eph. 1:1-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 9:20-24; 11:33-36). Let God be God!

Any time you place God's preference in the creature or a quality in the creature (humility, downtrodden, outcast), you are doing the equivalent of the Arminians; who place God's preference in the foreseen faith in the creature. Maybe we should take Mr. M. Luther seriously when he warns us of the legalism in our bones!

Judy Broadway
California

Timely

Sir / What a timely issue on "Election"! You should have greater readership because you really are spearheading "the truth" of the Reformation. Your September issue is just the thing for us to celebrate the "festival of the Reformation."

According to Romans 8:24 "we are saved by hope." So why not out-Luther Luther and go beyond the Reformation to a "theology of hope" based solely on the "holy Word of God"? Are you going to discuss hope in any upcoming issue? I hope so!

Lyndall D. Logee
Washington

Thoughtful Letter

Sir / Having been forewarned by the editorial comment, "Prove all

things; hold fast that which is good," in the August issue of *Present Truth*, I read Prof. Mueller's article on "The Meaning of Grace" with care. Unfortunately, Prof. Mueller is not as well acquainted with Calvinism as he is with the Latin language. Prof. Mueller's views are incorrect. The Synod of Dort did not deny the true universality of the gospel offer but rather strongly affirmed it. I quote Article 18 of the Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine:

"As many as are called by the Gospel are unfeignedly called; for God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him, namely, that all who are called should comply with His invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him."

Moreover, the Synod of Dort never declared that God's grace is "irresistible" but rather that God's calling of men to repentance and faith is "effectual." In affirming this, Dort uses almost the same language as the Lutheran Confessions. Dort says, ". . . by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, He pervades the inmost recesses of the heart; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised. . . ." The Lutheran Augsburg Confession, in Article V, states, ". . . For by the Word and Sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given; who worketh faith, *where and when it pleaseth God*, in those that hear the Gospel. . . ." The Formula of Concord agrees with Dort when it denies that grace is given to unwilling men, "For God in conversion of unwilling men makes willing men, and dwells with the willing, as Augustine is wont to speak."

What Prof. Mueller does not realize is that "particularism" is not something that John Calvin or the Synod of Dort or the Westminster Assembly invented. It is found in Scripture. It is true that it does not appear in the apostolic proclamation of the gospel to the unsaved (*euangellidzein*), but it is frequently found in the teaching (*didaskain*) of the gospel to the church. It is a definite part of the *kerygma*. At Pentecost, Peter called upon the multitude to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." But as Luke sums up the work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: ". . . and the Lord added to the church daily, such as

should be saved" (literal translation from the Greek, ". . . and the Lord added those being saved according to the day upon the same"). When the Gentiles responded to the gospel, Luke reports, ". . . and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Particularism is an inseparable part of Paul's salvation in Ephesians 1:4, 5: ". . . according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world . . . having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ." As one of my professors at Western Theological Seminary used to say, "Virtually every reference to predestination in the New Testament is a doxology." Particularism is part of the praise of the church. There are, of course, alternatives to particularism; they are Arminianism and Pelagianism. Either God is in total charge of His plan of salvation or God is not in charge at all.

I must confess that in the hands of some men particularism became something quite different from what it is from the pen and lips of our Saviour and His apostles. The "hyper-Calvinist" does indeed distort the gospel, and from sad experience I know how gross that distortion can become. It is not just, however, to attribute this distortion to Calvin. He says in his Treatise on Election, "I would by no means drive you to the secret election of God, to seek your salvation from thence, as it were, with open mouths, but I would exhort you to flee directly to Christ, in whom salvation is laid before our eyes."

As a Calvinist and an "Infralapsarian," I heartily regret the excesses of some of my Christian brethren who call themselves Calvinists, but I regret even more the singular ineptness with which otherwise competent theologians speak about Calvin and Calvinism. As one of my professors at Hope College once remarked, "Most of the people who talk about John Calvin heard about him from somebody else who never got around to reading Calvin either."

Both Calvinism and Lutheranism are Augustinian theologies, and Calvin and Calvinism owes much to Martin Luther and is not ashamed to acknowledge this debt. I hope the day may soon come when the polemical attitude of Lutheran theologians may be replaced by a sincere effort to see and understand the basic unity of Calvin and Luther in their mutual insistence that justification by faith must

be justification only by God's grace in Jesus Christ, plus nothing.

Arie Blok
Minister
Iowa

A good, thoughtful letter, sir! Mueller's criticism of Calvinism was a remark on the side which I was tempted to edit out, but that too would have invited criticism. Mueller's definition of grace as being something outside of the believer entirely is the main thrust of his article and is beautifully presented.—Ed.

Caution

Sir / I have read every issue of your magazine and heard you speak many times. I distribute *Present Truth* with every issue. You and *Present Truth* are truly raised up for this day. May you long continue your ministry. And I trust you will use some caution regarding the printing of certain articles which tend to confuse rather than enlighten. These are written by others, not yourselves. Allow me to refer to two that appeared in two recent issues, and the only two such articles I have noticed.

In your July issue I refer to the article by Jon Zens, "Why Existential Theology Is Bankrupt." Zens has something to say, but he confuses the reader with what he thinks is scholarship. By that I mean his use of every philosophical and theological word he learned in seminary. This is characteristic of his seminary, Westminster of Philadelphia. I can only excuse him because he seems to be a relatively young man. You should have known better than to publish such obfuscation.

The second article I refer to is in your August issue. It is "The Meaning of Grace," by John T. Mueller. I could have guessed he was a Lutheran by his attempt at scholarship through the overly abundant use of the Latin. Obviously, communication was not his goal. It is really a bit ostentatious to use Latin in a day when even proper English is on the decline. Mueller does put his finger on a critical problem, but he avoids facing it. He recognizes that unbelief is at the root of the mystery of saved or not saved. But he fails to indicate how one comes to belief. The Scriptures seem to be clear enough on this count: when the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching of the gospel, then faith ensues, resulting in salvation, and never otherwise. Ephesians 2:8 seems crystal clear on this point: faith is the gift of God.

In conclusion, let me say that Zens, a Baptist, and Mueller, a Lutheran, hail from traditions that have held the truth of justification by faith from the days of the Reformation. But as you see, they becloud the grand doctrine rather than clarify and communicate it. I advise my friends to be careful of their articles for this reason. I encourage you to pursue the truth in the excellent way you have done, without their kind of "help."

James Miller
Minister
Colorado

Dr. Hodge uses some Latin too in his Systematic Theology.—Ed.

Mueller Versus God

Sir / I am surprised (to say the least!) that you chose to print Mr. Mueller's article, "The Meaning of Grace," in your August issue. He tosses the term "efficacious grace" around as if it were a newborn baby crying out to be embraced but only being received by a concerned nurse once in a while.

Mueller said that the favor of God in Christ, our Mediator, extends to all men without exception (p. 18).

God says that Christ entreated God's favor only upon the "given ones," those who will believe (John 17:9, 10, 20, 21).

Mueller said that God earnestly wills every individual to be saved (p. 18).

God says that He only wills those who will believe to be saved (John 6:38-40). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him [not "that every individual"] should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Mueller said that God's pleasure is that every man be saved (pp. 18, 19), and thus man can cause God's pleasure not to be accomplished.

God says: "I am God and there is none else. I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:9, 10).

Baron Eickhoff
Pennsylvania

More on Mueller

Sir / The article, "The Meaning of Grace," in the August issue of *Present Truth*, was very much confused. The author never did explain or give

a biblical answer to his topic. He quoted Luther often but obviously does not agree with him. It is obvious that the author does not believe in faith alone for salvation because he states that there is the means of grace (the Word and the sacraments). Therefore he seems to say (if I can weed it out from the wordy mass) that salvation is by faith, plus baptism, plus communion. I'm convinced that this man is confused on the basis of salvation.

Alston Rasmussen
Baptist Minister
Nebraska

Try not to let a person's criticism of your own position make you so defensive that you miss what is really worthwhile in what he is saying.—Ed.

John Mueller to the Lions

Sir / You say repeatedly, "Let us reason together." In my opinion that is very necessary with regard to what John T. Mueller writes in your issue of August, pages 18, 19. I have never read such a superficial "attack" on the Reformed position. It is an attack that is in many respects incorrect and flagrantly contradicts the Conclusion of the Canons of Dort, which, for example, "detest with their whole soul" the idea that "in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety."

Much more could be mentioned. It just doesn't do to hide in "an unsolvable mystery" (p. 19) while the Scriptures speak so clearly about faith as a gift of God ("it is given to you to believe") and call the believers "the elect." If Mueller would place this "elect" after a person has believed, he would find himself in the camp of the Arminians!

Because you want to reason together, you should invite a Reformed theologian to write his answer to Mueller. I would suggest Prof. Dr. J. Faber of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

G. Van Dooren
Reformed Pastor
Canada

A response from Professor Faber is very welcome.—Ed.

Comments from Wm. C. Robinson

Sir / Regarding Dr. Mueller's article, "The Meaning of Grace," in your August issue: I am more interested in what I

agree with in Dr. Mueller than wherein I differ. My Robinson grandparents were members of Daniel's Lutheran Church a few miles north of Lincolnton, North Carolina. Their pastor baptized me. I graduated from Roanoke (a Lutheran college) and attended classes in Gettysburg Seminary (Pennsylvania) but have been in the Presbyterian Church all my life.

Dr. Robinson, a renowned Reformed scholar and author, exhibits the grace of a big man. He obviously differs with Dr. Mueller on the side point but does not allow the objectionable atom to hide the mountain.

We did not print Mueller's article because of his criticism on the side against particularism. In fact, we were tempted to edit it out because of the danger of its being distracting. Mueller's insight into the extrinsic nature of saving grace and its distinction from the gifts of grace was, in our opinion, beautifully presented. We wish some could quit fussing over the bones and enjoy the repast.—Ed.

* * * * *

As one who has been blessed by your writings and who holds to the Westminster Standards, may I suggest that your difference with Dr. Gordon Clark (see Sept. issue, pp. 15-17) is at least in part a matter of terminology.

In John 3 our Lord says one must be born of the Spirit in order to see the things of the kingdom. This evidently means that the Spirit works in him to believe in the Son of God freely offered in John 3:16. Now Paul seems to mean the same thing with his term "called" (1 Cor. 1:26f.; 2 Tim. 1:9, 10; Rom. 8:30). According to the last reference, this call *precedes* justification. It seemed to the Westminster divines that what Calvin sets forth in his *Institutes*, Book 3, chapter 1 (the illumination of the Holy Spirit) and chapter 2 (faith), was what was meant by being born of the Spirit (John 3) and being "called" in Paul's letters. Therefore they called it "effectual calling." This means that the illumination of the Spirit which we call faith precedes justification. In the same Westminster Confession *justification is treated prior to sanctification.*

Calvin puts justification and sanctification as coterminous in his *Institutes*, Book 3, chapter 16, section 1; chapter 14, section 9; and chapter 11, section 11. In the first of these (chap. 16, sec. 1) he seems to put justification logically prior to sanctification but both of them after "illumina-

tion by His wisdom"—which is what Westminster meant by effectual calling (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30, where Christ as our wisdom from God precedes both righteousness and sanctification). The other two references from the *Institutes*, Book 3, also keep together justification and regeneration or sanctification or reformation into newness of life. Thus it seems to me that Calvin uses regeneration in the *Institutes*, Book 3, chapter 16, section 1; chapter 14, section 9; and chapter 11, section 11, in the sense of sanctification. Thus he puts sanctification logically after justification as does the Westminster Confession.

I do not insist that this solves the difference but suggest that it ameliorates it. As by fraternal discussion we shake the lamp of truth, may it shine the brighter! [*Beautiful!—Ed.*]

In Principal John Macleod's *Scottish Theology in Connection with Church History* there is a discussion of the *ordo salutis* as set forth by two different Reformed theologians—one saying that justification precedes regeneration, and the other vice versa. I no longer have this fine book in my retirement. Your own scholarship is magnificent!

* * * * *

Regarding "The Order of Justification and Regeneration" in your September issue: May I suggest that your criticism of seventeenth-century Calvinism is more applicable to the Canons of Dort, while Dr. Gordon Clark's reply is a defense of the Westminster Standards.

Dort has a number of references to regeneration but no chapter on justification. Westminster makes only one reference to regeneration, and that in its chapter on sanctification. It does not state whether regeneration is prior to or later than justification, which is treated two chapters earlier. On the other hand, Westminster has a strong chapter on justification and six catechetical questions thereon. According to Westminster, God justifies sinners "not for anything wrought in them or done by them but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ by God imputed to them and received by faith alone."—L.C. 70.

Where Calvin treats of regeneration and justification (*Institutes*, Bk. 3, chap. 11, secs. 6, 11; chap. 14, sec. 9; chap 16, sec. 1), he uses regeneration in the sense of sanctification, that is, reformation into newness of life by gradual progres-

sion, bestowing the Spirit of adoption, by whose power He remakes us into His own image, so that by His power the lusts of the flesh are more and more mortified and we are sanctified. Now this is what Westminster means by sanctification, and its chapter thereon follows that on justification.

Westminster regularly calls the initial step "effectual calling." This term evidently comes from Paul's frequent use of "called" and takes up Calvin's illumination of the Spirit (*Institutes*, Bk. 3, chap. 1) and faith (chap. 2). God works it "by His Word and Spirit." According to Romans 8:30, "Those whom God calls He also justifies," and this seems to be the order in 1 Corinthians 1:26, 30 and Titus 3:5-7. Let's not push our logic so far as to condemn those who seriously think they are following the Word.

William C. Robinson
Professor Emeritus
California

Satisfied Readers

Sir / *Present Truth* is one of the most stimulating and informative theological magazines that I am receiving. It reminds me of the seminary days (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, '38) when many of the subjects you discuss were touched in our Dogmatics classes under Drs. J. T. Mueller and Engelder. I was happy to see a chapter of Dr. Mueller's book, *Christian Dogmatics*, included in your August issue.

Walter A. Haag
Lutheran Pastor
Florida

Sir / I recently lost (temporarily) a close spiritual friend. He as well as I had been *Present Truth* readers for some time. The confidence of his legal standing before a righteous and just God gave him the assurance to face death boldly and openly. He was able to encourage those who came to encourage him during the six weeks he lived after his tumor was discovered. He would have said a loud "Amen" to the fact that "Happy is the man who in the hour of test and trial has something better than his own fickle experience upon which to rest!"—*Present Truth*, Aug., 1976, p. 26. God bless you in your presentation of the legal and moral aspects of salvation.

William J. Gray, D.D.S.
California

Sir / Your magazine, *Present Truth*, and occasional pamphlets are truly

magnificent. The emphasis on the objective work of Christ is a healthy balance to today's subjectivism. Your enthusiasm and clear presentations of objective salvation fire me with new enthusiasm and inspire me to preach the great Reformation truths. May God bless you and keep you at this ministry.

Robert S. Williamson
Presbyterian Pastor
Pennsylvania

Sir / Although I can't say I am in agreement with you in every area, it is thrilling to realize that we can fellowship around the Bible truth of justification by faith. It is very refreshing to know that every time I sit down to read anything you publish, it always brings me back to the central fact of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. Please keep your emphasis there, where it rightfully belongs.

Karcie E. Crum
Minister
Georgia

Sir / Really, words can't express my appreciation for your publication of *Present Truth*. You are indeed a "voice in the wilderness" for this our present "bewildered" generation.

Henry Werner
Minister
Canada

Sir / Your publication is both inspiring and thought-provoking. Keep up the good work.

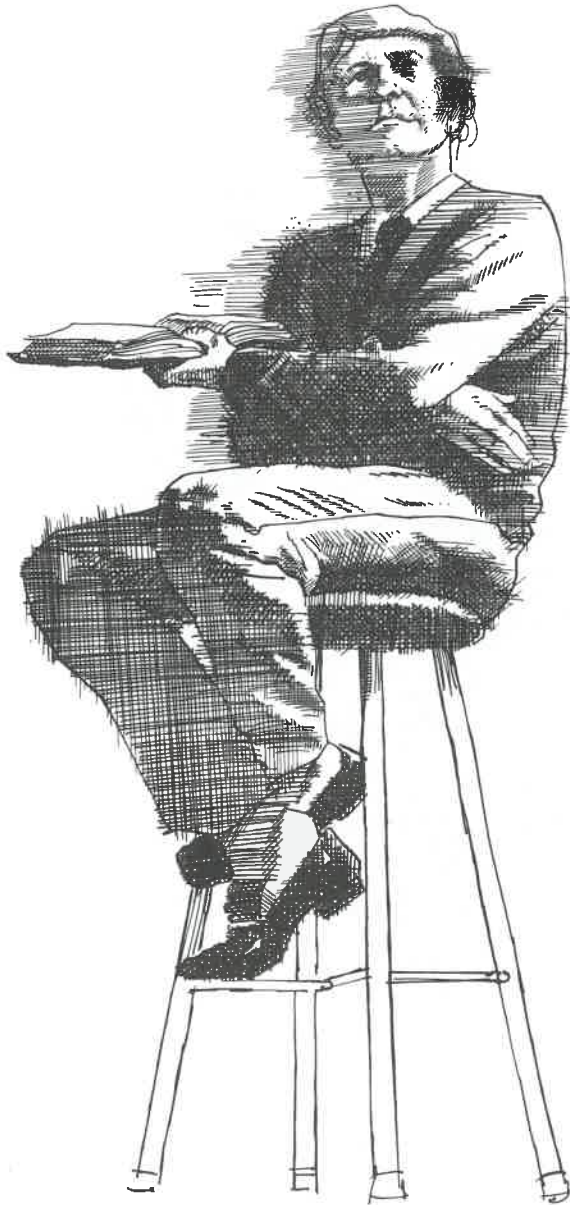
Charles F. Simmons
Anglican Seminary Dean
North Carolina

Sir / I must congratulate you for your outstanding magazine. Every time that a new issue arrives I set aside what I have been doing and read it cover to cover. I don't agree with 100% of what you have to say, but I've given it careful consideration.

James Hallberg
Congregational Pastor
Minnesota

Sir / It is with great joy that I receive *Present Truth*. The challenges you have brought to my theology have been marvelous. I sincerely desire that "my theology" not be simply what I was told as I was growing up or taking my ministerial training, but that it be what has been found in the Word of God through my own studies. Thank you for your help.

Joseph E. Gillespie
Minister
Minnesota



Some perspiration as well as inspiration should characterize our study of the Word.

Editorial Introduction

This issue on "Covenant" (Part 1) follows on from the series on "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation" which the editor presented in the last three issues of *Present Truth*. Covenant is one of the major legal conceptions which appear in the Bible.

This first portion of the presentation of the covenants covers some of the necessary technical detail. It is not exactly a bedtime story. The reader needs to remember that some perspiration as well as inspiration should characterize our study of the Word. If this generation of the church is going to recapture the powerful truth of justification by faith, it must come to grips with the legal framework of a lot of biblical thinking. Justification is a term which belongs to the law court and to divine jurisprudence. In this framework *covenant* figures very prominently.

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.

The Importance of the Covenants

The fundamental question to which all theology addresses itself is the God-man relationship. How does God relate to man? How can man establish a relationship with God? Is man God's pawn who has absolutely no say at all in his ultimate destiny? Can there be any real stability, dependability and predictability to this one-sided relationship of the infinite, perfect God with finite, sinful man?

The Bible answers these questions by showing us that the divine-human relationship is based on a *covenant*. This idea of a covenantal relationship between God and man is so basic and overwhelmingly predominant in the Scriptures that the two great sections of the Bible have appropriately been called the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant).

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are about God's covenant with men. "The covenantal idea was a special feature of the religion of Israel."—*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. Botterweck & Ringgren (Eerdmans), Vol. 2, p. 278. ". . . the covenant idea played a large part in giving Israel's religion its distinctive character in comparison to the religion of her neighbours, almost as much as did her characteristic monotheism."—Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Johns Hopkins Press), p. 66. The writings of Moses and the prophets are covenant documents and should therefore be studied in that light.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are also about a covenant between God and man. Christianity too is a covenantal religion. Its documents are covenantal documents.

The whole Bible, therefore, is about a divine-human relationship which is based on a covenant. The covenant theme is not just one of many interesting Bible doctrines; it is part of the very framework of biblical theology. Whereas the study of some things in the Bible may be regarded as optional as far as understanding its essential message is concerned, some understanding and appreciation of the covenants is indispensable to a sound knowledge of the Scriptures.



The covenant theme is not just one of many interesting Bible doctrines; it is part of the very framework of biblical theology.



The Technical Meaning of Covenant

The Old Testament

The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*. "Attempts to derive the meaning of the term from etymology have not led to any clear or certain conclusions."—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Kittel (Eerdmans), Vol. 2, p. 107. The majority of scholars, however, seem to think that *berith* is derived from an equivalent Assyrian word which means *to bind* or *to fetter*.

Since *berith* or *covenant* occurs nearly 300 times in the Old Testament, its meaning may be fairly well established by noting the word's context and usage. Besides the biblical usage, covenants were very common in the ancient world of the Middle East, and from the numerous ancient inscriptions that archeologists have unearthed, the general sense of *covenant* is quite clearly demonstrated.

In the Bible we read about a number of different covenants between men. For instance, Jacob and Laban settled family hostilities by making a covenant. They set up a heap of stones as a witness to their mutual pledges, offered sacrifice, and ate a covenant meal together (Gen. 31:44, 45). David and Jonathan made a covenant to seal their friendship and to guarantee a peaceful relationship between the house of David and the house

of Jonathan (1 Sam. 18 & 20). We also read about a covenant between tribes (1 Sam. 11:1; Judg. 2:2; Ex. 23:32), between kings (1 Kings 20:34), and between a king and his people (2 Kings 11:4; 2 Chron. 23). There was even a covenant imposed by a conquering king on a vanquished king (1 Kings 20:34). The most common type of covenant between people, however, was the marriage contract between a man and his wife (see Mal. 2:14).

Outside of biblical literature the most important use of the covenant idea is found in some international treaty documents of the second millennium B.C. In recent years archeologists have unearthed a great number of these treaties, which were drawn up by the Hittite kings or suzerains. These suzerainty treaties were unilaterally drawn up by the Hittite conquerors and imposed on a subjugated vassal king. The vassal was obliged to swear allegiance, fidelity and exclusive loyalty to the suzerain. The suzerain pledged that he would help and protect his faithful vassal.

There are two of these human covenants which especially help us to understand the meaning of God's covenant with man:

1. The first is the suzerainty covenant. In 1954 G. E.

Mendenhall, in *The Covenant Forms and Israelite Tradition*, was the first to demonstrate quite conclusively that the sacred covenant documents between God and Israel, as recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy, follow a form similar to the suzerainty treaties of the Hittite kings. (We will say more about this treaty form in our section on "The Names and Features of the Covenants.")

While some covenants between human parties are like negotiated agreements, God's covenant is more like a suzerainty covenant. It has nothing in it of the nature of a bargain or a negotiated agreement. It is a *disposition* or *arrangement* which originates unilaterally with the superior party. The inferior party may accept or reject the arrangement (for covenants generally imply reciprocity and a bilateral operation), but he cannot negotiate or alter the terms of the disposition in any way.

2. The covenant between God and man is also likened to a marriage contract (see Ezek. 16:8, 60; Hosea 2:16; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32). The relationship is wholly initiated by God. The election of Israel to be Jehovah's wife is entirely a divine act. Here again we see that God's covenant is unilateral in origin but bilateral in operation. God and His people are bound together by a covenant which is likened to a marriage contract.

In the light of the foregoing evidence we can say that the *covenant* is a *bond*, an *alliance*, an *agreement*, a *compact*, a *treaty*, a *pact*, a *contract*.¹ Its essential idea is *union* between God and man. God offers man partnership with Himself. It is a union and partnership based on a binding *legal* contract. It cannot be stressed too strongly that while the covenant is a fellowship between God and man, it is a fellowship which has a legal basis.

The New Testament

The Greek work for *covenant* is *diatheke*. It is used more than thirty times in the New Testament. Like many other key words or expressions found in the New Testament, it has an Old Testament background and quite obviously incorporates the idea inherent in the Hebrew covenant.

Especially intriguing is the meaning of the Greek word *diatheke*. The apostles were not the first to use this word to translate the Hebrew word *berith*. More than 100 years before them the Septuagint (the first Greek translation of the Old Testament) also chose the word *diatheke* to translate *berith*.² At the time of the

Septuagint's translators and also during the time when the New Testament was written, the word *diatheke* generally had the meaning of a *testament* or *will*. It is quite apparent that a last will and testament is not really what the Old Testament word *berith* means, even though there may be some similarities. The Greeks did have the word *suntheke*, which meant a *compact*, a *treaty*, an *alliance*, etc. So the intriguing question is, Why did not the Septuagint translators use the word *suntheke*? And why did the apostles also prefer to use *diatheke*?

There are two things to be said in answer to this question:

1. *Diatheke* did not only mean a *will* and *testament*. Scholars have been able to demonstrate that it did have the meaning of a *disposition* or *arrangement*. Says Moulton-Milligan:

Diatheke is properly *disposition*, an "arrangement" made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter. A "will" is simply the most conspicuous example of such an instrument, which ultimately monopolized the word just because it suited its differentia so completely.—Cited in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 128.

God's covenant is unilateral in origin but bilateral in operation.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that while the covenant is a fellowship between God and man, it is a fellowship which has a legal basis.

¹Some scholars have argued that since God's covenant is unilateral in origin, it is a *disposition* and not a *contract*, *compact* or *agreement*. But the concepts of *disposition* and *contract* are not mutually exclusive. In the sense that man has no say in determining the terms of the relationship, it is a *disposition* of the divine will. But in that man is called upon to respond to God's covenant and God Himself condescends to guarantee rights and privileges to man, it is a *treaty* or *contract*. It is as much a contract as marriage is a contract. The rights, privileges and responsibilities of each party are clearly defined and legally guaranteed.

²In 270 cases the LXX chose the word *diatheke*.

2. As we have seen, God's covenant is not a mutual agreement or negotiated treaty. As Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology* [Eerdmans]) suggests, the word *suntheke* sounds too much like an agreement between equals; and since the Bible is majoring on the divine covenant (an essentially religious idea), *diatheke* more nearly meets the idea of an arrangement which is unilateral in origin.

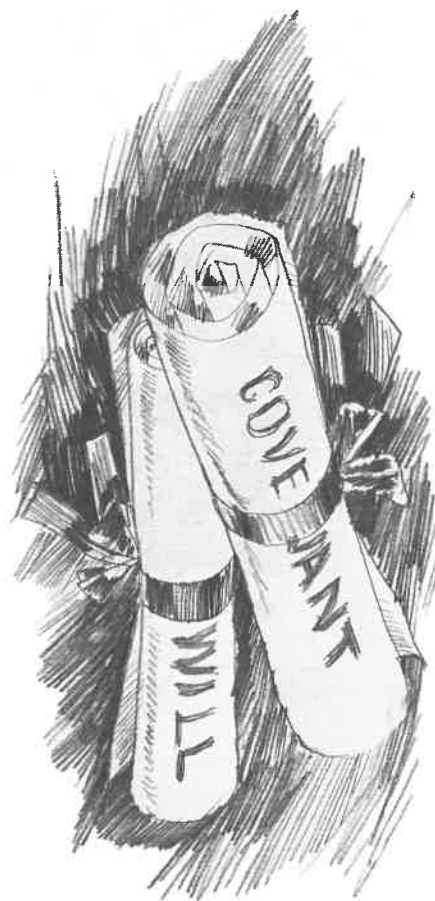
There has been some uncertainty (evidenced by the New Testament translators, for instance) as to whether the New Testament *diatheke* should be translated as *covenant* or *testament* (*will*). Undoubtedly, in view of the fact that the concept comes from the Old Testament, *covenant* is the better translation, with the possible exception of Hebrews 9:16, 17. Some scholars, wishing to bend everything into the mold of *berith*, even contend that Hebrews 9:16, 17 does not mean *will* and *testament*.³ This, however, is not supported by the face-value context. The Bible does not always fit into the precise systematic mold of scholars. Granting that the New Testament word *diatheke* primarily means *disposition* and *arrangement* corresponding to the Old Testament *berith*, is it not conceivable that, since *diatheke* also had the popularly understood meaning of *will* and *testament*, the apostles could at times make a play upon this double meaning? Perhaps in Galatians 3:15 Paul is also making a play upon the double meaning of *diatheke*.

G. S. Duncan sensibly comments that "it matters little which of the two renderings we adopt, for from a truly spiritual standpoint a 'covenant' in which God takes part is as essentially a one-sided proposal as a 'will' is." —*The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, Galatians*, p. 106.

Leon Morris also clears the air with these comments:

The very fact that the expression "the new covenant" is used indicates that the *berith* of the Old Scriptures is in mind and that the New Testament writers, when they used *covenant*, are thinking primarily of a disposition of God along the lines of Old Testament models, and not the conception of a will. Nevertheless, in view of the universal use of the word outside the Scriptures and of the place they assigned

³For instance, R. B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans), p. 214.



to the death of Christ in the making of the new covenant, it seems probable that in most cases where *diatheke* occurs there is the secondary thought of a death to be discerned with a corresponding benefit to those who were heirs. —*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 97.

One further point also shows us that the Hebrew *covenant* and the Greek *will* and *testament* are not so far apart in meaning after all. The disposition of an inheritance is very prominent in the covenants which God made with Abraham, Israel and David. And, of course, the disposition of an inheritance is the essence of a will and testament. In both cases the arrangement is unilaterally made, in both cases it is sealed by a sacrifice or by death, and in both cases the recipient may not negotiate or alter the stipulations.



The Practical Meaning of Covenant

It would be difficult to exaggerate the overwhelming significance that the covenant concept had for Israelite religion. The people's relationship with God was based on a covenant, and He would have no dealings with man outside of the covenant. "It is not too much to say that the covenant conception came to dominate Israel's thought about her relationship to God."—Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 81.

Every religion has to do with some form of union, fellowship, friendship or relationship with the Deity. This is not peculiar to the Hebrew religion. What is peculiar to the Hebrew religion is that this union, fellowship and partnership with the Deity is based on a legal arrangement called a *covenant*. "... covenant is a legal conception. ... a legal basis is inherent in the very nature of the covenant."—*Ibid.*, p. 257. This means that God's

union, fellowship and partnership with man are based on a legal contract. Further, God will have no relationship with His people outside of this legal contract.

It may help us to grasp the significance of this point if we observe that the covenant between God and His people is often likened to a marriage contract (see Ezek. 16:8, 60; Hosea 2:16; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32). In some respects Israel's solemn promise before Mount Sinai ("All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," Ex. 19:8) sounds like a bride making her wedding vow. The marriage contract, of course, is only one illustration and by no means exhausts the meaning of God's covenant with His people. But since this concept of a marriage contract is still with us moderns, it does help us to understand the biblical thought that our union with God is first of all a legal union. Just as the most sacred human re-

lationship is based on a legal covenant, so God's union with man must be based on a legal covenant. God, being holy love, will have nothing to do with spiritual fornication.

Here we touch on a principle which has vital significance for today. There has been a strong tendency in modern times to move away from the legal categories of the Bible. It is thought by many that legal and religious concepts are inimical to each other. But in the covenant framework of the Bible the legal and the religious aspects of the God-man relationship are bound inseparably together. Covenants are always legal and always religious.

We today tend to equate what is *legal* with *legalism*.¹ There is a tendency to think that legal categories are inferior notions which are transcended by a truly spiritual religion. But the covenant theme of the Bible shows us clearly that the religion which comes from God has its roots in the law of God and the perfect order of divine jurisprudence. Says Leon Morris:

. . . the men of the Old Testament seem to go out of their way to use legal illustrations when they have the divine activity in mind. Today we are inclined to be suspicious of "legalism." Indeed, if we can convict an opponent of too great an interest in law we are half way to confuting him. No-one today is interested in a legalist. But we should not read this attitude back into antiquity. . . . Yahweh and law went well together.—*Ibid*.

The current religious scene is dominated by the philosophy that the only thing really important in religion is "a religious encounter," "an experience of Christ in the heart," "an exciting discovery of the Spirit-filled life," etc. Even the more sober discipline of theology tends to develop doctrine from experience and to reduce everything to an experience. (Some even want to call God's act of *justification* an experience.²) This process, if allowed to continue, would end up destroying everything really distinctive about the Christian faith so that ultimately all religions could unite on the common denominator of a religious experience "in the cave of the heart." In the final analysis this sort of religion will be found to be as immoral and as unstable as conjugal union without legal basis.

The covenant concept, however, provides for a very unique and distinctive kind of fellowship with God.

1. It Is a Lawful Fellowship.

The covenant concept taught the Hebrews that their God was the God of law, who called them into a lawful

¹*Legalism* is a perversion of the legal just as *rationalism* is a perversion of the rational. *Legalism* is not really legal (lawful and right) but illegal, because it makes an improper use of law.

²See *Present Truth*, July, 1976, art. "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation," Part 1.

In the covenant framework of the Bible the legal and the religious aspects of the God-man relationship are bound inseparably together.

The religion which comes from God has its roots in the law of God and the perfect order of divine jurisprudence.

fellowship. As Creator, He is the Author of law. Not only is law the way in which He administers His universe, but He Himself can be relied upon to act according to law.

The Old Testament consistently thinks of a God who works by the method of law. This is not the conception of one or two writers but is found everywhere. It is attested by a variety of conceptions, many of them taken straight from forensic practices. Among the heathen the deity was thought of as above all law, with nothing but his own desires to limit him. Accordingly his behaviour was completely unpredictable, and while he made demands on his worshippers for obedience and service, there were few if any ethical implications of this service, and none of a logically necessary kind. Far otherwise was it with the God of the Hebrews. The Old Testament never conceives of anything outside Him which can direct His actions, and we must be on our guard against the thought of a law which is over Him. But Yahweh was thought of as essentially righteous in His nature, as incorporating the law of righteousness within His essential Being. Accordingly He works by a method which may be called law—He inevitably punishes evil-doing and rewards righteousness. He himself acts righteously, and He demands that His people do the same. This is the consistent teaching of the Old Testament.—*Ibid.*, p. 258.

2. It Is a Stable Fellowship.

The concept of fellowship with God based on a legal covenant meant that there was a stable and dependable element in the religion of the Old Testament. The covenant provided for a "firmly regulated form of fellowship between God and man or man and God."—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 109. The "legal concept is introduced to show that there is an established pattern in the dealings between God and man."—*Ibid.*, p. 110. "There is no firmer guarantee of legal security, peace or personal loyalty than the covenant. . . . It means legitimate order as opposed to caprice, uncertainty and animosity."—*Ibid.*, p. 115.

The advantages of having marriage based on a legal contract with sacred guarantees are plain to see. Marriage has to be based on something more than fluctuating human emotions. We must also appreciate that a believer's union and fellowship with God rest on something more durable and stable than the actual experience of the believer in the fellowship.

The covenant spells out the terms and conditions of the relationship. The covenant partner may know where he stands. He knows his rights and titles as well as his obligations and responsibilities. This means that the fellowship in the partnership is both dependable and predictable.

It is important that a man may know where he stands in relationship with His God. He does not need to be in jeopardy and uncertainty every hour. But he would stand in great jeopardy if he had nothing to depend on save his own religious experience. The sort of cotton-candy, sentimental evangelicalism that offers nothing deeper than the experience of "Christ in the heart" is not to be compared with the true freedom that a believer may enjoy in true covenant relationship with God.

3. It Is a Faith-Inspiring Fellowship.

The concept of a covenant fellowship with God gave the men of the Old Testament a mighty anchor to their faith. We may even say that it put them on vantage ground with God. God was obligated to them by the covenant (such is the love and condescension of God). He was their God. They were His people. He was bound to be loyal and merciful to His people. This is why we see examples of remarkable boldness to claim God's blessings. It was the covenant background which enabled Jacob to say to the Angel, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Outside of the covenant relationship this demand would have been presumption.

We must not, of course, get the idea that the covenant operated automatically or that Israel could rest on God's pledge while she herself flouted her own covenant obligations. Yet if she sincerely turned from her sins, she could always claim God's favor (1 Kings 8:31-53; Ps. 106:43-

The sort of cotton-candy, sentimental evangelicalism that offers nothing deeper than the experience of "Christ in the heart" is not to be compared with the true freedom that a believer may enjoy in true covenant relationship with God.

The covenant gives the believer a claim on God that makes him bold to rest his case, not only on God's mercy, but on a justice which means that God must be loyal and merciful to every child of the covenant.

47). This reminds us of St. Paul's words: "... if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13, RSV).

This same covenant concept is important for us today. In Romans the apostle Paul teaches us that our salvation is grounded in God's justice as much as in His mercy. This is a great encouragement for faith. If in view of his weakness and sinfulness the believer is sometimes tempted to think that God's mercy may run out, he never wonders whether God's justice will run out. Instead of inexorable justice terrifying the believer, he knows that God's justice is salvation (Rom. 1:16, 17). The covenant gives the believer a claim on God that makes him bold to rest his case, not only on God's mercy, but on a justice which means that God must be loyal and merciful to every child of the covenant.

4. It Is an Exclusive Fellowship.

The covenant concept taught the Hebrews that fellowship with God was an exclusive fellowship. They alone were His chosen people. Yahweh alone must be their God. When we say that the covenant relationship with the Deity was peculiar to the Hebrews, this is not to deny that other nations may have thought of themselves as having some form of covenant with the gods.

It seems, however, that the covenantal idea was a special feature of the religion of Israel, the only one to demand exclusive loyalty and to preclude the possibility of dual or multiple loyalties such as were permitted in other religions, where the believer was bound in diverse relationships to many gods. The stipulation in political treaties demanding fealty to one king corresponds strikingly with the religious belief in one single, exclusive deity.—*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 278.

This idea of exclusive loyalty in the relationship between God and His people is well illustrated by the marriage relationship. The prophets, especially Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, seize on this thought and use it again and again to charge Israel with adultery.

Further-more, the formula expressing the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:12, [13]; etc.) is a legal formula taken from the sphere of marriage, as attested in various legal documents from the ancient Near East (cf. Hosea 2:4, [2]). The relationship of the vassal to his suzerain, and that of the wife to her husband, leave no place for double loyalty in a monotheistic religion.—*Ibid.*

This helps also to explain why prophets like Isaiah frowned upon any alliance which Israel might make with surrounding nations. Such alliances were forbidden by Israel's covenant with Yahweh.





The Names and Features of the Covenants

In this section we will identify six of the major covenants which are featured in the Old Testament. These are the covenants which God made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel and David, and finally, the new covenant with the house of Israel prophesied by Jeremiah.

1. Adamic

The Bible does not specifically state that God made a covenant with Adam, unless it does so in Hosea 6:7, which says, ". . . they [Israel] like Adam [margin] have transgressed the covenant. . . ." Even this marginal rendering is disputed, although in our judgment it is the only rendering which does justice to the context and sense of the passage in Hosea. However, the evidence clearly indicates a covenantal relation between God and Adam.

The necessary features of a covenant are all indicated in Genesis 1 to 3. These are:

1. The contracting parties: God and Adam.
2. The conditions imposed on Adam: obedience to God's commandments, especially refraining from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
3. The implied promise of God: eternal life and immortality, represented by access to the tree of life.

The entire Bible record indicates that God has no fellowship with any man outside of a covenant.

4. The threatening of death in the case of disobedience. When Adam and Eve sinned, a whole series of curses were invoked (see Gen. 3:14-19). The word *curse* is covenantal language, being associated with the penalty of breaking a covenant.

Besides these four covenant features, we could also point out that the whole Bible record indicates that God has no fellowship with any man outside of a covenant. The covenant is always fundamental in any union between God and man. Just as human righteousness demands a marriage contract as the basis of conjugal union, so does divine righteousness demand a covenantal basis for God's union with man.

Adam was also the covenantal head of the race or its legal representative (see Rom. 5:12-19). His relationship with God was more than a private relationship, for it was one which involved all whom he represented.

The Adamic covenant may be likened to a suzerainty treaty. God was the great Suzerain, and the terms of the covenant were unilaterally arranged by Him. Adam was but a creature of the dust, but the covenant partnership conferred upon him the dignity and authority of a king. He was given dominion over the whole created order (Gen. 1:26-28; Heb. 2:6-8). One lone restriction—to refrain from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil—was to remind Adam that he was a vassal king under the authority of the great Suzerain. Adam could remain a monarch of the earth only as long as he recognized that he was God's creature and subject to divine authority.

2. Noahic

God made a covenant with Noah just before He destroyed the earth by the great Flood.

. . . Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. . . . And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. . . . But with thee will I establish My covenant. . . . —Gen. 6:8, 13, 18.

That which saved Noah and his family from the awful display of divine wrath was this covenant of grace. The man in covenant union with God could never perish. After Noah came out of the ark and stepped onto the new world, he built an altar and offered sacrifices to God (Gen. 8:20), and because of this the Lord renewed His covenant with Noah. In this covenant God also promised to preserve the earth from destruction even though man's heart after the Flood was just as evil as before the Flood (cf. Gen. 8:21; 6:5).

This promise of preservation, which some theologians call "common grace," embraced the whole created order. The earth would continue under a dispensation of divine mercy because of the pleasing sacrifice of Jesus Christ foreshadowed by the beasts on Noah's altar. As long as God's elect were upon the earth (represented by Noah), God would be pledged to uphold the natural order.

The covenant was primarily made with Noah. It was a covenant of redemption and grace. Yet Noah (who represents God's elect) must yet live in this sinful world and be related to the created order. God would therefore preserve the created order for the sake of His covenant with Noah. Just as the lives of a whole shipload of people were preserved because of the presence of Paul (see Acts 27), so the sinful world benefits from God's covenant with Noah and his spiritual children.

There is a lot of comfort in this covenant message for believers today. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has purchased even the bounties of common grace, which preserve this world and shall continue to do so until the end. Says David MacLeod, "God has undertaken to pre-

serve this world as an arena fit for human life, and our attitude to the perils of Nuclear warfare, world food shortages, population explosion and pollution must be modified by this." —*The Banner of Truth*, June, 1975.¹

Although the essence of the Noahic covenant consisted in a divine promise, it did impose certain responsibilities on Noah and his posterity. The mandate first given to Adam, to cultivate the earth, is repeated (Gen. 9:1-3). There is a prohibition against eating blood (Gen. 9:4). And the sanctity of human life must be recognized and enforced by human justice (Gen. 9:6). God also gave a sign and seal of His covenantal promise. He said, "I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth" (Gen. 9:13, RSV).

¹We cannot agree with MacLeod, however, when he says that the Noahic covenant "is not a redemptive covenant." We concur with Westminster scholar K. M. Campbell, who says, "The covenant is a covenant of common grace as well as of saving grace." —*God's Covenant* (Presbyterian & Reformed), p. 25.

Just as the lives of an entire shipload of people were preserved because of the presence of Paul, so the sinful world benefits from God's covenant with Noah and his spiritual children.

3. Abrahamic

Just as God rescued Noah from a doomed world, so He rescued Abraham from an idolatrous environment and separated him for covenant partnership with Himself. The covenant was made with Abraham when the patriarch was seventy-five years old (Gen. 15) and renewed to him when he was ninety-nine—the year before Isaac was born (Gen. 17).

The covenant consisted of a divine promise (confirmed by an oath) that Abraham would have a seed and an everlasting inheritance. There were a temporal and an eternal dimension to this promise. In its immediate prospect it promised a son to Abraham and Sarah in their old age and the land of Canaan for his descendants. But it was also a redemptive covenant. It promised that in Abraham's Seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:6-8, 16) and that through Him they would inherit the redeemed earth (Rom. 4:3; Heb. 11:8-16, 39; 2:5; Gal. 3:15-19, 29). The covenant was the gospel of Christ in promise (Gal. 3:6-8, 16, 19). The immediate temporal promises would serve the purpose of being the vehicle of carrying forward the unfolding drama of salvation-history.

Abraham's response to God's promise was that "he believed in the Lord; and He [God] counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Paul seizes on this to prove that it was a covenant of justification by faith (see Rom. 4; Gal. 3). The inheritance, Paul argues, was given to Abraham by promise and not because of his achievements in keeping the law. Abraham was justified by faith alone, but the faith which justified him was not alone. At a later time God said that "Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5; see also 18:19; 22:18). Abraham was not justified before God by faith and works but by a faith which worked (see Gal. 5:6).

The Abrahamic covenant was formalized by a ceremony which apparently was a well-known ancient custom. Abraham took several sacrificial beasts and birds. He divided the animal sacrifices into pieces and placed them in two rows, forming an aisle.² According to the ancient custom of covenant making, the covenant partners were to walk together down the aisle between the divided sacrifice. As they did so, they would bind themselves under oath to be true to the terms of the pact. The dismembered animal portrayed the cursed fate which would befall the covenant breaker.

The Hebrew form of oath, "God do so to me and more also," probably connects with such ceremonies. This is probably supported also by the threat of Yahweh, "And the men who transgressed my Covenant . . . I will make like the calf which they cut in two." (Jer. 34:18 R.S.V.)—Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 69.

²Some scholars suggest that there were three rows, forming two aisles.

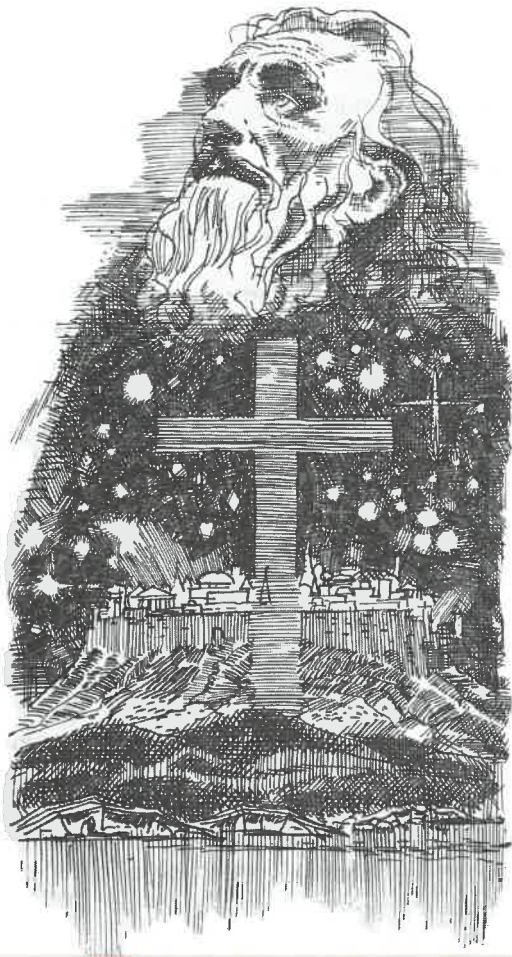
The Abrahamic covenant was the gospel of Christ in promise.

Abraham was not justified before God by faith and works but by a faith which worked.

In the Abrahamic covenant God passed through the parts of the sacrifice while Abraham was in a deep sleep or prophetic trance (Gen. 15:17). The Lord hereby staked His own existence on His promise to Abraham.

While the covenant promise was not given to Abraham because he fulfilled the law or the covenant conditions, the Bible is also clear that the covenant would not operate apart from obedience on the part of Abraham and his descendants. The covenant fellowship imposed upon him the responsibility of being devoted and upright (Gen. 17:1; see also 18:19; 22:18; 26:5).

Subsequent history demonstrated that this covenant would not work automatically—that is, without the appropriate response of the human party. Not all of Abraham's descendants became heirs of the covenant promise. Ishmael and Esau were disqualified from being children of the covenant, and so were the unbelieving Jews in the time of Jesus and Paul.



While the covenant promise was not given to Abraham because he fulfilled the law or the covenant conditions, the Bible is also clear that the covenant would not operate apart from obedience on the part of Abraham and his descendants.

unbelieving sinners live in the same world with God's people and receive the temporal advantages of the Noahic covenant.

Circumcision was given by God to be the sign or seal of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:10, 11). By metonymy the covenant became known as "the covenant of circumcision" (see Acts 7:8). According to Paul circumcision was the sign or seal of righteousness by faith (Rom. 4:11), for Abraham was given the promise of justification and salvation by Christ before he was circumcised. The Judaizers, however, perverted the sign and turned it into a means of obtaining the inheritance.

4. Sinaitic

The most important Old Testament covenant was the one made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai. It was the foundation of Israel's relationship with God and that which determined and gave character to the subsequent history of the chosen people.

Of the 286 times *covenant* is mentioned in the Old Testament, at least 150 of these refer to the Sinaitic covenant. Sinai was the high point of Old Testament history, and the covenant which was made there so dominates the Old Testament record that the collection of thirty-nine books has been named after this covenant.

It was only a few years ago (1954) that G.E. Mendenhall was able to demonstrate that the Sinaitic covenant bore a remarkable similarity to the ancient Hittite treaties. These Hittite treaties were made between a Hittite sovereign (suzerain) and a vassal. They contained six main features:³

Until Christ came as the promised Seed, however, there were always some unbelieving Jews who were incorporated in the nation which was covenantally related to God. It is clear that many in the nation were not real children of Abraham, for they were "children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32:20). As strangers to divine grace, they could not be heirs with Abraham of the redeemed world (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:6-8). But by being associated in nationhood with the covenant people, they received many of the benefits of life in the theocracy—just as

³For documentation of the Hittite treaty formulary, see G.E. Mendenhall, *The Covenant Forms and Israelite Tradition*; Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary: In Old Testament, Jewish and Early Christian Writings* (Fortress); Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*.

1. *Preamble.* In this the name of the suzerain is identified. For example, one such treaty begins, "These are the words of the Sun Mursilis, the great king, the king of the Hatti land the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, the son of Suppiluliumus," etc.

2. *Historical Prologue.* Here the previous relationship between the Hittite ruler and the vassal is described. It may embrace several generations. The emphasis is on the benevolent acts of the suzerain toward the vassal's father or ancestors and/or on the suzerain's present benefactions. This sets the stage for the obligations that are to be imposed upon the vassal, which he is now expected to discharge in grateful acknowledgement of the suzerain's acts of kindness.

3. *Stipulations.* The obligations which are imposed by the suzerain upon the vassal are spelled out. The fundamental demand is always for thorough commitment to the suzerain to the exclusion of all alien alliances. Thus Mursilis insists: "But you, Duppi-Tessub, remain loyal toward the king of the Hatti land, the Hatti land, my sons [and] my grandsons forever . . . Do not turn your eyes to anyone else." The stipulations define the duties of the vassal in preserving peace within the domain of the suzerain. "Unwavering trust in the Suzerain was mandatory, and murmuring against him was always regarded as violation of obligation."⁴—*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Buttrick, art. "Covenant" (Abingdon).

4. *Depository.* The treaties generally made provision for their preservation and regular rereading. "The treaty is put in the most sacred shrines of the chief gods of the involved, for an obvious purpose so that the gods could read it and be reminded from time to time of the provisions of the oath sworn in their presence."—Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*, p. 35. A typical treaty also says, "At regular intervals shall they read it in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country."—*Ibid.*

5. *Witnesses.* The gods, many and sundry, are called upon to witness the covenant oaths (*ibid.*, pp. 36, 37).

6. *Sanctions.* Blessings are pronounced on the keeper of the covenant, while curses pronounce the destruction of the offender—all that he is and all that he has.

The Sinaitic covenant, described in Exodus, chapters 19 to 24, has a similar structure to the Hittite treaties, although it is not completely identical. Comparing these chapters with the treaty formulary, we have a basic outline as follows:

1. Exodus 19 presents the historical introduction, which stresses the grace of God in His dealings with the Israelites.

2. The stipulations follow in chapter 20 in the form

⁴Compare Israel's murmuring against the Lord in Numbers 21.

The most important Old Testament covenant was the one made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai.

of the Ten Commandments.

3. In chapter 23:20-33 there is a series of promises and threats.

4. Chapter 24 describes how the covenant is ratified in a blood sacrifice and a covenant meal.

The Ten Commandments constitute the real text of the treaty between God and Israel (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13). The form of the Decalogue bears a very remarkable resemblance to the suzerainty treaty:

1. To begin with, there is the very characteristic preamble: "I am the Lord thy God . . ." (Ex. 20:2). D.J. McCarthy⁵ points out that the parallel with the Hittite treaties breaks down because whereas the Hittite treaties begin in the third person and identify the name and titles of the suzerain, the brief introduction to the Ten Commandments does not do this. However, the full name and title of the divine Suzerain do appear in the fourth commandment (" . . . for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is . . ."). Here we have the name (Yahweh), title (Creator) and realm (heaven and earth) of the great Suzerain. Meredith G. Kline points out that "the Sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words [is] the equivalent of the Suzerain's dynastic seal."—*The Treaty of the Great King*, p. 18.

2. In classical treaty form the Decalogue contains the brief historical prologue: " . . . which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2).

3. The stipulations of the covenant are the Ten Commandments, which are called "the words of the covenant" (Ex. 34:28). These oath-bound stipulations are often referred to as "the testimony" (Hebrew, *edut*; see Ex. 31:7; 32:15; 34:27-29).⁶

4. The covenant blessings and cursings are interspersed among the stipulations (Ex. 20:6, 7, 12).

5. Finally, the covenant was deposited in the sacred ark and kept in the most holy place of the tabernacle. Consequently, the ark is called "the ark of the covenant," and the tabernacle itself is called "the tabernacle of the

⁵*Old Testament Covenant* (John Knox Press), pp. 17, 18.

⁶"*Edut* is related to the Akkadian *ade*, which is used as a general appellation for the contents of the suzerainty treaties."—Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

testimony” (Ex. 32:15; 38:21; Num. 10:33; Rev. 11:19; 15:5).

The treaty formulary appears the clearest of all in the book of Deuteronomy. Forty years after Sinai, just before Israel’s entrance into the promised land, Moses led the people into a great covenant renewal while they were camped on the plains of Moab, poised for their conquest of Canaan. The book of Deuteronomy presents us with a lengthy covenant renewal document which follows the classic pattern of the treaty in the ancient Near East. This document more clearly spells out the covenant blessings and curses and also provides for witnesses to the covenant—“heaven and earth” (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:25f.). In his excellent little book, *The Treaty of the Great King*, Kline demonstrates how Deuteronomy follows the classical treaty lines—as follows:

1. Preamble: chapter 1:1-5.
2. Historical prologue: chapters 1:6 to 4:49.
3. Stipulations: chapter 5 and amplified to the end of chapter 26.
4. Sanctions: chapters 27 to 30:20.
5. Depository, witnesses, etc.: chapters 31 to 34.

Leaving now the similarities between God’s covenant at Sinai and the suzerainty treaties, we will take special note of some other major features of God’s covenant with Israel:

1. The covenant between God and Israel was a kind of marriage covenant (see Ex. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; Ezek. 16; Jer. 2-4; Hosea 1-3; Jer. 31:31, 32). The oft-repeated words, “I shall be thy God; ye shall be My people,” imply an exclusive relationship represented by marriage.

Yahweh brooks no rival; the more real the marriage, the less He permits His bride the luxury of an affair with another. Put it this way: We can measure the faithfulness of His covenant by the intensity of His jealousy. Were He a less passionate husband, His jealousy would not be so keen. The Bible speaks of God’s wrath in the same manner. Here too we can make the equation that His wrath is measured by His love. If God did not love so strongly, He would not become so angry.

In this atmosphere, the word “jealous” is a beautiful word. It belongs to the language of love. Only a suitor can be jealous. Hence the expression “to provoke to jealousy.” It is precisely because God is a loving husband that Israel can move Him to jealousy. Israel stirs up jealousy when it whores after other gods [Deut. 32:16, 21; 1 Kings 14:22;

**The Ten Commandments
constitute the real text of the
treaty between God and Israel.**



Ps. 78; Ezek. 8:3].—Harry M. Kuitert, *Signals from the Bible* (Eerdmans), p. 57.

2. The covenant at Sinai was ratified by a blood sacrifice and by a covenant meal eaten in God's presence by the representatives of the people (Ex. 24). Both of these practices were common in ancient covenant making. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on both altar and people. Exodus 24 does not tell us the significance of this ceremony, but it probably represents the cleansing and dedication of the nation to God (see Ezek. 16; Heb. 9:19-23).

3. Just as the rainbow was the sign of the Noahic covenant and circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, so the Sabbath of the fourth commandment was the designated sign of the covenant between God and Israel (see Ex. 31:16, 17; Ezek. 20:12). This sign or seal of God's covenant is not a new feature, however, for it appears in the record of God's covenant with Adam (see Gen. 2:1-3).

The Sabbath, the rainbow, and circumcision are, in fact, the three great covenants established by God at the three critical stages of the history of mankind, the creation (Gen. 1:1, 2, 3; Ex. 31:16f), the establishment of mankind after the flood (Gen. 9:1-17), and the birth of the Hebrew nation (Gen.

Whereas the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants accented the promises which God made, the Sinaitic covenant emphasized the promises which Israel made to God.

17).—*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol.2, p.264.

4. Although the background of the Sinaitic covenant was God's gracious deliverance from Egypt and His electing love toward Israel, there is no question but that the covenant accented the human stipulations. Fellowship between God and Israel would only be possible as Israel fulfilled the stipulations which required whole-souled obedience to God. Whereas the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants accented the promises which God made, the Sinaitic covenant emphasized the promises which Israel made to God (Ex. 19:8; 24:3).

As we pointed out earlier, God's covenant with Israel dominated the history of the Old Testament. That history is marked by several great covenant renewals. It was first renewed a few days after the covenant was broken by Israel's apostasy in making the golden calf (Ex. 34:10, 27-29). Then it was renewed to the next generation in the plains of Moab just before the death of Moses. The record of this renewal is the book of Deuteronomy. There was a great renewal of the covenant before the death of Joshua (see Josh. 24; here the covenant bears another remarkable resemblance to the suzerainty treaty). Another great covenant renewal occurred in the days of King Josiah (see 2 Kings 23:2, 3). The last great renewal in Old Testament history took place after the Babylonian Exile (see Neh. 9 & 10).

5. Davidic

God made a covenant with David concerning his royal house. The Lord declared:

... I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son.—2 Sam. 7:12-14.

There is no record of how this covenant was formalized or ratified. In fact, the word *covenant* is not used in 2 Samuel 7. Elsewhere, however, it is called a covenant and an oath (2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 89:3, 28, 29). Like the Abrahamic covenant, it was wholly promissory. God made a promise to David and confirmed it by an oath. We read of no promises made by the human party. "In David, the promise to the patriarchs is fulfilled, and renewed."—*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Covenant."

Although the covenant was promissory, it did not work automatically without human responsibility. The king who sat on David's throne was obligated to obey the commandments of God (1 Chron. 28:7; 2 Chron. 7:17, 18). Failure to do this would mean disqualification from the blessings of the covenant. This actually took place in the overthrow of Judah and the royal line in the Babylonian captivity. Yet even when the Jews were cast off into exile, the covenant with David gave them hope that a son would yet sit on David's throne, for even the children's apostasy could not prevent the fulfillment of the covenant (Ps. 89:29-37).

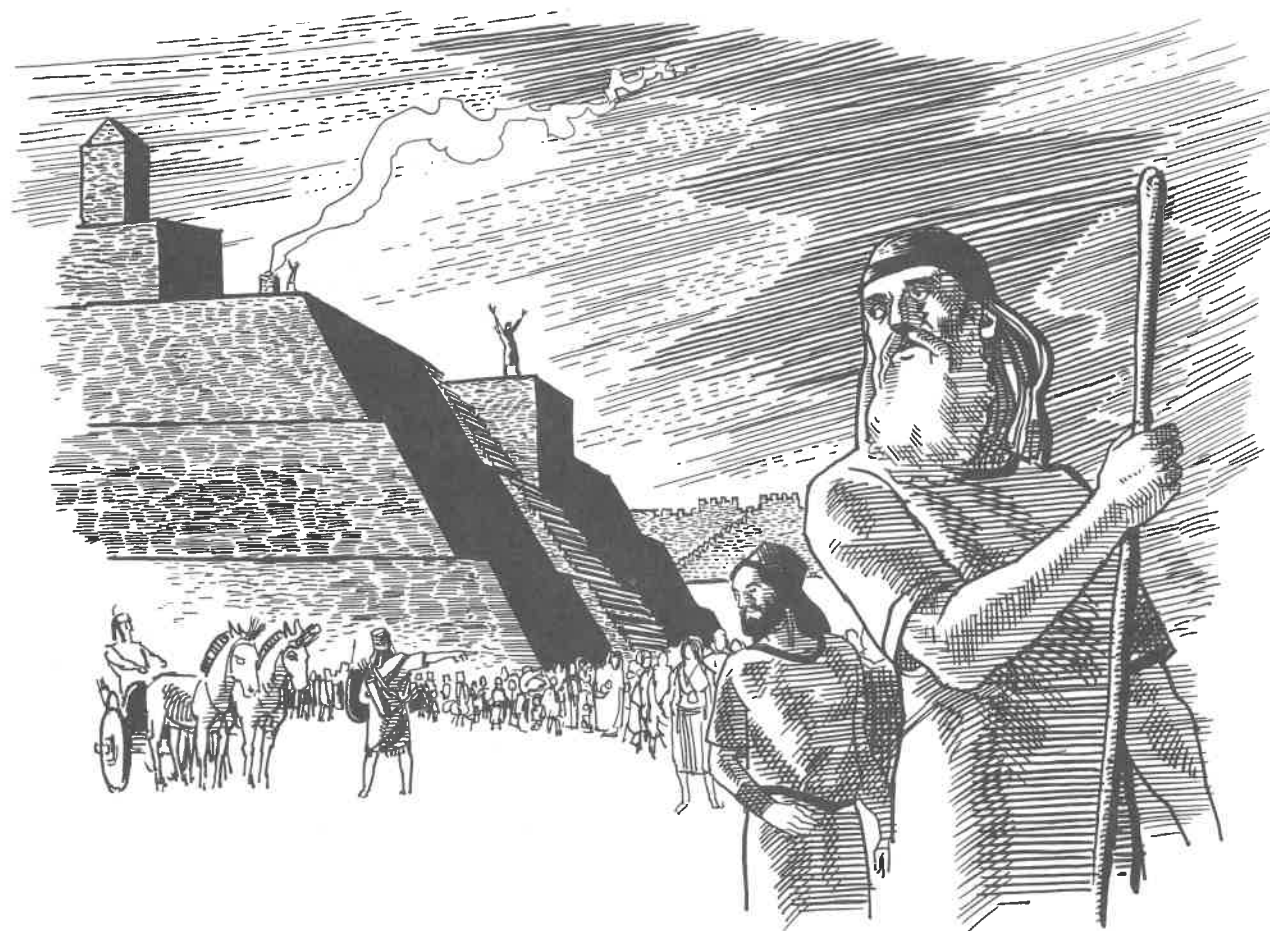
Like God's covenant with Abraham, the Davidic covenant reached beyond the immediate seed (Isaac or Solomon) and the immediate temporal blessings (Canaan or the throne in Jerusalem) to the real Seed of Abraham and David. That Seed was Christ. Solomon, who ruled in an era of peace and built the temple, was only a type of Christ. God promised that the Son of David would be David's Lord. He would sit at God's



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right hand and be a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedek (Ps. 110). Moreover, His dominion would be universal, and all nations would be brought into subjection to Him (Ps. 2). Even the Jews understood that the Davidic covenant was Messianic. The later prophets amplified this hope of Israel's coming King (Isa. 9:6; Zech. 9:10; Dan. 7:14; Ezek. 37:24, 25; Micah 5:2).



6. New

The new covenant is first brought to view in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an Husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This prophetic promise was made at the time of the Babylonian captivity. The chosen people had so transgressed the covenant that the great rupture took place.

As Adam, the covenant breaker, was expelled from Eden, so the Jews were expelled from the promised land and sent into captivity. Yet this was not to be a full end. The prophets spoke hopefully of a new beginning. Hosea likened it to the faithful God taking back the faithless wife. Isaiah spoke of a new exodus, Ezekiel of a new temple and a new Davidic King, while Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant.

No doubt the Jews anticipated that these prophecies would be fulfilled at the end of their seventy-year exile, and there was some justification for this expectation. Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant is written in the context of the return from captivity in Babylon (see Jer. 31). In the prophets there is a mingling of the local historical fulfillment and the final eschatological fulfillment.

When the promise of a new covenant with Israel is seen in its historical setting, it becomes clear that God is referring to a grand covenant *renewal*. The conditions of the covenant remain unchanged, but God will forgive the sins of His people and put His laws in their hearts (see also Ezek. 36:26, 27). The writing of God's law in the heart is not to be confined solely to New

Testament times, for through Isaiah the Lord addresses the returning exiles with these words: "Hearken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law . . ." (Isa. 51:7). Isaiah 56:1-6 refers to the covenant renewal also and mentions the Sabbath and the covenant interchangeably. Evidently Sabbath renewal and covenant renewal went hand in hand (see also Neh. 9:39; 10:31).

Of course, we now know that the new covenant promise reached its full realization in the coming of Jesus Christ and His gospel. Just before His death Jesus spoke of that death as a covenant sacrifice. He instituted the Supper as the sacral meal of the new covenant (Matt. 26:27, 28). But even here the covenant is the *kainos* covenant, and like the new (*kainos*) commandment and the new (*kainos*) heaven and earth in the Revelation, it really means a *renewed* covenant. Because of Christ's death as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), God is able to forgive the sins of believers and take man back again in lawful partnership and fellowship with Himself.

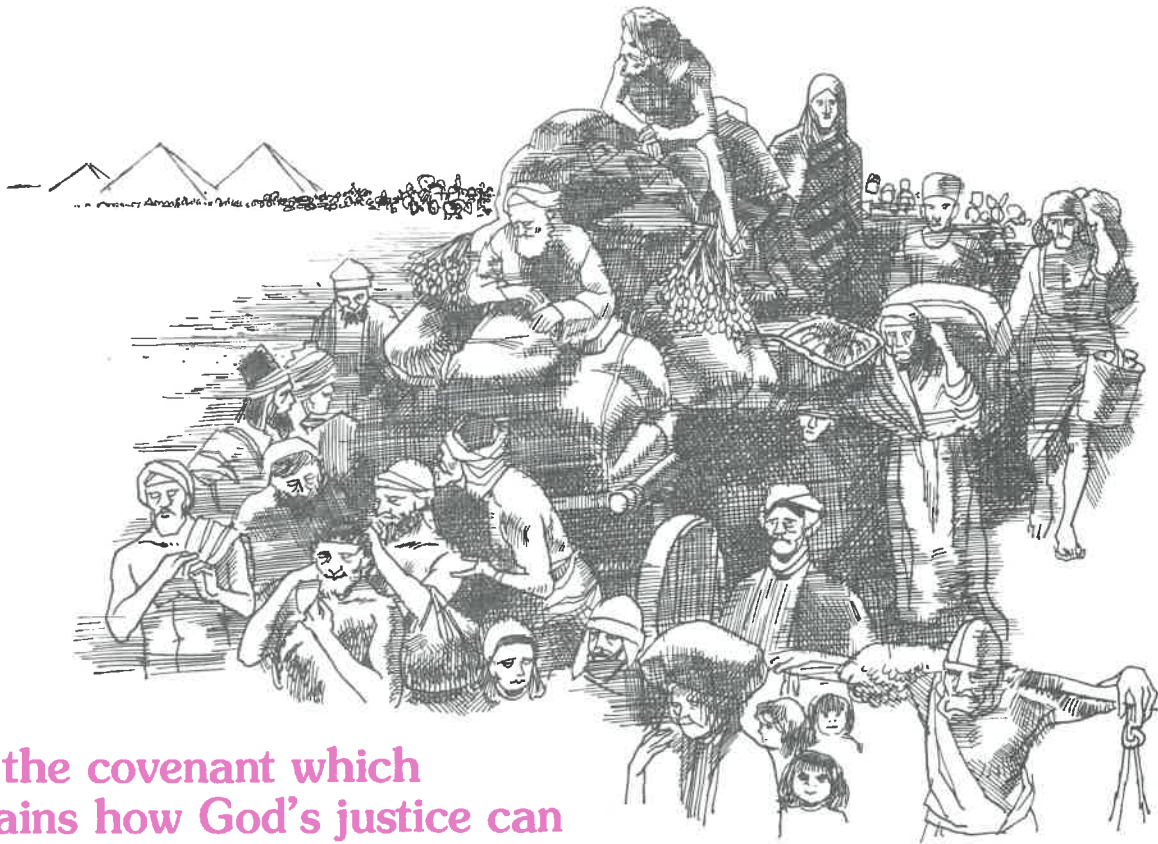
It was prophesied by Jeremiah that the new covenant would be made with "the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." The New Testament makes it clear that this new covenant is made with the new Israel. Since Christ is the Seed of Abraham, every believer, being in Christ, is a true son of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) and an heir of the new Canaan, which is the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1).

Like the covenant made with Abraham and David, the new covenant is overwhelmingly promissory. God promises forgiveness of sins and the writing of His law in the heart (see Heb. 8:10-12)—or as we could say theologically, justification and sanctification, a title to heaven and a fitness for heaven. This is not to deny that there are obligations resting upon new covenant believers. The New Testament is quite explicit about the sort of whole-hearted obedience demanded by those who are joint heirs with Christ. Yet their obedience does not fulfill the stipulations of God's covenant and is not the procuring cause of God's blessing. As it was with Abraham, the inheritance is wholly of grace, wholly of promise. The obedience of God's children adds nothing to God's promise but testifies that His children are genuine believers in Jesus Christ. While no man is saved by good works, it is also true that no one will be saved without good works; or to put it another way, salvation is not *by* obedience but *to* obedience. He who does not obey God demonstrates that he is not saved by grace through faith.

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It is the covenant which explains how God's justice can mean salvation to sinful men.

Key Words of the Covenant

The covenant concept is so fundamental in Old Testament theology that other important words derive their real force from the covenant context. In an excellent little book, *Signals from the Bible*, H. M. Kuitert shows how key words like *righteousness*, *justice*, *kindness*, *truth*, *peace*, *sin* and *election* are to be understood in relation to the covenant.

Righteousness

Righteousness is a covenantal word. When one does what is expected of him as a covenant partner, he is righteous. Righteousness is ascribed to the man who lives in a right relationship to God and acts as a true covenant partner. The law defines the terms of that relationship and spells out what is expected of the man in covenant with God. On the other hand, God is said to be righteous because His actions are true to His covenant relationship. When God delivers and saves His people, His righteousness is demonstrated because He proves true to His covenant pledge. From the human side faithful obedience is the content of righteousness (Deut.

6:25), but from the divine side the content of righteousness is salvation (Ps. 71:15, 24; 103:6; Isa. 45:8; 51:5; 56:1).

It is the covenant which explains how God's justice can mean salvation to sinful men. We might well expect, as did the unenlightened monk by the name of Martin Luther, that God's justice means nothing but wrath and condemnation of sinners who are fully deserving of death. But God has made with the children of Abraham (i.e., repentant believers, Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:7) a covenant of mercy (Deut. 7:12). He has pledged Himself to be kind and gracious to them in spite of their sinful state. Thus when God delivers the undeserving Hebrews from Egypt, it is an act of justice because He is showing Himself true to the covenant which He made with Abraham (Ex. 2:24, 25). When sinful Israel repents and cries unto the Lord for deliverance from her enemies, it is God's justice which delivers her by the hand of the judges (see the book of Judges).

Many times did He deliver them; but they provoked Him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard

their cry: and He remembered for them His covenant, and repented according to the multitude of His mercies. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto Thy holy name, and to triumph in Thy praise. —Ps. 106:43-47.

Many times does the Psalmist call upon God's righteousness (justice) to save him in his sore distress. Psalm 71, for instance, is a celebration of God's saving justice:

In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in Thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline Thine ear unto me, and save me. Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: Thou hast given commandment to save me; for Thou art my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For Thou art my hope, O Lord God: Thou art my trust from my youth. . . . My mouth shall shew forth Thy *righteousness* and Thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. . . . My tongue also shall talk of Thy *righteousness* all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt. —Ps. 71:1-5, 15, 24.

Nowhere is the saving justice of God more poignantly displayed than in Psalm 51. David had sinned grievously. He deserved to die and to be cut off from fellowship with God. But David repents and pleads for covenant mercy. He argues that the extension of divine mercy would be an act of God's justice, for he prays, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness" (Ps. 51:14). Again the Psalmist celebrates the joy of divine forgiveness in these words, "The Lord executeth righteousness [justice] and judgment for all that are oppressed" (Ps. 103:6; see context).

Isaiah describes Israel's deliverance from Babylon and her restoration to divine favor and privileges as an act of divine justice. It was not justice in the sense that Israel deserved to be the recipient of God's saving act (for the prophet complains that Israel's righteousness was like a filthy rag), but it was justice in that God was being true to His covenant in spite of Israel's obvious sinfulness. Isaiah 40 to 66 is mostly one inspired celebration of God's righteousness, which means salvation for His oppressed people.

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it. —Isa. 45:8.

My righteousness is near; My salvation is gone forth, and Mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon Me, and on Mine arm shall they trust. —Isa. 51:5.



When Paul proclaims that the gospel reveals the righteousness (justice) of God, which is salvation to all who believe, he is setting forth the essential covenant message of the Old Testament.

Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. —Isa. 56:1.

When Paul proclaims that the gospel reveals the righteousness (justice) of God, which is salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16, 17), he is setting forth the essential covenant message of the Old Testament. But he does it in the light of God's final and ultimate act of salvation, which has taken place in the death and resurrection of Christ. All who believe are incorporated into that saving event and are thereby forgiven, saved from well-deserved wrath, and justified unto life eternal—and all this as an act of divine justice. One main difference between the Old Testament era and the era of Paul's gospel is this: In the Old Testament it remained somewhat of a mystery how a just God could pardon sin and save sinners like David and the exiled Jews. But in Paul's gospel the secret is revealed, for he points to the pro-

pitiatory death of Jesus as the grounds of God's being able to pass over the sins of a former age while still being just (Rom. 3:25, 26).

Biblical theology is covenant theology. Because it grounds man's salvation on God's justice, it gives an absolutely solid basis for a man's faith. While he may be tempted to think that God's mercy may run out, his own conscience tells him that God will be just. But instead of this terrifying him, he may look in faith to God's covenant pledge (now sealed in full view by the death of Christ) and know that a just God must forgive and save those who put their trust in the God of the covenant.

Unrighteousness

Unrighteousness or *sin* means failing to do what is expected as a covenant partner. Sin is an act of infidelity and unfaithfulness to the covenant responsibility. Man's covenant responsibility is spelled out in the Ten Commandments—the "testimony" or *edut*—which constitute the oath-bound covenant stipulations. The Westminster Confession, therefore, is quite right and biblically concrete when it defines sin as any lack of conformity to the law of God. The covenant is a legally based fellowship, and the law of God merely spells out the terms of that covenant fellowship.

The covenant also helps us to understand the gravity of sin. All sin must ultimately be a sin against the God of the covenant (Ps. 51:4). The sinner is a covenant breaker who offers insult to the covenant Maker. He incurs the curse of the covenant, a curse that is so terrible that its weight and intensity can only be seen in the hell which was exhibited in the execution of Christ.

Kindness and Wrath

Another important covenant word is the Hebrew word *hesed*—often translated as *kindness*, *goodness*, *loving-kindness* or *steadfast love*. Says John Bright:

The word *hesed* cannot be exactly translated. . . . The word is intimately related to the idea of the covenant. When it is used of God, it is very nearly the equivalent of "grace." It refers to the favor of God which summoned Israel into covenant and the steadfast love which he shows them even in spite of unworthiness. When used of man, the word denotes that proper response to grace which is utter loyalty to the covenant of God and obedience to his will.—*The Kingdom of God* (Abingdon), p. 28.

The covenant with Israel is likened to a marriage bond. Throughout the Old Testament God is represented as the *hesed* (faithful, gracious) Husband. Israel, on the other hand, is not *hesed*; she is like an unfaithful, disloyal wife. Hosea complains that her *hesed* is like a fickle morning cloud (Hosea 6:4). In Deuteronomy 7:12 God's covenant is called the covenant of *hesed* (mercy).

The Westminster Confession is quite right and biblically concrete when it defines sin as any lack of conformity to the law of God.

The wrath of God is also associated with the covenant. The covenant demands an exclusive fellowship between God and Israel as if they were marriage partners (Ezek. 16; Hosea 1-3). God will tolerate no rivals. God's faithfulness to His covenant is measured by the intensity of His jealousy (Ex. 20:5). "His wrath is measured by His love. If God did not love so strongly, He would not become so angry."—Kuitert, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Election

The biblical idea of election is closely bound up with the covenant. In fact, it would be safe to say that the idea of election is so completely covenantal that it cannot be understood apart from the covenant.

We have seen that God's covenant is unilateral in origin. The New Testament can even liken it to a will and testament. When God makes a covenant with man or with a nation, it is wholly of the divine initiative. And when God calls the human party into covenant fellowship, this is God's act of election. When God gave Israel His covenant, He thereby elected her to be His people.

The idea of election is so completely covenantal that it cannot be understood apart from the covenant.



Election is as unilateral in origin as a will and testament. The election of Israel, therefore, was wholly of grace. It was absolutely unmerited. (See Ezekiel 16:3-14 for a graphic portrayal of Israel's unmerited election.)

Moses made it clear to the Hebrews that they were not delivered from Egypt or given the land of Canaan because they deserved it in any way:

The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.—Deut. 7:7, 8.

Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.—Deut. 9:6.

Israel knew that she was God's elect nation—the chosen people. In a sense she knew it too well. She utterly misinterpreted the meaning of her election. She assumed that her election was *unconditional*—that election gave her a mandate on the future irrespective of how she behaved. The Jews were so confident that they were God's elect people that the prophets' messages of doom were treated as an idle tale. The Israelites built themselves up in such a fatuous conceit about their

“The Old Testament standpoint is carried over into the New Testament and determines the meaning of the concept of election in the New Testament.” — Alan Richardson.

election that even the iron fist of the prophet could not break through their insulated self-confidence. They failed to see that the covenant was bilateral in operation. It could therefore be broken, and its privileges could be forfeited. Israel lived in a fool's paradise, not realizing that election did not mean immunity from punishment. Rather, it decreed that punishment for sin would be greater. The Lord declared through Amos, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2).

Any New Testament doctrine of election should be seen in the light of its Old Testament meaning. Alan Richardson is quite correct when he says, “The Old Testament standpoint is carried over into the New Testament and determines the meaning of the concept of

election in the New Testament.”—*An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (Harper & Row), p. 271. Paul points the church back to ancient Israel with this warning: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

The election of the Jewish nation did not prevent her from being cut off. Although election was unmerited, it was not unconditional.¹ The covenant relation implied reciprocity. Divorce was not impossible. So Paul again warns the elect gospel community:

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say



¹We suggest that it may be prudent to make a distinction between the adjectives *unmerited* and *unconditional* and that we should use the former and not the latter when we speak of election. The word *unmerited* preserves the gratuitous nature of election, but it does not pose the danger of implying that an elect person or nation can be in God's favor irrespective of his or her own course of action. So too we can say that salvation is unmerited, but it is dangerous to say that people are saved unconditionally. Of course, some use the expression *unconditional election* to mean *unmerited election*, and they do not mean that a man can be elect if he flagrantly sins. If nothing further is meant by *unconditional* than the *meritorious cause*, there can be no objection to *unconditional election*.

then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.—Rom. 11:17-21.

Is it not still true that among those of us who are most confident of our election (either individually or corporately) we find the same arrogant spirit of triumphalism as was found among the Jews? We may feel that we alone are the true heirs of the Reformers, the chosen people who have the orthodox faith (especially about election). We may feel that we can thank God that we are not like those “heretics” or “Babylonians.” Yet we fail to see that our own dead churches and dry orthodoxy (as dry as the hills of Gilboa, which had neither dew nor rain) expose us to the same fate as the self-confident Jews who perished while glorying in their election. The whole of Peter's second Epistle (especially 1:5-12; 2:20-22; 3:14-17) is a warning against the notion of unconditional election,² and it is perhaps significant that right in this context Peter speaks of the misuse of some of Paul's Epistles (see 2 Peter 3:15, 16).

Peace

Peace is the heart of the covenant, for covenant means union and communion in a peaceful relationship. So we should not be surprised to find that the words *covenant* and *peace* are often found together. The covenant is even called “a covenant of peace” (see Ezek. 34:25; 37:26; 1 Kings 5:12; Ps. 55:20, 21). The Hebrew word for *peace* (*shalom*) is much broader than what may today be taken for a certain tranquillity of mind. *Shalom* also means prosperity, abundance, fullness of blessing, health and well-being. Peace is the benefit of God's covenant, and its blessing is exceedingly great.

These are just some key words whose meanings are amplified and vitalized when seen in their relation to the covenant. There are many more words and ideas that the diligent student, wide awake to the importance of the covenant, could rediscover. If the books of the Bible are studied as covenant documents, they will yield many covenant treasures.

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²See footnote 1.



The Prophets of the Covenant

The prophets were messengers who were fully aware of the meaning of Israel's election and her covenant responsibilities.

The whole of Israelite religion and history was girded by the knowledge that God, in a historical act, had chosen Israel to be His people and had entered into a covenant with her.

The memory of the Exodus towered over the national consciousness for all time to come. The prophets harked back to it repeatedly. Here is the unforgettable example of the power and grace of God (Amos 2:9-11; Micah 6:2-5; Ezek. 20:5-7), here he carried infant Israel as a little child (Hos. 11:1), here he married her in the covenant ceremony and claimed her loyalty forevermore (Hosea 2; Jer. 2:2, 3).
—John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 27.

Once we grasp how omnipresent is the covenant concept in the Old Testament and how many words and expressions allude to it, we have a better basis to understand the message of the prophets. The prophets may not use the actual word *covenant* frequently (as in Isa. 24:5; 59:21; Jer. 11:3, 10; 22:9; Hosea 6:7; 8:1; Mal. 2:4; 1 Kings 19:14; Ezek. 16:8), and some of them do not use the word at all; but their many allusions to the covenant show that their message was conditioned by the covenant idea.

The prophets were men of the covenant. They were messengers who were fully aware of the meaning of Israel's election and her covenant responsibilities, but they charged her with failing to live up to the terms of the covenant relationship. Particularly striking was their frequent use of the figure of marital unfaithfulness to describe Israel's course of action (see Ezek. 16; Jer. 2; Hosea 1-3).

The prophets found it hard to break through Israel's fatuous conceit, which was nourished by a false view of her election. The covenant was a bilateral agreement, and it could be broken. Israel's glorious destiny could be achieved only if she were obedient. But Israel was unfaithful; she had broken the covenant and forfeited all claims on the divine favor. Therefore judgment and doom would follow.

A number of the prophetic books contain a literary form which in recent years has been identified as a covenant *lawsuit*. Examples of this are found in Isaiah 1:2, 3, Micah 6:1-8 and Jeremiah 2:4-13. On the basis of His covenant with His people God is represented as suing His people before a court of law for breach of contract. In this procedure the witnesses of the covenant—heaven and earth—are duly called. Micah's demand for *justice (mishpat)*, *mercy (hesed)*, and the humble walk with God (Micah 6:8) is based on what is ex-



The prophets are not ecstatic visionaries but lawyers of the covenant with their feet on the ground. They frame their oracles of woe in terms echoing the curses associated with the covenant.

pected of a covenant partner. The prophets are not ecstatic visionaries but lawyers of the covenant with their feet on the ground. They convict Israel of violating the covenant.

One of the most striking features of the prophets is the way in which they pronounce their message of judgment and doom. They frame their oracles of woe in terms echoing the curses associated with the covenant. In Leviticus 26:15, 22 the Lord had warned, "If you reject My statutes . . . and thus break My covenant, then I will send among you wild animals which shall make you bereft of children and destroy your cattle, and make

you few in number and your ways desolate." So Jeremiah 8:17 declares: "For behold I will send among you venomous snakes, against which there is no incantation. They shall bite you, without any healing." And Jeremiah 5:6 says, "Therefore a lion from the forest will smite them; a desert wolf shall ravage them. A panther is watching over their cities; everyone who leaves them shall be torn in pieces."

Deuteronomy 28:53-57 mentions among the curses the awful doom of people eating their own children. Ezekiel 5:10 pronounces this curse on Israel (see also Hosea 13:7, 8). Delbert Hillers is able to point out many instances where international treaties contain curses which bear a remarkable similarity to the curses pronounced on Israel by the prophets.

. . . the prophets were not arbitrary in choosing the lurid figures in which they depicted the wrath to come. They were not indulging a morbid imagination but were fundamentally like lawyers quoting the law: this is just what the covenant had said would happen.—*Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*, p. 134.

Because Israel had broken the covenant, the time came when she was dispossessed of homeland, king-

dom, temple and people. That is where the book of Daniel opens. It opens with a calamity which is like the fall of Adam all over again. Daniel's intercessory prayer (Dan. 9) shows that the prophet well knew that Israel was suffering the results of a violated covenant:

. . . and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments . . . Yea, all Israel have transgressed Thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey Thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against Him. —Dan. 9:4, 11.

The prophet intercedes with God on the basis of His covenant faithfulness. God's righteousness means that He will forgive and renew His covenant with those who repent (Dan. 9:15-19). It was in this context that God promised to send the Messiah to take away sin and confirm His covenant. Daniel, of course, was praying for the restoration of the Jews from captivity and a renewal of the covenant after the Exile. Such a renewal did take place under Ezra and Nehemiah (see Neh. 9 & 10), but God knew that it would be no more stable than before, because it was based on a *hesed* no more stable than a morning cloud. So in answering Daniel's prayer for forgiveness and restoration (i.e., a renewal of the covenant), God said that He would send His Messiah to make the covenant permanent (see Dan. 9:24-27).¹

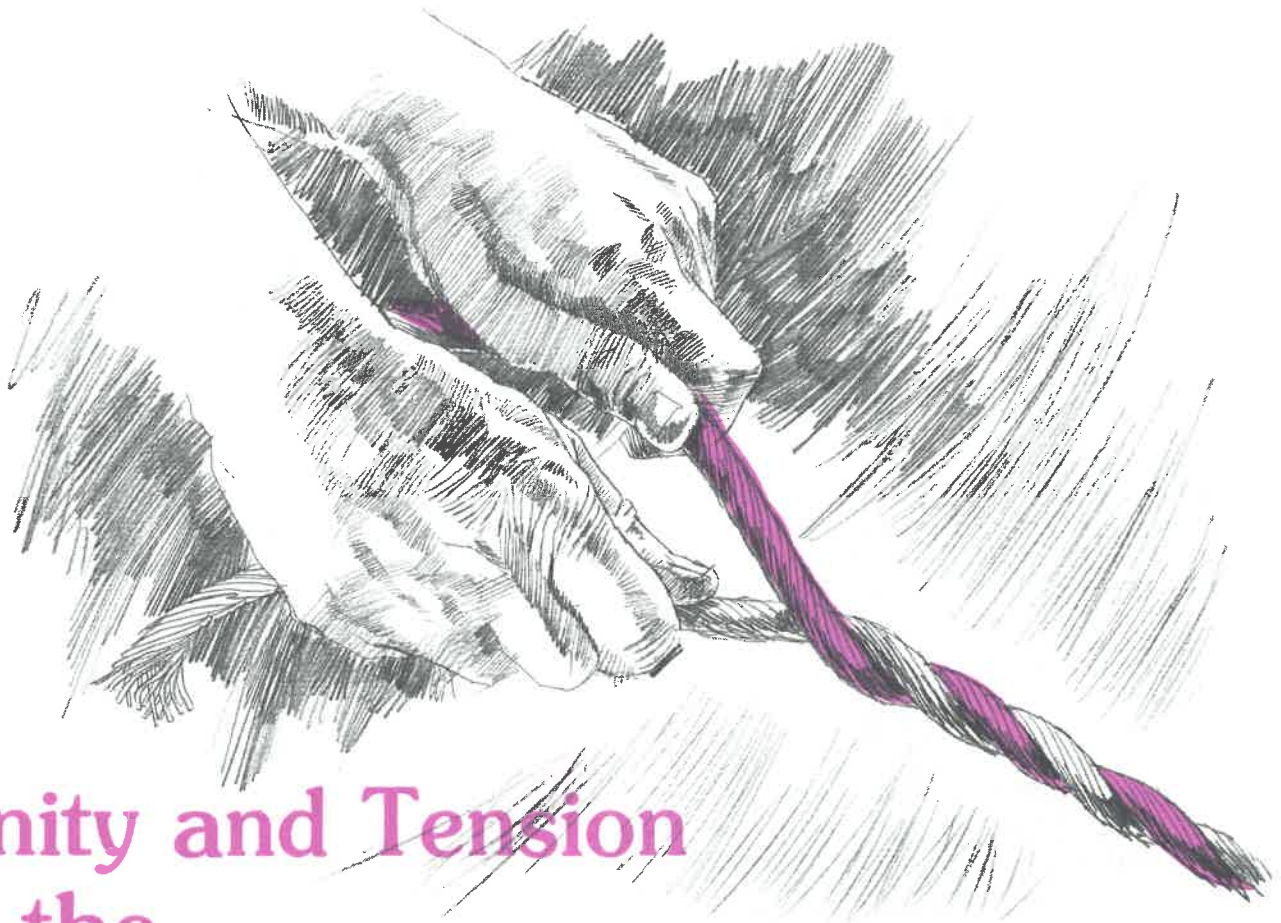
What God needed was a faithful partner in the covenant, else the covenant relationship would always break down. Such a partner He would find in the Messiah, and then, founded upon Him, God's covenant would be sure and everlasting.

The Old Testament ends on a note of unfulfillment. Endless covenant renewals with Israel would never do. While the covenant might be renewed by sacrifice (P.s. 50:5), a multitude of annual sacrifices could not establish an everlasting covenant. The Old Testament yearns for one final sacrifice that would suffice to renew the covenant once and forevermore.

¹The whole context of Daniel 9 is about the covenant between God and His people. Daniel prays for the renewal of the covenant which Israel has broken. The covenant of Daniel 9:27 is "the covenant"—the one that the whole record of salvation-history is about. It is the Messiah who confirms that covenant, for He is the Prince (Dan. 8:25; 11:22) and the Messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1; see also Isa. 42:6). The idea of injecting a supposed covenant of anti-christ into Daniel 9:27 is an importation which has nothing to do with the context.

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Unity and Tension in the Covenants

Thus far we have merely done the groundwork in our study of the covenants. We are now about to enter upon an intensely interesting yet somewhat difficult area. It is easy enough to identify the different covenants as we have done. That is a very straightforward task. But it is far more difficult to relate the covenants (some would say disrelate them) in such a way that we can appreciate the divine system and order throughout.

Reformed theologians tend to stress the unity of the covenants. K.M. Campbell, for instance, calls his essay *God's Covenant*. The title indicates that he believes that God only has one covenant and that each covenant is but a further unfolding of that one covenant. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, major on the differences between the covenants. There is no doubt that each approach is motivated by a sincere effort to gather all the strands of salvation-history into some cogent system and some clearly-defined order.

Reformed scholars find their integrating principle in their concept of the divine decrees which from the beginning predestined everything which would come to pass. Campbell suggests, for instance, that Mendenhall finds

a real tension between the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants simply because he does not understand the Reformed theology of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. But do these Reformed premises solve this tension as simply as this? We think not. A philosophical concept of election and predestination is not sufficient to integrate all these great biblical truths, for the Bible moves on a far more dynamic plane than a philosophical concept about the divine decrees. There is a lot to be said in favor of the Reformed emphasis on the unity of the covenants, but as we will see, it is not the whole story.

The dispensational system is far less sophisticated. In fact, to many scholars it seems naive, crude and simplistic. But it is a system which has an order in it which can be easily followed. Therefore it has an appeal to those who want a system that is understandable. It has to be said, however, that it is an artificial device which does not come from the Bible but is imposed on the Bible. It is sometimes used as if the essence of Bible study were in learning a mechanical secret of how to put all the pieces of a fantastic jigsaw puzzle together.

It is unquestionably a “Johnny-come-lately” device (nineteenth century invention) never thought of or used before in the history of the church. Rather than seeing unity in the covenants, dispensationalists tend to see only tension. So instead of emphasizing the unity of the covenants, they tend to emphasize the distinctions. And as we will see, they do have a point.

We will now show that there is both a unity and a distinction in the covenants. Just as we find unity and distinction in Christology (the two natures of Christ) and soteriology (justification and sanctification), so we will find unity and distinction in our study of the covenants.

The Unity of the Covenants

On general principles, we must expect to find unity in the covenants. The fact of one God, one gospel (Rev. 14:6; Heb. 4:2), one way of salvation, and one eternal moral law should point us in this direction. Dispensation- alists have been rightly faulted for severing the essential unity of the Bible, for setting off law against grace, and the Old Testament against the New. John Bright is unquestionably right when he says that the New Testament does not contribute a new ethic or a new religion, for the Bible is one book.¹

As touching God’s covenants with men, there is one fundamental purpose and relationship expressed or implied in all of them. It is contained in this promise: “. . . [I] will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:33; see also Gen. 17:7, 8; Ex. 19:5, 6; 20:2; Deut. 29:13; 2 Sam. 7:14; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; Ezek. 36:25-28; 37:26, 27; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3).

The one promise really includes all other promises.
—Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 279.

The summary expression of the covenant is the same throughout, both in the Old and New Testament: “I will be thy God.” It is the expression of the essential content of the covenant with Abraham, Gen. 17:7, of the Sinaitic covenant, Ex. 19:5; 20:1, of the covenant of the Plains of Moab, Deut. 29:13, of the Davidic covenant, 2 Sam. 7:14, and of the new covenant, Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10. This promise is really an all-comprehensive summary and contains a guarantee of the most perfect covenant blessings.—*Ibid.*

In specific details we also find that the unity of the covenants is indicated by the following evidence:

1. “My Covenant” Is Singular. Throughout the Old Testament the Lord refers to the covenant as “My covenant”—always in the singular. It is introduced to Noah as something which is already in existence (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11). Abraham is given the privilege of entering into it (Gen. 17:2, 4, 7). Israel is delivered from Egypt because God remembers His covenant with Abraham

Just as we find unity and distinction in Christology and soteriology, so we will find unity and distinction in our study of the covenants.

¹*The Kingdom of God*, pp. 195-200.

(Ex. 2:24; 6:4, 5). God brings the people to Sinai and says, "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep *My covenant*, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me . . ." (Ex. 19:5).

Sometimes the covenant is called "His covenant" (as in Deuteronomy 4:13) or "the covenant" (as in Daniel 9:4, 27 and 11:30, 32). This shows us that God has one covenant in mind—a covenant which He renews to different people at different stages of salvation-history.

2. "Everlasting" or "Perpetual" Covenant Is Applied to All. Each covenant which God enters into is called an everlasting or perpetual covenant—whether with Noah (Gen. 9:16), with Abraham (Gen. 17:7, 13), with Israel (Ex. 31:16), with David (1 Chron. 16:17), with mankind in general (Isa. 24:5), the renewed covenant after the Exile (Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26), or the covenant of the New Testament (Heb. 13:20). This concept of one everlasting covenant is comparable with that of one everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6). So the Psalmist can say:

His work is honourable and glorious: and His righteousness endureth forever. He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear Him: He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He hath shewed His people the power of His works, that He may give them the heritage of the heathen. The works of His hands are verity and judgment; all His commandments are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He sent redemption unto His people: He hath commanded His covenant forever: holy and reverend is His name.—Ps. 111:3-9.

3. Israel Is Given Abraham's Covenant. The unity of the two major Old Testament covenants—the Abrahamic and Israelitic—is clearly established by the Old Testament record. Israel is continually reminded that the Lord has in mind the covenant with Abraham and is acting in accordance with it (Deut. 1:8; 7:7, 8; Lev. 26:42; Ex. 2:24; 6:4, 5; 32:13). God leads His people out of Egypt and into Canaan on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant.

The covenant made with Abraham and the covenant

The unity of the two major Old Testament covenants — the Abrahamic and Israelitic — is clearly established by the Old Testament record.

God has one covenant in mind — a covenant which He renews to different people at different stages of salvation-history.

The concept of one everlasting covenant is comparable with that of one everlasting gospel.

made with Israel are presented in Psalm 105:8-10 as being one covenant:

He hath remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant . . .

4. The Law Is Not Contrary to the Abrahamic Covenant. In Galatians 3:15-22 Paul argues that since the covenant was confirmed by God to Abraham, nothing which happened at Sinai could disannul or add anything to it. He says that the law was not against (contrary to) the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

5. The Grace Basis of the Sinaitic Covenant. All acknowledge that grace was the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant. Abraham "believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). But it is sometimes represented that God held out to Israel at Sinai nothing but a legalistic covenant of works, a system of salvation by keeping the law. After all, does not Paul liken the Sinaitic covenant to Hagar and a yoke of bondage? (Gal. 4:22-25). Does not he also call it a ministration of death? (2 Cor. 3:7). And does not the writer to the Hebrews describe it as something imposed upon God's people until the time of reformation? (Heb. 9:10).

We must be careful, however, in reading the New Testament strictures against the "old covenant" back into the Old Testament. What the apostles were inveighing against was not the divine intent at Sinai but the way that the Jews had misunderstood and perverted what God gave to them.



The Old Testament does not look upon the Exodus and the covenant with Israel negatively. The deliverance from Egypt is presented as a mighty exhibition of saving, redeeming grace to be celebrated by Israel in all generations to come.

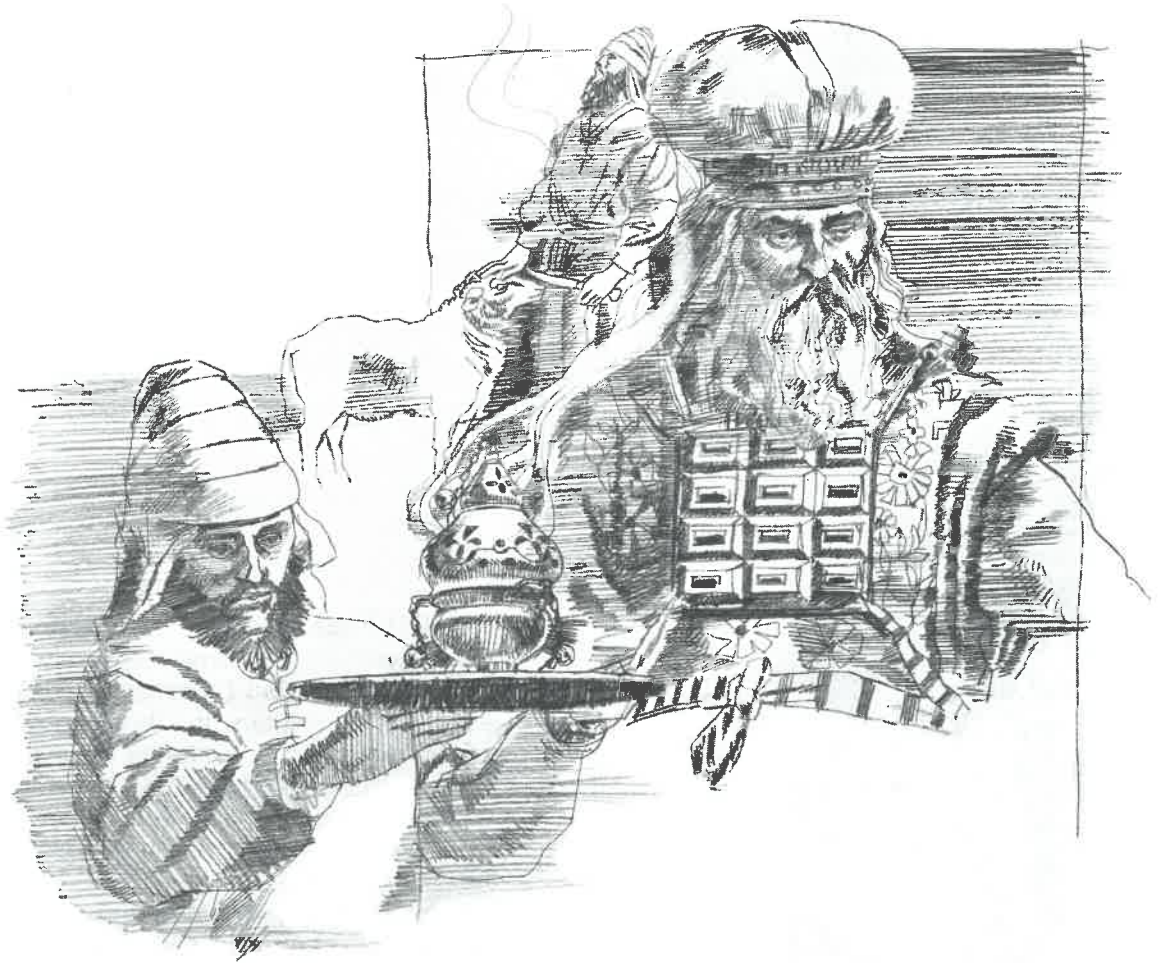
The Old Testament does not look upon the Exodus and the covenant with Israel negatively. They are not represented by the Old Testament documents as some disaster. On the contrary, the deliverance from Egypt is presented as a mighty exhibition of saving, redeeming grace to be celebrated by Israel in all generations to come. The Psalms and the prophets never seem to tire of repeating God's mercy which was exhibited to Israel at the time of the Exodus.

Then too, Moses and the prophets call attention to Israel's unmerited election. God chose a race of slaves. He gave them Canaan for no goodness or achievement on their part (Deut. 4:37; 7:7, 8). Hosea depicts God as tenderly leading Israel like a father leads his little child and teaches him to walk (Hosea 11:1-4). Ezekiel pictures God as choosing and wooing His bride in the desert and then, out of sheer grace, decking her with beautiful apparel and giving her royal status and dignity before the nations (Ezek. 16).

All the miracles manifested in the deliverance from Egypt were exhibitions of unmerited, redeeming grace. The passing over the firstborn by virtue of the sprinkled blood, the giving of the water from the rock ("that rock was Christ"), and the bread from heaven were the means by which God preached the gospel to His ancient people (Heb. 4:2).

And what of the Ten Commandments? Did God say that they were to be the means of salvation for Israel? On the contrary, the commandments were prefaced with the good news, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:1). Redemption preceded the giving of the law. The people were not asked to keep the law in order to be saved but because they were saved. They were not delivered by obedience but to obedience.

Think too of the sanctuary and its services, which were given to teach by types and shadows the lessons



of salvation by substitution (the sacrifices) representation (the high priest) and imputation (incense). What else was the tabernacle ritual to teach but the principles of salvation by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith?

Lutheran scholar J.M. Myers, in his little book, *Grace and Torah* (Fortress), points out how grace was the foundation of the giving of the law at Sinai. He shows that the relationship between the Exodus (Passover) and the law finds its parallel in the book of Romans, where the believer's redemption by Christ precedes the ethical demands of Romans 12 to 15.

Even the law itself is seen in the Old Testament as a gift of God (Deut. 33:2). It was given for Israel's good (Deut. 6:24). In Psalm 119 the law is a theme that calls forth endless litanies. Even in the New Testament the law is regarded as one of the great gifts which God gave to Israel (Rom. 2:17; 3:2; 9:4).

6. New Covenant Means Renewed Covenant.

Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant with the house of Israel obviously refers to a renewed covenant. The context of Jeremiah 31 is about Israel's return to Palestine at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Just as Ezekiel prophesied about the post-Exile in the imagery

When we come to the New Testament, we find that all the Old Testament hopes and promises blossom out in the glorious reality of fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is not the negation of the Old Testament covenant history.

of building a new temple and Isaiah employs the language of a new exodus movement, so Jeremiah speaks about the new beginning for Israel in terms of a new covenant. Although God had put away His unfaithful wife, the Exile was not to be the full end. There would be a renewing of the covenant relationship with the faithful remnant who survived the captivity.

The prophecy of the new covenant did not, of course, reach its full and final fulfillment in the postexilic restoration. The prophets looked beyond this historical event to that grand eschatological fulfillment in the Christ event. The New Testament apostles see that the death and resurrection of Christ are the real Passover, the real raising up of God's temple, and the real ratification of the new covenant with God's remnant or new Israel. Thus when we come to the New Testament, we find that all the Old Testament hopes and promises blossom out in the glorious reality of fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is not the negation of the Old Testament covenant history. He does not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). In the New Testament the Greek word for *new* in *new* covenant is *kainos*. It is the same word which is used for "new commandment," "new man," and "a new heaven and a new earth." It really means *renewed*. Old Testament history is marked by many covenant renewals. But that history climaxes in the grand covenant renewal which took place in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Distinction of the Covenants

We have seen that it is not difficult to marshal a lot of evidence on the side of unity between the different covenants. This points in the direction of God's having one everlasting covenant. But unity of the covenants is not the whole picture—just as unity in the Godhead, unity in the two natures of Christ, or unity between justification and sanctification is not all that needs to be said. Sound theology must recognize that there is distinction in all these areas as well as harmony.² There is a distinction as well as a harmony of the Persons in the Godhead. There is a distinction as well as a harmony between the divine and human natures of Christ. There is a distinction as well as a harmony between justification and sanctification. So too, there is the element of distinction as well as unity in the covenants. Mendenhall is not incorrect for pointing to a certain tension which exists between the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants.

First of all, the tension is very clear in the mind of Paul and the writer to the Hebrews. The old Sinaitic covenant is a "ministration of death"; it is Hagar and bondage (2 Cor. 3; Gal. 4). The new covenant is life and liberty. The promises of the old were faulty, but

²We might use music to illustrate the necessity of both distinction and harmony. Music consists of both elements; and so does a sound theology.

Mendenhall is not incorrect for pointing to a certain tension which exists between the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants.

the promises of the new are better (see Heb. 8). One may argue, of course, that the apostles are really only looking at the way in which Judaism perverted the law and not at the covenant as God gave it. But it must be remembered that Israel's blindness was not a late development, but according to Paul the veil was upon the Jews' hearts going clear back in history to Mount Sinai (2 Cor. 3:13-15).

Despite all the evidence which may be marshaled to show the grace of God exhibited in the Exodus and in the giving of the law, and despite all the evidence that God wanted to bless Israel according to His covenant with Abraham, there are features which appear in the covenant at Sinai which do not appear in the covenant with Abraham. To be specific:

1. God's covenant with Abraham was promissory. We read of no promises which Abraham made to God. At Sinai, however, great emphasis is given to the promises made by the people.

2. The terms and stipulations of the covenant were not spelled out to Abraham. He was not promised a seed and a future inheritance on the grounds of his fulfilling covenant stipulations. It is true that Abraham obeyed God (Gen. 18:19; 22:18; 26:5), but this obedience did not fulfill the covenant stipulations. His was not a works-righteousness but a faith righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Paul emphasizes that Abraham was not given the inheritance because of any achievement on his part in keeping the law, but he was given the inheritance by promise (Gal. 3:17, 18).

On the other hand, the human stipulations were spelled out at Sinai. The Ten Words of the testimony (*edut*) were the oath-bound stipulations which the people pledged themselves to fulfill. True, God did not give them Canaan because they carried out the stipulations, for

they would never have entered Canaan on that basis (they entered Canaan because of God's promise to Abraham). Yet there are too many clear statements in Moses to avoid the conclusion that Israel's ultimate and future prosperity and fellowship with God rested on their carrying out the terms of the covenant. Paul did not read Moses incorrectly when he said, "Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it" (Rom. 10:5, RSV; cf. Lev. 18:5).

In this respect Sinai was an *obligatory* covenant—meaning that the human obligations were spelled out and appeared to rest (we say this guardedly) on the human party. We say this guardedly because there is some uncertainty among scholars as to whether the Ten Commandments (which are the words of the covenant) should be translated as indicatives ("You will have no other gods before Me . . . You will not steal," etc.) or imperatives ("You shall not," etc.). Perhaps this ambiguity is not without meaning. If Israel had been sensible of her sinful inability to fulfill the stipulations, she might have staked her future on the divine promises, as Abraham did, rather than upon her conceited notion that it was well within her power to fulfill the stipulations.

However, Israel did not see this, for as Paul says, the veil was over her heart. She saw only the stipulations which she must fulfill. She came to believe that the inheritance would be given to her on account of her obedience to the law. By the time of Paul this was the entrenched delusion of Judaism.

God, however, was a good teacher. He spelled out the stipulations of the covenant at Sinai, not because He wanted to lead Israel away from faith-righteousness, but because He wanted to lead her to it (see Gal. 3:24). Paul says that the law (the righteous stipulations of the covenant) was added because of Israel's sinfulness (Gal. 3:19). The stern, inflexible moral demands of a law demanding perfect righteousness, laid squarely on the shoulders of a sinfully proud people, would teach some of them to acknowledge their utter inability to fulfill the terms of the covenant by their own righteousness.

In other words, Israel entered a covenant of works, taking upon herself the obligation of fulfilling the human terms of the covenant. This was not by divine intent but by divine permission. In this respect she stood in the same covenant relationship to God as did Adam in Eden. The big difference, of course, was that whereas Adam was amply endowed with a perfect nature to carry out the terms of the covenant, Israel, whose humanity had long since lost those original endowments, was not qualified to carry out one jot of the stipulations, which demanded perfect righteousness.

We could summarize this section by saying that whereas the Adamic and Sinaitic covenants are obligatory, the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic and new covenants are promissory.

If Israel had been sensible of her sinful inability to fulfill the stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant, she might have staked her future on the divine promises, as Abraham did, rather than upon her conceited notion that it was well within her power to fulfill the stipulations.

God spelled out the stipulations of the covenant at Sinai, not because He wanted to lead Israel away from faith-righteousness, but because He wanted to lead her to it.

God's relationship with man (covenant) is governed by two factors — law and gospel, the will of God and the promise of God.

Obligatory Covenants

Adamic
Sinaitic

Promissory Covenants

Noahic
Abrahamic
Davidic
New

The Two Covenants Are One in Christ.

At this stage it may appear that we have the impossible situation of acknowledging that there is unity and that there is also distinction in the covenants. Are they really one? Or are they different? If God has one covenant, how can the Bible also speak of two?

First of all, we could point out that the same phenomenon of unity and distinction faces us in all areas of theology. We believe in one God yet three Persons. We confess two natures in the incarnate Son yet one Person. It is not a matter of holding to unity or distinction but to both.

The covenant shows us how God relates to man and man to God. If we keep this simple fact before us, we will soon see why there must be both one covenant and two covenants. God's relationship with man (covenant) is governed by two factors—law and gospel, the will of God and the promise of God.

God's will and God's promise run like two strands throughout the entire Old Testament. These are the law and the prophets. We may speak of them as existing together in God's one covenant plan, or we may speak of them as two covenants—obligatory and promissory.

If we emphasize the one-covenant aspect and lose sight of the distinction, we shall lose the proper distinction between law and gospel. If we emphasize the distinction and lose sight of the harmony, we shall separate the law from the gospel. The first error leads to legalism, and the second error leads to antinomianism.

What is needed is a central scriptural principle which brings order and system into this vast doctrine of the covenants. There is a central theme in the Bible which illuminates that which appears obscure and harmonizes that which appears to be contradictory. That theme is Jesus Christ. He is the hope of covenantal history. The two covenants—law and promise—are found to be one in Him, for He is the fulfillment of what the law demands and what the prophets promise (Matt. 5:17).



The two covenants — law and promise — are found to be one in Jesus Christ, for He is the fulfillment of what the law demands and what the prophets promise.

Back of all the covenants and before all the covenants which God made with men stands a covenant which God made with His Son in the counsels of eternity.

The Mediator of the Covenant

Back of all the covenants and before all the covenants which God made with men stands a covenant which God made in the councils of eternity. He made this covenant with His eternal Son. From everlasting the Son of the eternal God, the second Person of the Godhead, was the Surety and Mediator of the everlasting covenant.

This covenant with Jesus Christ is the foundation of all God's actions.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things [including all plans and purposes] were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.—John 1:1-3, RSV.

Reformed scholar Louis Berkhof is to be faulted when he posits a philosophical, speculative concept of election which precedes the counsel of redemption (*Systematic Theology*, p. 268). Nothing, including election, came into existence preceding God's covenant with Jesus Christ, for that would be an election before and outside of Jesus Christ. It would mean that back of Jesus Christ there would stand some higher cause for election. That would be impossible, for God does nothing before Him or without Him; and all that God does He does because of Him, on account of Him, and through Him. Says the apostle, ". . . for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible . . . He is before *all* things . . ." (Col. 1:16, 17).

We must not begin our thinking with a philosophical view of election, which is always as lifeless as cold human logic. Before election or anything else there stands the eternal Mediator, Jesus Christ. Christ is the



Before election or anything else there stands the eternal Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Word, the Father's thought made audible. If all of God's thinking starts with Christ, then surely the starting point of all our thinking must be Jesus Christ. He is the truth. All that we may know about God is revealed in Him, for He is perfect God and perfect man. He is the mirror of the future, because the end-time events—judgment, wrath, hell, the new creation, resurrection, Satan's defeat, the destruction of death, and the end of sin—have already taken place in Him. He is the mirror of the past, because all that God planned from eternity has been realized in Him.

The Evidence for a Covenant with Christ

The most important covenant of all is the covenant between God the Father and Jesus Christ, His only Son. This covenant precedes all and is the archetype of all other covenants between God and man (see *ibid.*, p. 263).¹ Moreover, it is the integrating theme of the Bible's covenant story. Without a knowledge of this covenant it is impossible to relate and harmonize the different covenants.

The Bible does not directly use the word *covenant* in describing the relation between God and Jesus Christ. Yet once we have become familiar with the features of a covenant, it becomes clear that such a covenant exists. We offer the following evidence:

1. The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were promises made, not just to Abraham and David, but to Abraham and David's Seed. We have already seen that the Seed refers to Christ (Gal. 3:16). This means, then, that here we have a covenantal promise made to Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3:15-19 Paul not only uses the words *promise* and *covenant* as synonyms, but he clearly says that God's promise was made to Jesus Christ (see vs. 16, 19).

2. Christ was the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-19). As such, He stood in Adam's place to be the covenantal Head and Representative of the human race.

3. Christ's repeated statements that He was sent of the Father for an assigned task and that He Himself was fulfilling a predetermined obligation and trust signify a covenant between the Father and the Son (John 6:38, 39; 10:18; 17:4).

4. The Father made promises to Christ in respect to Himself and His people (John 5:30, 43; 6:38-40; 17:4-12). The Son claimed a reward for the task He had faithfully executed (John 17).

5. In Luke 22:29 Jesus says, ". . . I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath *appointed* unto Me . . ." The verb *appointed* is *diatithemai*, which means to *appoint by will or covenant*. This is covenantal language.

6. Christ addresses His Father as "My God" (Ps. 22:1, 2; 40:8; etc.), which implies covenantal relationship.

Christ was appointed to the office of Redeemer from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). The covenant of redemption was set up from eternity (Rom. 16:25). In the councils of heaven the Father and the Son cov-

enanted together that Christ should redeem the sinner by taking his place and fulfilling his obligations. Redemptive love therefore preceded creative love. God's love carefully planned man's future and made provision for every emergency. The salvation of the human race has ever been the object of the councils of heaven. The covenant of redeeming mercy existed from all eternity. So surely as there never was a time when God was not, so surely was there never a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity.

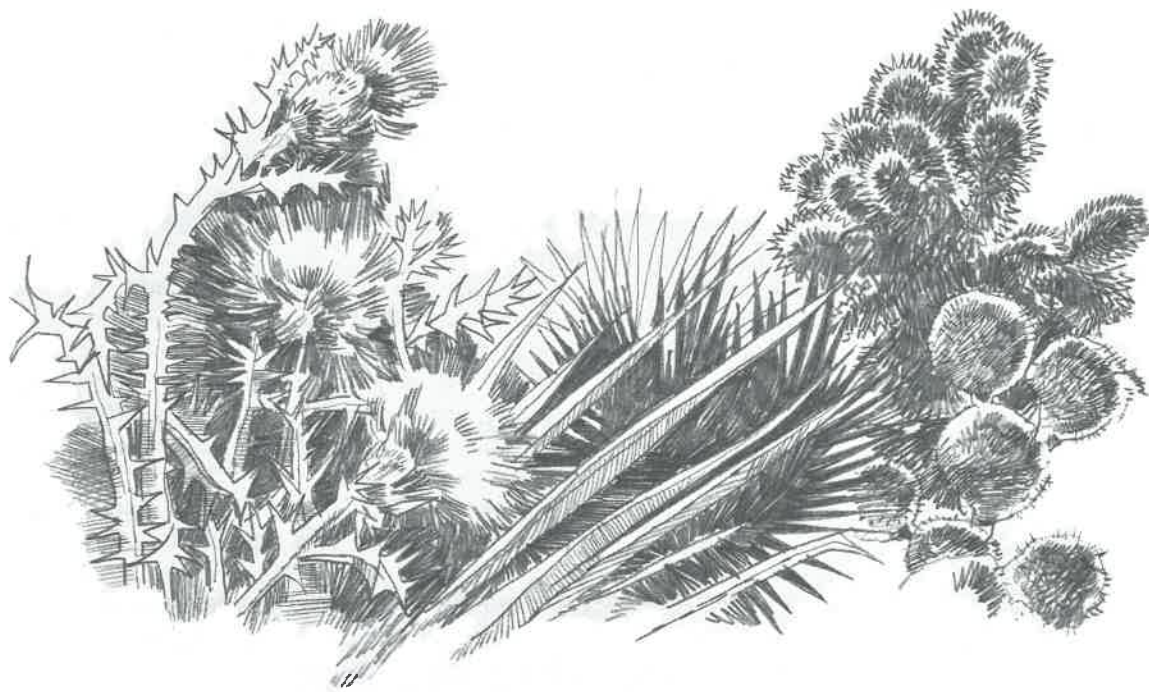
Although the covenant was made from eternity, it could not be ratified and sealed until Christ had fulfilled all that He covenanted to do. When he cried, "It is finished!" He addressed His Father. The compact was now fully consummated. Christ had fulfilled the pledge which He had made. He had paid the price of man's redemption.

In resurrecting Christ from the dead, exalting and glorifying Him at His own right hand, and giving Him the gift of the Spirit for the church, the Father fulfilled His covenant promises. He will consummate them when all the redeemed are with Christ in the earth made new (John 17; Rev. 21 & 22).

In God's eternal purpose He arranged that His fellowship with man would be based on a more enduring foundation than the stability of creature-righteousness. It is said, for instance, that any partnership or marriage is no stronger than the weakest partner, just as no chain is stronger than its weakest link. But God based His fellowship with man on the suretyship of Jesus Christ. On the event of man's failure to render perfect righteousness in his relationship to God, Christ would stand Guarantor for man—that is to say, He would undertake to fulfill man's responsibilities in such a way that the perfect God-man relationship would endure for eternity.

God's eternal covenant with Christ was the reason why God could keep renewing His covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David and the Christian church. Otherwise the righteous God could no longer have continued His association with the sinful race. Back of every pact which God made with the human family and undergirding every covenant was God's covenant with Jesus Christ. For this reason Old Testament history moved irresistably forward to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Time and time again divine wrath was suspended only because it was put to the account of Jesus Christ, who in due time would pay all covenant debts at the bar of eternal justice.

¹This raises the interesting point as to whether God imitates the covenants of men or whether men imitate the covenant of God. We are inclined to think that since man was made in God's image, he retains some capacity to imitate God even in his fallen condition. K.M. Campbell says: "We must remember that the covenant was not an idea invented by ancient pagan societies. A covenant was entered into by God and Adam, and we believe that just as all ancient civilizations retain garbled versions of the true stories of the fall, the flood, and other historical truths contained in Scripture, so the conscience of the pagan world retained the notion of covenant."—*God's Covenant*, pp. 11, 12.



Christ and the Obligatory Covenants

Christ and the Adamic Covenant

God made a covenant with Adam, who was the legal head and representative of the race. He was promised immortality for himself and his posterity on the grounds of perfect righteousness or whole-hearted obedience to the will of God. Some have called this “the covenant of works.”¹ Others, not liking the sound of these words, have called it “the covenant of life.”²

Holmes Rolston, III, in his *John Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession* (John Knox Press), thinks that this whole idea of the covenant of works is a legalistic denial of God’s grace. But Rolston confuses that which is legal with legalism.³ He fails to see that a covenant requiring perfect obedience of Adam was not inimical to God’s graciousness.

¹E.g., The Westminster Confession.

²E.g., K.M. Campbell, *God’s Covenant*, p. 13.

³Legal is lawful, rightful. God is a God of law, and His great redemptive act in Christ was a legal atonement. Legalism is a perversion of the legal; it is not legal but illegal. Rolston’s argument may sound plausible, but it is the great fallacy of liberalism, which tries to discredit law and the legal categories of the Bible by confusing them with legalism.

In the first place, Adam’s life was a gracious donation by God. As Calvin well said, God’s paternal solicitude for man was conspicuous in that He “furnished the world with all things needful, and even an immense profusion of wealth, before he formed man. Thus man was rich before he was born.”—*Institutes*, Bk. 1, chap. 14, sec. 22. Adam was amply endowed with all necessary gifts and well qualified to perform the stipulations of the covenant. To promise him immortal life on condition of perfect righteousness was like promising him life if he continued to breathe—for it was as natural and as easy for Adam to love God and serve Him in whole-souled obedience as it was for him to breathe. That God promised Adam and all his posterity immortal felicity on such easy conditions (for Adam could, after all, only return to God what had been graciously bestowed upon him) was evidence of the exceeding graciousness of God. The promised reward was out of all proportion to Adam’s easy task. There was nothing harsh about this “covenant of works.” It was a just covenant which required no more and no less of man than he could justly be required to render.

Christ stood related to the Adamic covenant in that He was the second or last Adam. He too was the Head and Representative of humanity.

Yet Adam failed—without cause or reason—and the whole race whom he represented became sinners before God (Rom. 5:18, 19). The curses of the broken covenant were invoked. The earth was cursed to bring forth thorns. Man was cursed to sweat and struggle for existence until the covenant breach exacted its full penalty in death (Gen. 3:17-19).

Christ stood related to this covenant in that He was the second or last Adam (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:45-47). He too was the Head and Representative of humanity, for in His incarnation He assumed human nature—not the nature of some kind of people, but the nature common to all. In Adam's room (and in ours) He was man in God's image, man as man was meant to be in perfect obedience to God's will ("I have kept My Father's commandments," John 15:10).

While Matthew the Jew, for obvious reasons, traces Christ's genealogy back to Abraham, Luke the Gentile traces Christ's genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). For Christ stands related, not just to Israel and to her covenant, but to the whole world and the covenant which God first made with the world in the person of Adam.

Not only must this second Adam fulfill the stipulations of the Adamic covenant (i.e., perfect righteousness of life, Rom. 5:18, 19), but He must also bear its curses. In the crown of thorns which He wore, in His sweat of blood and tears in Gethsemane, and in His death outside the gate of Jerusalem, Christ is clearly linked to the curses of Genesis 3. As the second Adam we see Him, not as the One who dies for the Israel of God, but for Adam—which means mankind or the whole world (1 John 2:2). Hence the significance of His death outside the gates of Jerusalem (Heb. 13:12).

So the work of Jesus in relation to Adam's covenant was twofold. In His life of perfect obedience to God He fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant; in death He carried away the covenant curses. This is why the curses did not fall upon Adam and his posterity with unabated force. They were tempered with mercy and became means of discipline and blessing to the fallen race.

Christ and the Sinaitic Covenant

The stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant are the same as those of the Adamic covenant—perfect right-



Not only must the second Adam fulfill the stipulations of the Adamic covenant (i.e., perfect righteousness of life), but He must also bear its curses.

eousness or obedience to the will of God. This is so because the conditions for fellowship with God are always the same. The only difference is that at Sinai the stipulations are specifically spelled out for the first time. This is in keeping with the progressive nature of revelation which is contained in the Bible.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony [Hebrew, *edut*] in Moses' hand . . . —Ex. 34: 27-29.

And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even Ten Commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone.—Deut. 4:13.

The stipulations of the covenant between God and man are the Ten Commandments or testimony (*edut*). In the Scriptures these commandments are often celebrated as "righteousness" (as in Psalm 119:142, 144, 172), for they constitute the most succinct expression of God's perfect will for man. This moral law is not righteousness created but righteousness made known—the transcript of God's own righteous nature. If man is to image God, the *edut* enunciates what that means. This law is exceeding broad; it is perfect and spiritual (Ps. 119:96; 19:7-11; Rom. 7:14). The commandments are "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12).

Commenting on the Ten Commandments, John Calvin says:

The law of God contains perfect righteousness . . . We therefore willingly confess that perfect obedience to the law is righteousness, and that the keeping of each commandment is a part of righteousness; provided that in the remaining parts the whole sum of righteousness is contained.—Calvin, *op. cit.*, Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 7.

. . . righteousness consists in the observance of the law.—*Ibid.*, Bk. 2, chap. 17, sec. 5.

For the Lord promises nothing except to perfect keepers of His law, and no one of that kind is to be found.—*Ibid.*, Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 1.

When Israel broke the covenant stipulations, she stood exposed to the covenant curses. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy 28 to 30 these curses come in handfuls. They are awful threats which may on first sight appear to be out of all proportion to the sins committed. But sin, being a breach of the covenant, is an affront to the covenant God and an insult to His infinite majesty. The prophets invoked these covenant curses against disobedient Israel. The curses include hunger and thirst (Deut. 28:48; Isa. 65:13), desolation (Isa. 5:6; Zeph.

Christ stood related to God's covenant with Israel inasmuch as He was the Son of Abraham, the Seed of Israel, and the King of the Jews. He was Israel personified.

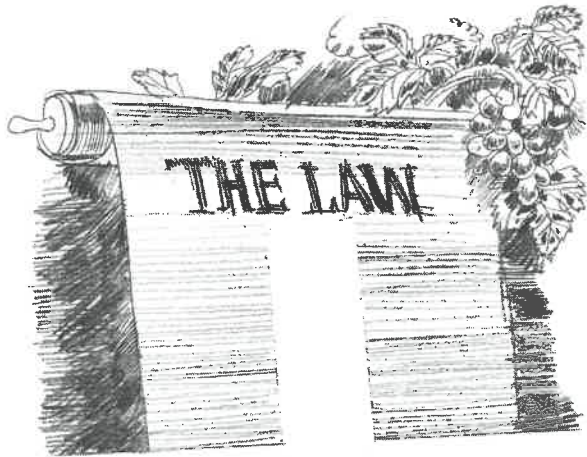
1:15), poverty (Deut. 28:31), the scorn of passers-by (Jer. 19:8), darkness (Isa. 13:10; Amos 5:18-20), earthquake (Isa. 13:13; Amos 1:1), being "cut off" from among the people (Ex. 12:15, 19; 31:14; Lev. 7:25; Jer. 44:7-11), death by hanging on a tree (Deut. 21:23), a brass heaven (Deut. 28:23), and no help when one cries for help (Deut. 28:31; Isa. 10:3).

Christ stood related to God's covenant with Israel inasmuch as He was the Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1), the Seed of Israel (Gal. 3:16), and the King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). He was Israel personified. In Hebrew thought the king represented the whole nation—he was the one in whom the many were incorporated.⁴

In Isaiah 41 to 53 there is an interesting interplay between Israel and the Messiah. Both are called "the servant of Yahweh." It is sometimes difficult to know who is being referred to—Israel or the Messiah. This mingling of identity in Isaiah is quite deliberate, because the suffering Messianic Servant stands for Israel in such a way that He is Israel personified.

Matthew's account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness is very obviously a reminder, or perhaps we could say a replay, of Israel's exodus from Egypt and testing in the wilderness. Christ too is called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15) and is later tested in the wilderness (cf. Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). He passes over the same ground as Israel and makes amends for her failure. Whereas

⁴For example, when King David, who represented Israel, sinned in numbering the people, God punished the people.

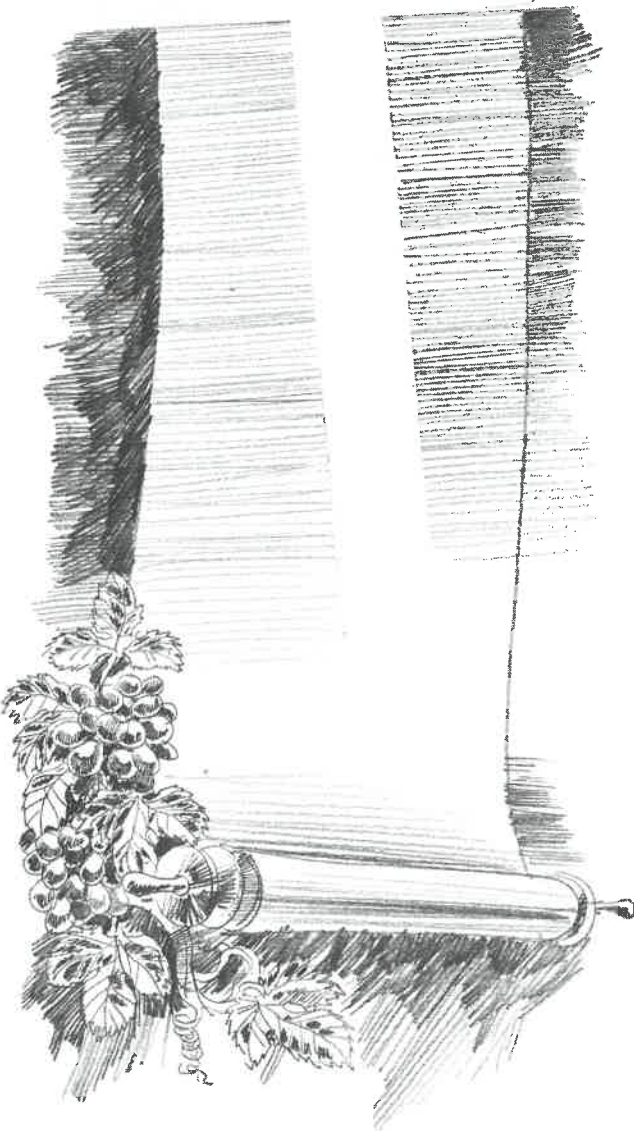


The righteousness of Christ consisted in His faithfully fulfilling the stipulations of the covenant. These stipulations were embodied in the Ten Commandments or testimony.

Israel is impatient and murmurs against God, Christ patiently submits to the will of God. In the Person of her King, Israel is victorious and altogether pleasing to God (Matt. 3:17). Christ stands before God as Israel stood at Mount Sinai. He obligates Himself to carry out all the covenant stipulations. He makes the vow, "All that the Lord hath said will we [I] do, and be obedient."

The righteousness of Christ consisted in His faithfully fulfilling the stipulations of the covenant. These stipulations were embodied in the Ten Commandments or testimony. Christ's holy obedience to each commandment of the Decalogue constituted a part of His perfect righteousness—or we could say, Israel's righteousness (Jer. 23:6). The Decalogue became flesh-and-blood reality in Jesus Christ.

Not only must Christ fulfill the stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant; He must also carry away those terrible curses pronounced in the covenant documents. For this reason He was hungry (Matt. 4:2; 21:18) and was so poor that He had nowhere to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). On the cross He cried, "I thirst!" (John 19:28). He was mocked and derided (Mark 15:29, 31) and deserted by His friends (Matt. 26:69-75). He was hanged on a tree as a cursed man (Gal. 3:13) and "cut off" from His people (Isa. 53:8). As He hung on the cross, the heavens were as brass. He was as one who cries for help and receives none (Mark 15:34). He died as the great covenant breaker and endured the unabated fury of all the covenant curses. Even the cosmic scope of the curses is portrayed in Matthew. As Christ bore the sins of the



Not only must Christ fulfill the stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant; He must also carry away those terrible curses pronounced in the covenant documents.

broken covenant, darkness descended over the earth (Matt. 27:45), the ground quaked, and the rocks were rent (Matt. 27:51). But by dying Jesus carried away the curses of the covenant.

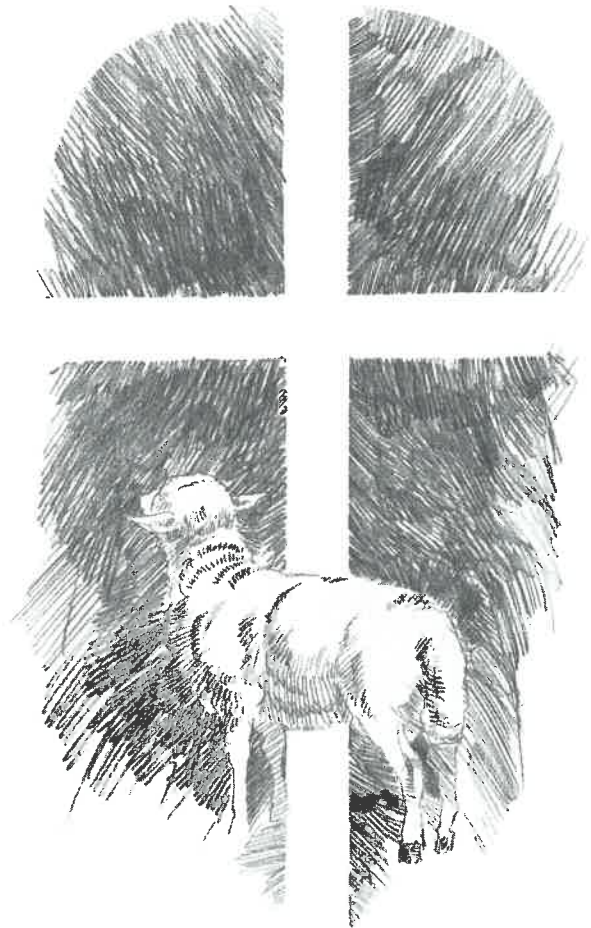
The Mediator

When Christ cried, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), He addressed His Father. Before the creation of the world the Father and the Son had entered into the solemn covenant that Christ would stand surety for Adam and Israel. Now Christ had carried out the terms which He undertook. By His sinless life He had wrought out a robe of unstained righteousness, and by dying He had borne all the curses due to the "transgressions under the first covenant" (Heb. 9:15, RSV). It was in full consciousness that He had completed His part of the eternal compact that Christ's last words were a cry of victory. Having completed His work, He rested His case in the hands of the God of the covenant.

In the resurrection and the inaugural session at the right hand of God, the Father fulfilled His covenant promises. All power in heaven and earth was given into the hands of this second Adam and this King of the Jews. He was given the heathen and the ends of the earth for an inheritance (Ps. 2:8). To Him was given the rich promise of the Holy Spirit on behalf of His people (Acts 2:33). The resurrection proclaims the election of Jesus Christ as the Man of God's own choosing.⁵

As perfect God and perfect Man, Christ was qualified to be the Messenger, Confirmer and Mediator of the covenant (Mal. 3:1; Dan. 9:24-27; Heb. 8:6). In Him man (Adam and Israel) fulfilled all his obligations to God, and in Him God fulfilled all His promises to man (2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:3; Acts 13:32, 33). In death the Son completed man's side of the covenant transaction, and in Christ's resurrection God fulfilled His side of the covenant transaction. In Christ, God and man have become one in a covenant union which can never be dissolved.

⁵Gospel preaching is preaching the good news of the election of Jesus Christ. The election of Jesus Christ is the subject of the first Christian sermon ever preached (see Acts 2:22-36).



In Christ, God and man have become one in a covenant union which can never be dissolved.



Christ and the Promissory Covenants

The covenants with Noah, Abraham and David are promissory covenants, and they all find their most perfect expression and complete fulfillment in the new covenant promise:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.—Heb. 8:10-12.

The new covenant promise is made to the house of Israel. This does not refer to the old Israel, which has rejected the gospel and is now found outside of Jesus Christ. Every gospel believer, whether from Jewish or Gentile descent, is now a son of Abraham and a member of God's new Israel¹ (Gal. 3:6-8, 27-29; 6:16; Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:7, 8). This is so because Christ incorporates all Israel in His own Person. To be in Christ is to be in Israel. The promises of the new covenant therefore belong to every believer in Jesus.

¹Just as the writer to the Hebrews argues that a new covenant implies a new priesthood and sanctuary (Heb. 7-9), so we too can argue that a new covenant implies a new Israel.

To be in Christ is to be in Israel. The promises of the new covenant therefore belong to every believer in Jesus.

This means that salvation and eternal life are given to the believer as the inheritance was given to Abraham—that is to say, wholly by promise. But right at this point we must understand why the covenant is promissory to the believer. It is not promissory as if God had waived His demand for perfect righteousness from man. As far as God is concerned, the conditions of covenantal union between God and man are always the same. He has not set aside the stipulations as if it were a small matter whether or not His will is obeyed. God sent His Son to do what fallen man was obligated to do but could not do. Christ fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant on the sinner's behalf. He did this in order that the reward might be of promise to the believing sinner.

The great mercy of God is certainly displayed in providing Christ as the Mediator of the covenant, but God's justice is equally displayed in requiring full payment of all human obligations at the hand of this Mediator. The stipulations (the Ten Commandment law) were not set aside or abrogated by the work of Christ but were honored and

established (Isa. 42:21; Rom. 3:31).

To the believer grace is free. It costs him nothing. But grace is not cheap. It has cost Another much to obtain it for the believer. When we speak of the covenant of grace, we must always remember that it was not grace but work for Christ. He won for us a free promise by His blood, sweat and toil.

We must be careful not to sever this unity between the law (obligatory covenant) and the gospel (promissory covenant) as if they were two covenants which sustain no relation to each other. God did not require one thing of man in one age for salvation, then abandon that requirement for another requirement entirely. Law and promise are not antagonistic in Christ (Gal. 3:18), but each finds its true place in God's everlasting covenant.

First, we must understand our obligation in the covenant. Calvin truly says, "The Lord promises nothing except to perfect keepers of His law." And then, to underline our predicament, he adds, "And no one of the kind is to be found." Now comes the reason why the covenant can be a covenant of promise: "For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon Himself, he reconciled us to God as if all had kept the law."—*Institutes*, Bk. 2, chap. 17, sec. 5.

This means that the way of faith in Christ does not set aside the law's legitimate demand for righteousness but meets it. Although the sinner can never satisfy the covenant claims by personal righteousness, he can satisfy them by faith in the vicarious righteousness of Christ. By faith he can bring to God the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, and the Lord places that righteousness of His Son to the sinner's account. This is how the believing sinner is justified by faith.

Justification before the law is more than pardon for past sins. While on the cross Christ bore away the curses of the broken covenant so that the believing sinner might be pardoned, He also fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant by His life so that a perfect keeping of the commandments might be imputed to the believer.² Being justified by faith in both Christ's doing and dying, the believer is entitled to all covenant rewards. Says Calvin again:

We define justification as follows: the sinner received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by His grace. While cleansed by Christ's blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat.—*Ibid.*, Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 8.

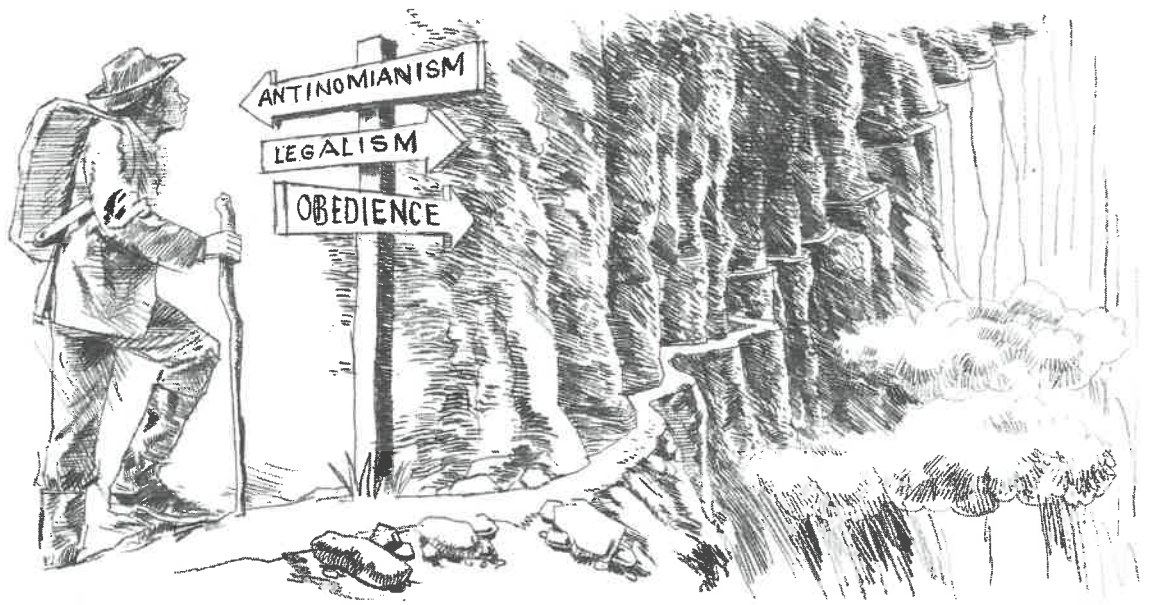
The New Obedience of the Believer—Its Content

The new covenant not only promises the believer forgiveness of sins and acceptance into God's favor,

²Sometimes theology has called these two aspects of Christ's work the *active* (life) and *passive* (death) obedience of Christ.



While on the cross Christ bore away the curses of the broken covenant so that the believing sinner might be pardoned, He also fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant by His life so that a perfect keeping of the commandments might be imputed to the believer.



but it guarantees his sanctification in a life of new obedience. God declares, "I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . ." (Heb. 8:10). It is by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that the believer is assured that his covenant fellowship with God will be a life of new obedience. In a promise which compliments Jeremiah's promise of the new covenant, the Lord declares through Ezekiel:

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.—Ezek. 36: 26, 27.

What is to be the actual content of the obedience of the covenant partner? We must think carefully at this point, for right here the road divides in three directions. Two roads are detours to destruction, and only one is the straight path to glory.

Antinomianism. The first error is to say that since Christ kept the law of God (stipulations of the covenant) for us, it is not necessary that the believer submit to the law of God as a rule of life. Louis Berkhof is quite right when he says, "It is pure Antinomianism to maintain that Christ kept the law as a rule of life for His people, so that they need not worry about this any more."—*Systematic Theology*, p. 614. Antinomianism misuses Paul's dictum, "not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14), as if the apostle meant that the believer should have no further dealings with the law.

If we take the dispensational view of the covenants, it is difficult to avoid the heresy of antinomianism. Dispensationalism reads Paul as if the law itself were "the

yoke of bondage" and the villain. What Paul fights against is not the law as the just requirement of the covenant but the misuse of law. The Judaizers perverted the holy covenant; they tried to use the law as a means of obtaining the inheritance.

Dispensationalism says that the law is only for the Jew. It is said that the Christian does not need the law as a rule of life but has the Holy Spirit instead. A sort of Spirit-ethic takes the place of objective biblical ethics. If the believer is cut loose from an objective law, how is he going to tell the difference between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit? And what can save him from just another system of ethical relativism? How can he distinguish the Holy Spirit from all sorts of human impressions and impulses? What can save him from the worst kind of subjectivism?

The doctrine that men are released from any obligation to obey the law of God constitutes one of the greatest apostasies which has permeated the modern church. Nothing more effectively opens the floodgates of law-

**"It is pure Antinomianism to maintain that Christ kept the law as a rule of life for His people, so that they need not worry about this any more."
— Louis Berkhof.**

lessness and corruption upon society than this soul-ensnaring delusion. Christ did not suffer and die to give men license to trample on His Father's holy commandments. He did not fulfill the stipulations of the covenant so that men could thereafter despise them with impunity.

Says the apostle Paul, "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: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3, 4). It is not a Spirit-filled mind which is no longer subject to the law of God, for the apostle continues, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). And St. John also says, "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him . . . He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John 2:4, 6).

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Legalism. Legalism is not wrong because it says that the believer needs to keep the law. It is wrong because it says that he must keep it for the wrong reasons. Legalism generally acknowledges the necessity of free forgiveness for the sins of the past, but it then proposes that the believer by a life of new obedience must satisfy the covenant stipulations and so at last gain the inheritance.

Those who undertake to fulfill the conditions of the covenant by their personal obedience are "under the law" (Gal. 3:23). It makes no difference whether it is said that such obedience is by one's own strength, by the help of the Holy Spirit, or even by the Spirit's power entirely. The believer is still put "under the law," because it is proposed that the obedience in the believer himself must satisfy the covenant stipulations.

It is sometimes said that in the old covenant experience a person tries to satisfy the claims of the law in his own strength but in the new covenant he satisfies these claims by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. This is the old error of legalism under the guise of putting the Third Person of the Godhead in the room of the Second Person. It is not the Holy Spirit's work either to help the believer satisfy the covenant claims or to do it in the believer. The work of the Holy Spirit at this point is to direct the believer to the Mediator, who has satisfied these claims on the sinner's behalf. When Christ died on the cross, He sealed forever the covenant of grace. His death meant that He had fulfilled every condition by which any man can have covenant fellowship with God.

Louis Berkhof, who in other respects presents an excellent treatment of the covenant, is to be questioned when he says, "In the covenant of works man could meet the requirements of the covenant in virtue of his natural endowments [correct], but in the covenant of grace he is enabled to meet them only by the regenerating and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit."—Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 264. If by *requirements* Berkhof means the *conditional stipulations*, we say, Never! What

Those who undertake to fulfill the conditions of the covenant by their personal obedience are "under the law." It makes no difference whether it is said that such obedience is by one's own strength, by the help of the Holy Spirit, or even by the Spirit's power entirely.

man was obligated to do and could have done in his sinless state, Christ has done as the second Adam. The Holy Spirit does not in this life enable us to meet the conditions imposed upon sinless Adam, unless it be by giving us faith to lay hold of the righteousness of our Mediator.

The True Way of Obedience. In the first place, it must be said that the law which is put in the believer's heart under the ministration of the new covenant is the same law which was loved, obeyed and honored by Jesus on the believer's behalf. The believer looks to the cross and sees that it is no light thing to sin—that is, to break the covenant stipulations. He also sees that the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to him is Christ's life of holy obedience to each commandment of the Decalogue. The man who thinks that he can lightly esteem the stipulations of the covenant because of grace and Calvary has no part or lot in grace or Calvary,

for he does not understand or appreciate the very first principles of salvation.

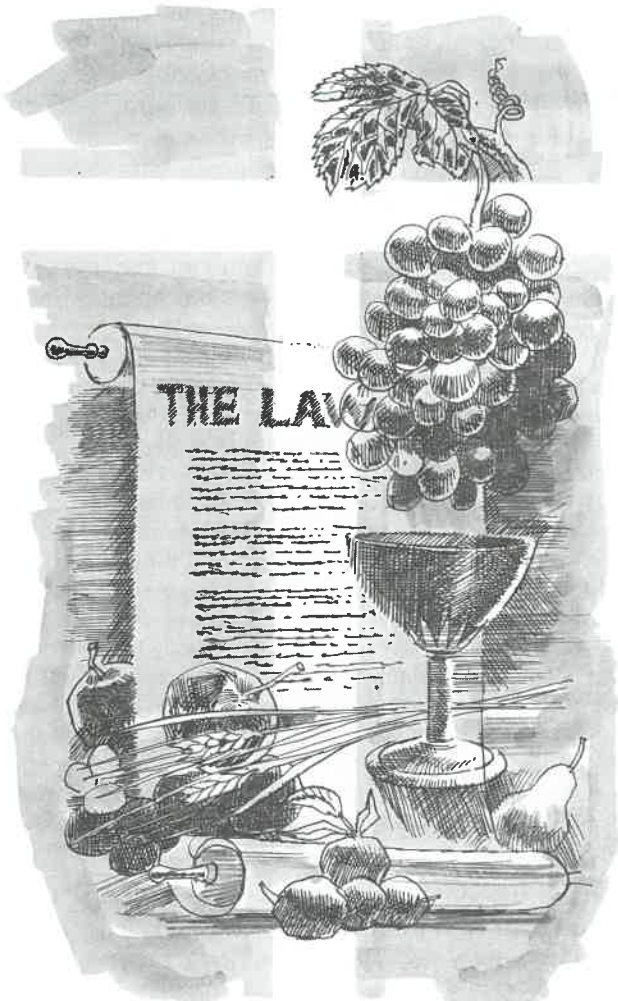
Christ did not treat the covenant demands irreverently or carelessly. The covenant is a legal document. No person readily tampers with a carefully-drawn-up legal transaction, least of all one whose terms and conditions have been unilaterally decreed by Almighty God. Here is the eternal, immovable and unalterable will of Jehovah in respect to the human family. If one word is changed, the integrity of the divine administration is compromised. If a person offends in one point, he is guilty of all (James 2:10). Every jot and tittle of the covenant must be honored (Matt. 5:17, 18), for God is particular about His words. It is precisely because man dared to tamper with the covenant stipulations that its curses were pronounced on the human race and finally fell with unabated fury on the head of our Substitute and Surety.

In view of all this, how can the believer fail to reverence the holy commandments of God and even walk before the Lord with fear and trembling? Yet he keeps the commandments of God, not in order to be accepted, but because he is accepted by the work and merit of Christ alone. His careful obedience to each precept of the covenant is nothing but an expression of His faith in Jesus. He is not saved *by* obedience but *to* obedience. He is justified by faith alone, but the faith which justifies him is never alone. He does not obtain the inheritance by faith and works but by faith which works (Gal. 5:6).

Abraham, the father of the faithful, is often presented by the apostles as the believer's example. He obtained the inheritance by faith in God's promise (Gal. 3:15-18). Yet the genuineness of his faith was testified to by his life of obedience in such a way that God could say of him:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.—Gen. 18:19.

The man who thinks that he can lightly esteem the stipulations of the covenant because of grace and Calvary has no part or lot in grace or Calvary, for he does not understand or appreciate the very first principles of salvation.



. . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice.—Gen. 22:18.

. . . and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.—Gen. 26:4, 5.

A holy life on the part of the believer is not optional. While God promises to him the gift of the Holy Spirit, a holy life is still the believer's responsibility and task. Spurgeon says, "We cannot be saved by or for our good works, neither can we be saved without good works."—C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Banner of Truth), Vol. 1, p. 224.

The work of Christ has released the believer from the law as a procuring cause of his justification, but it has in nowise abolished it as his rule of life. Divine grace does not set aside its recipient's responsibility, nor does the believer's obedience render grace any less necessary. God requires obedience (conformity to His law) from the Christian as truly as He does from a non-Christian. True, we are not saved for (because of) our obedience; yet it is equally true that we cannot be saved without it.—Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Covenants* (Baker), p. 107.

This new obedience of the believer is not perfect in itself, for the channel of corrupted human nature means that his most pious works fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17; etc.). In this sense he is never wholly without sin and imperfection (1 John 1:8). Therefore no work proceeding from the believer can stand approved before the undimmed splendor of God's law unless, as Calvin says, "it is buried in Christ's innocence." The believer's obedience is accepted because Christ has passed over that same ground and is able to impute His perfection to each act of obedience which the believer renders to God. If, however, a man substitutes a form of "obedience" which is outside and contrary to the words of the covenant, that "obedience" can never be acceptable to God, because Christ has no righteousness to impute to anything outside the order of covenant life. In order for obedience to qualify as being "in the Lord," it must be within the words of the covenant.

Is the Covenant Unconditional?

Throughout the history and development of covenant theology it has been warmly disputed whether or not the covenant is unconditional as far as the believer is concerned. On the side of the unconditionalists it has been argued that Christ has fulfilled the conditions of the covenant (and this is certainly true). On the side of the

conditionalists it has also been argued that without repentance and faith no man has any saving interest in Christ (and this also is certainly true).

The problem is partly due to the ambiguity of the word *condition*. We can heartily endorse these comments by John Murray:

If condition is understood in the sense of meritorious cause, then the Covenant of Grace is not conditioned . . . But if understood as instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant, then it cannot be denied that the Covenant of Grace is conditioned . . . The promises respecting salvation are on condition of faith and repentance, and no one can deny that these promises are conditional.—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, art. "Covenant Theology" (Eerdmans).

It is in this latter sense that we now use the word *conditional* and would therefore say that the covenant privileges are conditional on a faith that will produce the kind of obedience which we discussed under our previous subheading, "The True Way of Obedience." Unbelief and disobedience disqualified the Jews from inheriting the covenant promises given to Abraham, and unbelief and disobedience will disqualify any man today.

In the light of the failure of national Israel and the many warnings given to Christians in the New Testament, we submit that it is safer to speak of unmerited election than of unconditional election. To be sure, election is undeserved and is not merited by anything in the believer. But election, like the covenant with which it is inseparably connected, does not work deterministically, mechanically or automatically. People will not be found among the elect irrespective of whether they persevere in a life of faith and holiness. Says the apostle Peter:

. . . whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.—2 Peter 1:4-11.

False theories in regard to unconditional salvation have emptied of any real force and meaning the numerous warnings which the New Testament presents to the church. To be sure, there is one strand in the New Testament which encourages the believer to live in confidence

and assurance of salvation; but there is also another strand which is there to inspire a certain fear and trembling, especially in those who are inclined to become "secure and lazy by the continual preaching of grace" (Luther). Many want to cut and hack at these scriptures to bring them into harmony with their "systematic" theology which allows for no real tension between confidence and fear.

The doctrine of unconditional salvation also empties of all meaning the biblical doctrine of a final judgment according to works. But the doctrine of a final judgment according to works assumes tremendous importance in the New Testament, especially in Paul, who is also the apostle of justification by faith (see Rom. 2:6, 16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Peter 1:17; Matt. 12:36, 37).

The genuineness of our faith in the Mediator of the covenant must be attested to in the final judgment. Since faith is known by its fruit (good works—i.e., works in harmony with God's law), the deeds of all the professed people of God must pass in review before God. The man without a "wedding garment" will be cast out (Matt. 22: 1-14). He will not inherit the covenant blessings but the covenant curses. Says Lutheran scholar Adolf Koberle:

All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the final judgment on this earthly life. Whoever in the earthly congregation continues to serve evil shall not inherit the Kingdom. . . . when the idea of judgment on the entire attitude of the one who is justified has been main-

tained, there will be no room for the ancient antinomian misunderstanding which has always accompanied Paulinism and Lutheranism like a dark shadow. . . . If even the justified sinner must face the judgment it is no longer a matter of indifference as to the degree in which he has allowed himself to be purified by the Spirit from the "defilement and evil of the flesh."—*The Quest for Holiness* (Augsburg), p. 166.

The Christian is now righteous before God, elect, saved, and has eternal life. But he has these things by faith only. They are not yet realized as simple historical possessions. So the New Testament also speaks of "the hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5), "the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8), and "the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). Faith is the title deed of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1), and for this reason the believer is exhorted to continue in the faith (Col. 1:23; Heb. 6:12). The decree unalterably fixing the destiny of men will be made only on the day of judgment, and on that day no genuine believer will stand in jeopardy. Then the covenant which has been ratified and sealed by Christ's death will be consummated with all those who have kept the faith unto the end (Rev. 3:10; Matt. 24:13; 2 Tim. 4:7).

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. . . . He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.—Rev. 21:3, 7.

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.—Rev. 22:3, 4.

(To be continued)

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